

EYE SECRETS

Spy in every blink

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SC dismisses Telangana govt plea over 40-acre Secunderabad land

Hyderabad, Sept 15

The Supreme Court has rejected a petition filed by the Telangana government against a High Court order involving Shantha Sriram Constructions, noting that the state had not challenged the judgment within the prescribed time.

A bench headed by Justice Deepankar Gupta not only dismissed the Telangana government's petition but also observed that the disputed 40-acre land in Secunderabad is private property owned by Shantha Sriram Private Limited.

It all began after Shantha Sriram Constructions Pvt Ltd had approached the Telangana High Court alleging interference by Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA), other government departments and the police on its private land.

The property covers 40 acre in Survey numbers 1 and 2 of Lothukunta village in the Medchal-Malkajgiri district.

After hearing the case, the single-judge bench of the Telangana High Court had directed the state government to relieve HYDRAA commissioner AV Ranganath from his post over alleged



repeated wilful disobedience of the court orders concerning the land.

However, a division bench of the High Court later suspended that direction. The bench also instructed Ranganath and HYDRAA officials against entering the disputed property until further orders.

The Supreme Court's latest decision came after the Telangana government challenged the High Court's judgment in favour of Shantha Sriram Constructions.

Revanth invites Rahim Aga Khan to Telangana Rising Global Summit

Hyderabad, Sept 15

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Tuesday, September 15, invited Prince Rahim Aga Khan V, 50th Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, to attend the Telangana Rising Global Summit to be organised by the state government for three days from December 7.

Reddy, who met Khan in Hyderabad, sought the assistance of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in renovating City College and the Nizam-era Osmania General Hospital (OGH) buildings.

He said the state government is constructing new buildings for the OGH and the old hospital complex is planned to be developed as a heritage structure.

The Global Summit would be organised in the Future City being developed by the state government on Hyderabad's outskirts, he said, according to an official release.

Representatives from 100 countries are expected to attend the summit. He also said the Future City is being developed on 30,000 acres as a net-zero city.

Reddy said a company from Singapore is preparing the master plan for the Future City, which would be just 20 minutes away from the city's international airport.

He highlighted that a 'green zone' would come up in 15,000 acres in the Future City. Top companies like Amazon have started their operations in the Future City, he said.

Expressing deep respect for the Aga Khan Foundation, he said it played a key role in rejuvenating various heritage structures in the city.

The Legislative Council building, a heritage complex, has recently been renovated, and the Qutb Shahi tombs were restored earlier with the help of the Foundation, he said, according to the release.

The CM informed Khan about the state government's plans for rejuvenating the Musi River here.

State Minority Affairs Minister Mohammad Azharuddin and senior officials were present during the meeting.

Khan began his India visit on September 9 following an invitation from Vice President C P Radhakrishnan.



He called on Telangana Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla here on September 14.

Govt opens doors to fee on large UPI payments



New Delhi, SEpt 15

: Ending nearly six years of fully free UPI payments, the Union government on Tuesday introduced a 0.4 per cent fee on transfers worth more than Rs 2,000 made to merchants through the platform from October 15 while explicitly ring-fencing everyday person-to-person transactions as well as small payments from any charge.

"Customers will not be required to pay any charge when making such payments through UPI," the Finance Ministry said in a statement, adding, "MDR is a charge within the merchant payment ecosystem. It is not a charge on customers making UPI payments."

Also, individuals will continue to have "unlimited free usage, with no monthly quotas, volume restrictions or tiered caps on free UPI transactions", it said.

The carefully calibrated move signalled the end of an era for the world's largest real-time payments system even as the government tried to avoid alarming the hundreds of millions of daily users. The move drew sharp criticism from the Opposition parties.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleged that the

levy was "once again surrender" by a "compromised" Prime Minister Narendra Modi to American pressure. The BJP hit back, accusing the Congress of spreading "fake news", saying the government had made it absolutely clear that MDR charges would not be levied on consumers.

From October 15, a 0.4 per cent Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) will be levied on person-to-merchant (P2M) transactions above Rs 2,000 through UPI (Unified Payments Interface), capped at Rs 300 for payments of Rs 75,000 and above.

Essential and thin-margin sectors -- railways, telecom, insurance, fuel and agricultural inputs -- will pay a flat MDR of Rs 5 per transaction above Rs 2,000, intended to keep costs predictable for critical services; these categories account for nearly 17 per cent of P2M transaction volume but roughly 46 per cent of P2M transaction value.

The same flat-fee treatment extends to government utility bill collection (electricity, water, piped gas) and educational fee payments such as school tuition and university fees above Rs 2,000, both similarly exempted below that threshold.

Payments into mutual funds, securities and through stockbrokers and dealers will attract a lighter 0.02 per cent MDR, capped at Rs 300 -- a rate designed to keep the cost of investing low and encourage retail participation in formal financial markets.

Person-to-person (P2P) transfers -- which make up 37 per cent of UPI's transaction volume and 70 per cent of its transaction value -- will continue to attract zero charges, irrespective of size. Small-value transactions up to Rs 2,000, which the government said account for more than 95 per cent of total P2M volume, remain untouched.

6 states ink Kishau agreement; Centre to bear 90% project cost

New Delhi, Sept 15

After years of dispute on issues related to cost-sharing and water allocation, a memorandum of agreement for the Kishau Multipurpose Project was signed on Tuesday between the chief ministers of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Delhi and Haryana in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Jal Shakti Minister CR Patil.

Himachal Pradesh, which is one of the two states (the other being Uttarakhand) where the proposed dam and reservoir will come up, claimed that its key concern regarding the sharing of the financial burden of the

project had been resolved. It had long argued that as an upstream state bearing the direct impact of the proposed dam, it should not be made to shoulder a disproportionate financial burden when much of the water would benefit downstream states. As per the terms of the agreement, the Centre will bear 90 per cent of the cost of the project, while the remaining 10 per cent will be borne by the participating states in accordance with the 1994 agreement. Regarding the Kishau Multipurpose Project, Shah said an agreement reached on May 12, 1994, required separate agreements to be signed for each storage project coming up in the basin. Without that arrangement, this would not have been possible.



landowners in advance in the name of issuing pattas.

He demanded a judicial inquiry into the 22-A issue to protect everyone's interests. "The government committed the mistake, but people are suffering the punishment," he said, adding that the Congress could not escape responsibility for what he termed its "crimes". Politics

The BRS working president accused the government of deliberately suspending party legislators to avoid answering issues raised by the principal Opposition in the Assembly. He said the party would continue taking up the 22-A issue and other land-related problems with the people despite the suspension of its legislators.

Referring to the alleged attack on his staff inside a police station, Rama Rao said the BRS had lost faith in the police and would approach the courts for justice.

On the proposed Uniform Civil Code, he said such a proposal was yet to take shape and that the party leadership would take a decision after internal consultations.



Diljit Dosanjh shuts down appeal by retired IAS officers, defence personnel asking him to lead Punjab

A think tank of retired IAS officers, defence personnel, and professionals in Punjab on Saturday issued a public appeal to singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh to take over the leadership of the state, “brought to its knees by successive dispensations”. Dosanjh, however, declined the offer, saying “Kadey v Nhi..In a full-page newspaper advertisement addressed directly to Dosanjh, Chandigarh-based Jago Punjab Manch stated that Punjab did not need another politician, but needed a citizen of consequence. “This letter is not flattery. It is a reckoning,” the appeal stated, invoking the failures of successive governments, the silence of those who should have spoken, and what it called the possibility that one man of unimpeachable reach could change the course of a people’s destiny.Dosanjh reacted to the appeal on X on Saturday, saying, “Kadey v Nhi.. Am Very Happy in My Field. Thank You So Much.”

Though appeals to film stars to enter politics are not uncommon in India, a signed full-page public appeal from a group of retired officers to a singer asking him to lead a state has no precedent in Punjab.The signatories include retired IAS officer S S Boparai, retired brigadiers M S Dullat, Harwant Singh and Inder Mohan Singh, retired colonels Avtar Singh Hira, Malwinder S Guron, Gurbir S Sandhu and Iqbal Singh, and others.The letter identified four crises consuming the state. Punjab’s fiscal architecture, it said, is in ruins, pointing out that the state carries one of the heaviest sub-national debt burdens in the country, with governance reduced to populist announcements and negligible returns in health, infrastructure or human

capital.It added that social institutions, from public hospitals to government schools, are being quietly hollowed out. Communal polarisation, it warned, was deliberately being injected into Punjab’s political bloodstream at a moment when the state, given its border location and the living memory of Partition, could least afford it. It also highlighted the migration crisis, saying every young Punjabi was boarding a flight to Canada, Australia, or the United Kingdom.The appeal comes weeks after Dosanjh found himself at the centre of a charged controversy when pro-Khalistani organisations displayed banners targeting him at one of his concerts abroad, accusing him of being insufficiently committed to the Khalistan cause. Dosanjh told his audience that everything he does, he does for Punjab, not for any ideology, not for any organisation, not for any geography beyond the land that made him.The letter pointed to his access to the Punjabi diaspora worldwide, and his authenticity, citing his “solidarity with farmers during the agitation when it was neither fashionable nor without professional consequence.” It also says, “Dosanjh has a credibility that has not been purchased, a discipline that has been lived and not constructed.”Punjab heads to polls in early 2027. The Manch did not ask Dosanjh to join any political party or contest any election, but invoked Nepal and Tamil Nadu as models where change came from people and movements that the conventional political calculus had not accounted for.“Punjab’s moment is now,” the letter stated. “And they are willing to stand, once more, for something larger than themselves.”

Nilesh Lanke hospitalised in Pune; Ahilyanagar MP stable after fever

Ahilyanagar MP Nilesh Lanke was admitted to Ruby Hall Clinic in Pune with viral fever and dehydration.Ahilyanagar MP Nilesh Lanke was admitted to Ruby Hall Clinic in Pune with viral fever and dehydration.The condition of Ahilyanagar MP Nilesh Lanke, who was admitted to Ruby Hall Clinic on Friday with viral fever and dehydration, is in stable condition, said hospital authorities.Dr Prachee Sathe, director, ICU, Ruby Hall Clinic, said the 46-year-old MP has been admitted for observation and is currently stable. “The medical team is carrying out the necessary procedures and further evaluation,” he said in a statement.Lanke, who belongs to NCP(SP), initially underwent treatment in Ahilyanagar after he complained of uneasiness. But later, he was shifted to Pune after his condition deteriorated.

On Wednesday, he posted on X that he had become slightly unwell two days ago. “After receiving treatment, my condition is now stable, and there is no reason for concern. With your good wishes, love, and blessings, I will soon rejoin your service.”According to party sources, Lanke’s health deteriorated after he took part in a fort conservation drive at Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu on May 1, where he performed physical labour for a few hours under scorching heat.“Besides, he was already feeling exhausted due to continuous tours, public meetings, and social engagements. After his return to Pune, he was admitted to a hospital in Ahilyanagar,” the sources added.

Can’t get a table at Soam? Pinky Chandan Dixit’s Varsoo is your answer

Varsoo by Soam, founder Pinky Chandan Dixit’s newest venture, is housed in a 120-year-old heritage building in South Bombay. Photo courtesy: Special ArrangementVarsoo by Soam, founder Pinky Chandan Dixit’s newest venture, is housed in a 120-year-old heritage building in South Bombay.If you’ve spent time in the queue outside Soam wishing you could book a table, here’s your answer. Founder Pinky Chandan Dixit has opened Varsoo by Soam, a reservation-friendly venture that carries Soam’s most-loved dishes like moong dal sheera, handvo, panki, khichu, muthiya and turiya paatra, alongside newer additions like peru ananas ki chaat with crushed peanuts, a flavourful salad.

Tucked inside a heritage building that is over 120 years old, right above Aamchee, Varsoo is designed by Saloni Kothari of Studio SKO, who has worked alongside Dixit to honour the structure’s original character. Arched doorways, high ceilings, original windows, grand wooden doors — all of it has been preserved and woven into the new space. Round poker tables, now repurposed as dining tables ideal for groups of six, add to the sense of a room that has been lived in.The restaurant unfolds across three zones — two indoor spaces and an outdoor nook for quieter moments, with a section that can be closed off for private dining. A live juice and chaat counter and a live kitchen add to the experience.Varsoo, which translates to ‘inheritance’ in Gujarati, says Dixit, is her personal expression — a gathering of lived experiences, shared meals, and inherited recipes, brought together into a space designed for today.Layered dal baati churma and dal dhokli ravioli. Photo courtesy: Special Arrangement Layered dal baati churma and dal dhokli ravioli. Photo courtesy: Special Arrangement“Soam was opened in 2005 at a space where my father had an office for reservations to our hotel in Mahabaleshwar. When my brother suggested we start a cafe, I jumped at the opportunity, before we realised we were ahead of our times and should go for something we know: Gujarati food. And so Soam was born,” recalled Dixit, an alumna of Le Cordon Bleu.

The early days were not without resistance. Dixit had decided to break with the thali culture synonymous with Gujarati restaurants at the time, deconstructing the meal into standalone dishes rather than serving the tra-

ditional spread. “Gujarati food in Bombay meant having a thali. Everybody was unhappy but I said to them, give me six months,” she said. The recipes, meanwhile, kept evolving: started with a Maharaj and dishes borrowed from her mother, their hotel, and family, the menu grew richer as guests brought their own versions. “Post opening, every guest would give me their recipe, saying ‘in our home, we do it like this’. The recipes kept getting better.”A conversation with veteran food writer Rushina Munshaw Ghildiyal gave Dixit the confidence to introduce seasonal menus, which became, as she puts it, “a big part of our DNA.” During COVID, the team — drawn from various regions — began cooking food from their own homes, and some of it found its way onto the menu.The outdoor nook (left), and live chaat counter (right). Photo courtesy: Special Arrangement The outdoor nook (left), and live chaat counter (right). Photo courtesy: Special ArrangementAll of this and more now comes to Varsoo. “Varsoo is Soam’s inheritance, for people who didn’t wish to wait in queues, or have a rushed meal because they can see others standing behind them waiting for the table. Soam always appealed to an older population, but we couldn’t offer them a reservation to celebrate their 60th or 70th birthday. With Varsoo, we can.”On the plate, the guava-pineapple salad was refreshing, enough texture and brightness to polish off quickly. Dal dhokli ravioli, served with pickled oil, sev and pomegranate, managed to feel both familiar and new. The instinct to present the old in a new avatar runs through much of the menu: the layered dal baati churma arrived with disc-shaped baked baatis, dal and churma. While baatis didn’t appeal to us, the churma had the texture and taste of something made in a Rajasthani home. Nachni khichu was comforting, enough that we polished it off. Hot pankis came with a chilli pickle. Pro tip: the one on the condiment tray is better, it really elevates the dish. While the muthiya didn’t quite land, malai dhokla and pattice were done well.The jamun masala, lifted with a little cumin and salt, served as both cooler and palate cleanser throughout the meal. Don’t skip it.On the sweeter end, a very rich but liquidy mohanthal and a mango ravioli from the seasonal menu that had no added sugar, and beautiful to look at (courtesy food stylist Shubhangi Dhaimade), rounded things off. The menu is extensive; it will need multiple visits to do it justice. Aavjo, as Dixit would say.

Gujarat HC dismisses family’s plea seeking registration of FIR over ‘custodial death’

WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING the constitutional gravity of custodial death allegations and noting the “irony” that the violation of a Supreme Court mandate to register an FIR in cognizable offences affords no direct recourse to a writ court, the Gujarat High Court has dismissed a petition seeking registration of an FIR in the alleged custodial death of 70-year-old Zahiruddin Shaikh, who had been arrested by Ahmedabad police in connection with an allegations of cow slaughter.Justice D N Ray, while pronouncing the judgment in the petition filed by Shaikh’s son Tofik, held that the petitioner was bound to first exhaust statutory remedies under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), before invoking the extraordinary writ jurisdiction in the High Court.The 30-page judgment, made available on Friday, noted that “the moment there is an allegation against the police authorities which is brought before the police authorities, instead of registering an FIR which would lend credence to the version of the informant, the police authorities would simply investigate whatever else and in whatever manner it would choose, to stifle the inconvenient truth.”The court further weighed the legal position and noted, “I would

have ordinarily thought that the most natural and effective remedy would have been a writ petition to implement the directions of Lalita Kumari...” Delving into whether “custodial death” could be “carved out as a special exception” to the statutory process to “redress a situation where Lalita Kumari (Supra) is not followed in letter and spirit”, the court accepted that while the Commissioner of Police “may be biased and partisan” in such cases, the presumption cannot be extended to the Magistrate.The court held, “I cannot automatically include the Magistrate to whom an appeal from the decision of the Commissioner of Police would lie, in the same bracket.”Dismissing the petition, Justice Ray stated in the judgment, “It is ironic that even if a Supreme Court mandate is violated by the authorities, various Benches of the Supreme Court, relying upon Sakiri Vasu (Supra), a decision of a smaller Bench prior to the Constitution Bench decision in Lalita Kumari (Supra), have said that the procedure laid down in the CrPC/BNSS has to be followed and the writ court should not be approached prior to that, solely because an alternative remedy exists in the statute.

ED searches premises linked to minister Sanjeev Arora: ‘Punjab will never bow to Modi’s tactics,’ hits out Bhagwant Mann

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday carried out searches at five premises in Delhi, Gurgaon, and Chandigarh linked to Punjab Cabinet Minister Sanjeev Arora and his company. The action comes as Punjab continues to witness a series of searches by the central agency on leaders and people linked to the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).Sources said the searches were conducted at the office premises of Hampton Sky Realty Limited and at Arora’s residence as part of a money-laundering investigation linked to alleged fake GST transactions and exports.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann slammed the search operation. “Today, once again, the BJP’s ED has come to Sanjeev Arora’s house. In one year, this is the third time the BJP’s ED has come to his house. And in the last month, the second time. Yet, they haven’t found anything,” he said.“I want to tell (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi ji that Punjab is the land of the Gurus, which even (Mughal emperor) Aurangzeb could not subdue. This is the land of Bhagat Singh, who never bowed before the British...Punjab will never bow to Modi’s tactics. The end of this unethical alliance of ED-BJP will begin from Punjab itself,” he added.According to ED sources, the agency has detected “a large-scale money laundering operation allegedly carried out through Arora’s company involving fake GST purchases of mobile phones worth more than Rs 100 crore and subsequent exports aimed at round-tripping illegitimate funds from Dubai to India”.Sources alleged that multiple fake GST purchase bills were procured from non-existent firms in Delhi to claim fake input tax credit (ITC), GST refunds on export credit, and duty

Punjab recorded 106 drug overdose deaths in 2024, much higher than neighboring Haryana, Himachal: NCRB report

At least 106 people in Punjab died of alleged drug overdose in 2024, way more than similar deaths recorded by Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Union Territory of Chandigarh, as per latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report.As per the report, released by the union ministry of home affairs (MHA), Himachal Pradesh recorded 31 such deaths in 2024, Haryana three and Chandigarh seven. Nationally, Punjab recorded second highest number of such cases, behind Tamil Nadu where 313 people died of drug overdose. Punjab was followed by Madhya Pradesh (90), Rajasthan (69) and Mizoram (65). A total of 978 drug deaths were reported across the country in 2024, up from 654 in 2023.The number of drug deaths in Punjab have increased from 89 in 2023 to 106 in 2024. In 2023, Punjab had recorded the highest number of drug overdose deaths while Tamil Nadu was placed second.NDPS cases: Punjab not among top-3Punjab recorded 29 NDPS Act cases per lakh population, second only to Kerala, with 75.5 cases per lakh population, as per the report. But, compared to Punjab, the neighboring Haryana (10.8) Himachal Pradesh (22.8) and Chandigarh (7.2) have lower crime rate for drug offences. Punjab’s crime rate under drug offences is way higher

drawback benefits, allegedly causing losses to the exchequer and leading to personal enrichment.The agency had earlier raided premises linked to Sanjeev Arora in October 2024, in connection with an alleged land fraud and money laundering case. Sanjeev Arora had earlier stated that he would cooperate with the probe.At that time, the ED had searched multiple premises linked to Hampton Sky Realty, formerly known as Ritesh Properties and Industries Limited, and alleged illegal change of land use, fraudulent bookings and generation of proceeds of crime.

The agency had also alleged that companies linked to Arora were under the scanner for booking fake export bills and purchases from non-existent GST entities. Friday’s raids were part of a wider probe into alleged financial irregularities involving the round-tripping of funds from the UAE, insider trading and routing of illegal money into India through shell entities and fake commercial transactions, sources said.The ED had also conducted searches linked to AAP Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Kumar Mittal and his educational institutions. Mittal, founder of Lovely Professional University, had switched to the BJP, triggering speculation within political circles over mounting pressure from central agencies.The latest action comes amid heightened ED activity in Punjab. On Thursday, the agency linked builder Gaurav Dhir to Punjab AAP president Aman Arora in a money-laundering case after searches at premises associated with Dhir and others.The ED action assumes political significance, coming at a time when the AAP government in Punjab has repeatedly accused the BJP-led Centre of using investigative agencies to target Opposition leaders ahead of elections.

than national average of 7.8.When it comes to registration of cases under the NDPSAct, Punjab was placed fourth nationally with 8973 cases. The list is led by Kerala (27,149), followed by Maharashtra (15,641) and Tamil Nadu (11,037). However, Punjab witnessed way higher cases than neighboring Haryana (3,325), Himachal Pradesh (1,715) and Chandigarh (90). The country recorded 1.09 lakh cases under the NDPS Act in 2024.Punjab tops in drug trafficking, Kerala in personal consumptionWhile Kerala tops the country in possessing drugs for personal consumption, Punjab witnessed the highest cases in the country for drug trafficking.Punjab, in 2024, registered 6,060 cases for drug trafficking, followed by Uttar Pradesh (3,219), Rajasthan (2,758),

Tamil Nadu (2,753) and Maharashtra (2,324). In neighbouring Haryana 2,046 trafficking cases were registered, while Himachal Pradesh recorded 1292 such cases and Chandigarh 90.In possessing drugs for personal use/consumption, Punjab is not among the top three states. The list is led by Kerala (25,856 cases), followed by Maharashtra (13,317) and Tamil Nadu (8,284). In Punjab, 2,913 cases were registered for possessing drugs for personal consumption, higher than Haryana (1,279), Himachal Pradesh (423) and Chandigarh .

Cloudflare to cut over 1,100 jobs amid AI-led restructuring

New Delhi: US-based connectivity cloud company Cloudflare has announced that it plans to cut more than 1,100 jobs globally as the company restructures its operations around the growing adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), according to an internal memo sent to employees by the company.The company said that its internal use of AI has surged by more than 600 per cent over the last three months, with employees across engineering, finance, human resources and marketing increasingly relying on AI agents to carry out day-to-day tasks.Cloudflare described the move as part of a broader organisational overhaul aimed at adapting to the ‘agentic AI era’, rather than a conventional cost-cutting exercise or a performance-driven layoff programme. “This decision is not a reflection of the individual work or talent of those leaving us,” the company said in the memo.“We are reimagining every internal process, team and role

across the company.” The company further added that all employees would be informed directly about how the restructuring affects them, with notices being sent to both official and personal email addresses for impacted workers.Cloudflare said the severance packages for departing employees would include full base pay through the end of 2026, continued healthcare support in the US through the end of the year and additional equity vesting benefits through August 15.The company noted that employees who had not yet completed their one-year vesting cliff would receive prorated equity vesting as part of the separation package.According to the memo, the company intends to complete the restructuring exercise in a single phase to avoid prolonged uncertainty and repeated rounds of layoffs. Cloudflare said it was reshaping its organisational structure to remain competitive as AI rapidly transforms business workflows and operating models across the technology industry.

40 metres below Malad Creek – Mumbai’s Rs 5,821-crore tunnel takes shape

Nearly 40 metres below the Malad Creek, Poisar River and mangrove patches, Mumbai is set to carve out a 3.9-km twin-tunnel corridor linking Mindspace in Malad West to Charkop in Kandivali. The Rs 5,821-crore tunnel package, a key part of the 22-km Versova-Bhayander Coastal Road, is expected to enter the mining phase early next year and be operational by 2029.The underground route is aimed at easing the western suburbs’ dependence on the Western Express Highway, Link Road and SV Road, while allowing the coastal road to pass through an ecologically sensitive stretch without cutting trees or disturbing mangroves.

Significance of the projectAt present, North-South connectivity in the western suburbs is dependent on the Western Express Highway (WEH), Link Road and SV Road. Considering the increasing vehicular density, the coastal road is expected to take off the load from the existing roads, providing an alternate route for seamless connectivity.Out of the total 3.9 KM length, around 3 KM of this tunnel will be cylindrical in shape, to be constructed by mining through a Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM), and is set to have a diameter of 14.2 meters.Coastal Road -- Tunnel Alignment Each tunnel will have three lanes for vehicular movement, along with five cross passages (Express photo)

The cylindrical portion of the tunnels will pass beneath the Poisar River and Creeks. The remaining portion of the tunnels will be rectangular in shape and 700 meters long.Each tunnel will have three lanes for vehicular movement, along with five cross passages, built as a precautionary measure against emergency situations.The width of the tunnels will vary between 36

meters and 45 meters.Civic officials maintained that the tunnels will be equipped with a modern-day fire and accident prevention system, along with ventilation facilities and heat sensors.Why a tunnel?The area through which this tunnel will pass is an ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ) having mangrove patches and water bodies. The BMC has maintained that the reason the tunnel is chosen is to ensure that the mangroves don’t get damaged and the process also doesn’t require cutting of any trees.Cost and timeline

The total cost of this project has been pegged at 20,000 crore, of which Rs 5,821 crore has been earmarked for constructing the twin tunnels. The mining for the tunnels is set to begin in early 2027, and the tunnels are likely to become operational by 2029.

Administration speaks“Considering the tunnels will pass below mangrove patches, rivers and creeks, we can say that this will be Mumbai’s first vehicular tunnels that will pass underneath water bodies.

We are eyeing a 2029 deadline for the coastal road project, and once operational, travel time between Versova and Bhayander will take less than 20 minutes, which now takes more than an hour,” Abhijit Bangar, additional municipal commissioner (Projects).The tunnels will be part of the Mumbai Coastal Road Project (Phase II). This 22 km-long high-speed corridor being built by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is set to connect Versova with Bhayander in the northern end of Mumbai. As part of this project, a 3.9 KM stretch between Mindspace and Charkop will be connected through these underwater tunnels.



‘12,000 Rajiv Gandhis’, Vaghela’s 2027 push and Congress strategy



Gyanesh Kumar’s ‘12,000 Rajiv Gandhis’ remark, Shankersinh Vaghela’s bid to revive the Praja Shakti Party and Congress’s preparations for the 2027 Gujarat polls make up this week’s Gujarat Confidential.

Welcome to Gujarat Confidential, your inside track to the power corridors of the state. Today: From the CEC’s SIR remark and Shankersinh Vaghela’s electoral push to Congress’s Gujarat strategy and Surat’s plastic-for-Ganesha-idol drive.

12,000 Rajiv Gandhis’ Responding to a question on whether complaints regarding the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) would be resolved before the next Lok Sabha elections, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, in his first public address in Gujarat, said, “Do you know how many Rajiv Gandhis would be there in my electoral database? Not less than 12,000.” Sitting in the front rows in the audience was another Rajiv Gandhi, who is the MD and CEO of Hester Biosciences and President of the Ahmedabad Management Association. He was also the host of the event.

Shankersinh Vaghela’s Push VIEWING THE 2027 Assembly election as a last ditch effort, former Gujarat chief minister Shankersinh Vaghela announced an “aggressive campaign” to reactivate the Praja Shakti Party,

which he launched, starting October 2. The 86-year-old Vaghela told The Indian Express, “This 2027 Assembly election is my last chance. I don’t think I can be as active later. And I want to do my bit to fight against the BJP”. Vaghela convened a meeting at his residence in Gandhinagar on Sunday which, according to him, was attended by “over 500 people” in support of his outfit. “I did reach out to (Congress president) Mallikarjun Kharge and (former general secretary in charge of Gujarat) Mukul Wasnik around six months back, but there is no response from them yet. It is not for joining the Congress but to ally with it to fight against the BJP. We kept quiet for all this time because every time we would contest, we were blamed for dividing Opposition votes. But now there is hardly any time left,” said Vaghela.

‘Strategic’ Visit RANDDEEP SURJEWALA, the newly appointed AICC general secretary in-charge of Gujarat, will visit the state on September 12. His trip here will coincide with the ongoing Gujarat visit of the BJP’s new Gujarat in-charge, Tarun Chugh. Sources say the Congress has planned a “centrally strategised” plan for the 2027 Assembly elections, given the deep differences within the party’s state unit. Shunning Plastic AS PART of environmental conservation efforts, the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) has started a drive under which citizens can give one kilogram of plastic waste and get an idol of Lord Ganesha from collection centres at nine of its zones. The campaign has received an enthusiastic response from the people, officials said. The SMC’s Health Committee chairman, Ashok Randeriya, said that since the launch of the drive, in the past seven days, over 1,200 kg of plastic waste has been collected and 750 idols of Lord Ganesha, made of mud, were given to the people. “Keeping in mind more demands from the public, we ordered 500 more such idols and these will reach us in the next few days. Through such an initiative, we want to cultivate a habit among citizens not to use plastic material in day-to-day life,” Randeriya added.

Why everyone in Mumbai is still talking about Kaspers, Bandra’s buzziest bistro

It opened late last year, dinner service only, and packed reservations. At a gathering earlier this year with a pastry chef and a food blogger, the conversation drifted to “have you dined at Kaspers yet?” The buzz had reached everyone, including a food influencer who has stopped dining out entirely to follow a diet. She made an exception for Kaspers.

Eight months later, it now opens for longer hours — covering breakfast, lunch and dinner, but the buzz hasn’t died down. Even on a heavily pouring evening earlier this week, the 38-seater bistro just off Hill Road was full: a bunch of ladies, a family of four, two girls catching up, a group of six young people. There’s chatter, the kind you can eavesdrop on without it touching your own evening. Kaspers is the latest opening from restaurateurs Jay Yousuf and Gauri Devidayal’s Food Matters Group, the house behind The Table, Mag St. Bread Co., and Magazine St. Kitchen. The menu and the room are both put together by Chef Will Aghajanian, who has cooked at Mugaritz in Spain and Per Se in New York, and ran Horses in Los Angeles before the restaurateurs called him to Mumbai a little under three years ago now. Mumbai Sea bream tartare with meunie’re vinaigrette; Demi’s salad, barrel-aged sheep’s feta, crushed olive and watermelon; and bread & butter. Photo Courtesy: Special Arrangement

The space, designed with Patch Design Studio, is a piece of Paris folded into a busy Mumbai lane: hand-laid mosaic floors, deep maroon banquettes, a zinc bar. It is lit exactly the way Will wanted it. “Lighting is one of the most important things; it needs to be good, not overly bright,” he said. That instinct extends to everything guests touch. “Even the forks have a hidden logo on the back. There are a lot of small hidden details like that.” The room is also, unmistakably, a canvas. Every table is topped with white paper and a packet of crayons, an invitation the artist Kacper Abolik set the tone for: he spent a month in Mumbai hand-painting the cherub frescoes that give the restaurant its name and its whimsy. On the night we visited, nearly everyone gave in to it. The family of four’s mother sketched a mountain scene while her daughter drew a waffle; a group of friends recreated the cherub motif from the walls. A few of these table-top doodles have already been framed and now hang in the space. Will is candid about why he built the room this way. “I am pretty awkward, and when I used to date, I was bad at it, I have ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder, now called ADHD), so I need things to talk about, or the conversation stalls,” he said. “So the idea was: give people things that fill the void of an awkward date. It’s why Jenga comes out for the second seating, why the playlist shifts toward ‘90s Blink-182 territory as the night wears on, why there is always something on the wall worth pointing at.” The two pillars at the centre of the room do plenty of that talking themselves. A nice mix of Hollywood and Bollywood memorabilia decorates them: Rekha from Umrao Jaan, a poster from the Folies Bergère cabaret hall in Paris, vintage adverts for Campa Cola and Charminar cigarettes, and covers from The New Yorker and Illustrated Weekly. The menu resists easy geography, drawing on French bistro classics and Basque pintxos using seasonal ingredients with European flair. “It’s what sets it apart,” Will said of the Indian elements running through it. “There’s also Basque



in there, Italian, and something like southern France meeting Indian flavours.” His tandoori crab, technically a Basque preparation before the tandoori paste goes on, ends up tasting, in his own words, like rustic coastal cooking “even though it’s meant to be tandoori crab.” Much of that flavour memory, he said, comes from staff meals cooked by his largely Bengali kitchen team, which he eats constantly.

That range shows on the table. We began with charred dates and smoked goat’s curd with rosemary (Rs 750), a dish that leaned sweeter, better suited perhaps as a light dessert than an opener. The bread basket (Rs 450), sourdough, sesame focaccia and a crisp olive disc, came with a golden housemade butter, cultured with buttermilk and cream, finished with sea salt. Stronger was the ruby red beet lavash (Rs 950): crispy lavash topped with sliced avocado, pistachio, roasted beetroot, arugula leaves and mulberries. The sea bream tartare (Rs 975) was plated over browned-butter vinaigrette, and seasoned just right, with capers and parsley, and the golden crispy shortcrust of spinach and Taleggio read almost like a pizza. “I had to learn the vegetarian palate when I came to India,” Will said. “It’s still western at its base, but figuring out how to make it work for everyone was the goal.” Demi’s salad (Rs 850), barrel-aged sheep’s feta over cherry tomato, onion, crushed olive and watermelon, came together very well, and we polished it off. The French onion soup crostino (Rs 675) didn’t land for us. But we thoroughly enjoyed the salt roasted tiger prawns with prawn head rouille and bouillabaisse jus (Rs 1050). “It’s a king prawn dish, but we make almost a curry paste using Bouillabaisse spices instead of the traditional approach, so it ends up with a lot of Thai elements. It’s a hybrid of Southeast Asia and France. A lot of the food here works that way — it takes elements of Basque, French, or Italian cooking, and then becomes Indian or South-east Asian somewhere inside it.

There might be a sambal, there might be something hidden in there that we don’t talk about, but it’s what gives the dish more flavour. It’s always a bit of a balancing game,” said Chef Will. For drinks, we began with a lighter Aperol Spritz, moved on to a bold Negroni, and ended the night with a shot of espresso. Desserts, which Will oversees personally, were the stronger half of the meal. The Santa Rosa plum and almond tart (Rs 650) had just the right tang, though its accompanying cream needed more sweetness to balance it. The pineapple baba au rhum with coconut cream (Rs 650) was heavy on alcohol and light on coconut. But the coffee cake tiramisu (Rs 650), dusted in dark cocoa, stole the meal. “

Back to Delhi home from US for break, student dies as car veers off slippery road

According to officers, the driver, identified as Yashvendra, had sustained serious injuries in the crash. Yashvendra Singh, shared by Sanskriti school According to officers, the driver, identified as Yashvendra, had sustained serious injuries in the crash. A 20-year-old student died and a woman, who was travelling with him, was injured after the car he was driving allegedly lost control, plunged into a drain and overturned in South West Delhi on Friday morning, said police. According to officers, the driver, identified as Yashvendra, had sustained serious injuries in the crash. He was rushed for medical treatment but later succumbed to the injuries. Preliminary enquiry revealed that while taking a sharp turn near the Nangal Dewat red light, Yashvendra allegedly lost control of the vehicle because of the slippery road surface. The car subsequently veered off the

road, fell into a drain and overturned. Police said the two had spent the previous night at a friend’s house and were on their way to drop the woman home when the accident took place. Investigators found that the vehicle belonged to the woman while it was being driven by Yashvendra at the time of the accident. In her statement to police, she said the vehicle skidded due to the road condition, leading to the crash. Officers said both Yashvendra and the woman were students of the same institution in the United States, where they had become friends. They were in India for a break. Yashvendra was the son of an Indian Army officer and a resident of Delhi. The woman is a resident of Vasant Kunj. Her father works with a private firm in Delhi, while her mother is a homemaker. According to police, a PCR card regarding a fatal road accident was received at Vasant Kunj South police station on Friday.

Govt orders GitHub to remove Bluetooth-based chat app Bitchat over security concerns: Jack Dorsey



New Delhi: Home ministry’s cybercrime arm, the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre, has ordered Microsoft subsidiary GitHub to remove Bluetooth-based messaging application Bitchat, according to a notice. “The Government of India does not like technologies like Bitchat and wants it taken down,” said the app’s developer and former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey on Friday in an X post, sharing a copy of the notice dated July 23. A query sent to I4C in this regard elicited no immediate reply. In its notice, I4C said that the app enables communication even during network restrictions and creates a substantial risk of misuse by anti-national elements, terrorist organisations, organised criminal groups and cyber criminals seeking to evade lawful detection and continue communication despite legally imposed restrictions.

While giving reference to Bitchat, I4C said that the content hosted or published by the GitHub intermediary platform is prohibited by law or being used to commit an unlawful act. “I4C said that it has identified multiple applications as communication platforms capable of establishing decentralised peer-to-peer messaging over Bluetooth mesh networks without relying on mobile networks, internet connectivity, or centralised servers.

“The application enables anonymous communication

tion without mandatory user registration, phone number verification, or centralised logging of communications. The technical architecture of the application significantly impedes lawful interception, attribution and investigation by law enforcement agencies,” the notice said. The notice comes after several users participating in a protest organised by the Cockroach Janata Party at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, were observed using Bluetooth-based messaging apps after the government imposed temporary restrictions on internet services around the protest site. According to I4C, since communications occur directly between nearby devices through a decentralised mesh network, the platform can be misused to evade lawful surveillance, facilitate anonymous coordination, and circumvent lawful restrictions imposed by competent authorities during situations involving public disorder, riots, terrorism, organised crime, or internet shutdowns. “Intelligence inputs indicate that such decentralised communication platforms are capable of being exploited for coordinating unlawful assemblies, violent protests, dissemination of misinformation, radicalisation, criminal conspiracies, and other activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, public order, and for facilitating the commission of cognizable offences,” the notice said. It added that the absence of a centralised service provider also limits the ability of law enforcement agencies to obtain subscriber information, communication records, or timely assistance during investigations.

“The application’s design, which enables communication even during network restrictions, creates a substantial risk of misuse by anti-national elements, terrorist organisations, organised criminal groups, and cybercriminals seeking to evade lawful detection and continue communication despite legally imposed restrictions,” the notice mentioned. In the notice to GitHub, I4C has mentioned that the app violates Sections 43, 84B and 84C of the IT Act and Section 61 read with 196 and 197.

Bengaluru delivery agent, jailed for stripping inside woman’s home, seeks bail

A delivery agent arrested for allegedly entering a woman’s house in Bengaluru’s Electronic City area and stripping on the pretext of using the bathroom has sought bail, claiming innocence. A rural Bengaluru court on Friday directed the state government to file its objections by July 28. The delivery agent, Maheshkumar Patil, arrived at a sixth-floor apartment in Electronic City on the morning of July 17 with a rent renewal document for a 30-year-old tenant. When she went to fetch her phone to provide an OTP number, he allegedly entered the house.

According to the woman’s police complaint, Patil told her that he wanted to use the bathroom. Even though she denied the request, he allegedly entered the bathroom and came out within a couple of minutes without clothes, exposing his privates. The woman told the police that she panicked and ran out of the flat and sought help from neighbours and the apartment security staff. Patil stepped outside the flat after putting his clothes on. “The suspect was caught by the neighbours and the security and handed over to the police,” the First Information Re-



port states. Patil was arrested on July 17 and booked on charges of sexual harassment, outraging the modesty of a woman, and house trespass. The incident came days after another delivery agent, Vijay Mallikarjun Kamath, was accused of sexually harassing a woman in a similar manner at her Bengaluru apartment. Kamath was arrested last week.

Why Sukhbir Badal’s reading of Modi’s ‘Akali’ remark has created a storm

PM Narendra Modi referred to ‘Akali Dal’ during his Punjab rally, but SAD chief Sukhbir Badal said the remark targeted another Akali faction. (File Photo) PM Narendra Modi referred to ‘Akali Dal’ during his Punjab rally, but SAD chief Sukhbir Badal said the remark targeted another Akali faction. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent visit to Punjab was intended to highlight the Centre’s development agenda, with projects worth around ₹5,470 crore inaugurated or dedicated to the state. Yet, much of the political discussion that followed centred not on the projects but on a brief remark the Prime Minister made about the Akali Dal, and more significantly, on how Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal interpreted it. While Modi referred simply to “Akali Dal” during his address in Jalandhar, Sukhbir Badal later maintained that the criticism was not aimed at the Shiromani Akali Dal but at another Akali faction. His interpretation has generated considerable discussion because the Prime Minister himself did not distinguish between different Akali groups.

What did PM Modi say?

Addressing a public rally in Jalandhar, Modi targeted Punjab’s three principal political rivals while projecting the BJP as the state’s only viable alternative. He described the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as “kattar beimaan” (utterly dishonest), said the Congress remained trapped in internal power struggles, remarking that “inka to kissa kursa ka hi khatam nahin hota”, and added that “Akali Dal is no different”, alleging that internal selfish interests had prevented it from serving Punjab effectively. At no point did the Prime Minister specify any particular Akali faction. He referred only to “Akali Dal”.

Why did Sukhbir Badal’s response attract attention?

Rather than treating Modi’s remarks as criticism of the Shiromani Akali Dal, Sukhbir Badal argued publicly that the Prime Minister was referring to Akali Dal Punar Surjit and other splinter Akali factions that have emerged in recent years. That clarification surprised many political observers because Modi himself had made no distinction between the Shiromani Akali Dal and any other Akali outfit. The response immediately prompted a political question: why did the SAD chief seek to distance his party from remarks that appeared to refer to the Akali Dal as a whole?

How do political observers view Badal’s statement?

Political observers and leaders from both parties suggest more than one explanation. One view is that by declining to interpret Modi’s remarks as a direct attack on the Shiromani Akali Dal, Badal avoided publicly escalating tensions with the BJP, the party’s ally for nearly 25 years. A senior SAD leader said this should not be read as evidence of any behind-the-scenes negotiations but reflected a conscious decision not to further widen the political distance between the former allies.



Why does the BJP-SAD relationship still matter?

The BJP and the Shiromani Akali Dal shared one of India’s longest-running political alliances before parting ways in 2020. Together, they governed Punjab three times. The BJP traditionally drew support from urban constituencies, traders and sections of the Hindu middle class, while the Shiromani Akali Dal remained dominant across large parts of rural Punjab and among sections of the Sikh electorate. The alliance allowed both parties to expand beyond their individual support bases.

What changed after 2020?

The alliance collapsed in 2020 after the Shiromani Akali Dal walked out of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) over the Centre’s three farm laws. Since then, the two parties have fought the 2022 Punjab Assembly election and the 2024 Lok Sabha election separately. Both have faced electoral challenges after the split. The BJP has continued to struggle to expand beyond its traditional urban base into rural Punjab, where the Akali Dal historically maintained strong organisational networks. The Shiromani Akali Dal, meanwhile, has found it difficult to regain political momentum without the BJP’s urban support base. It has also had to contend with anti-incumbency from its previous tenure and the emergence of new political players, according to a senior SAD leader. Political observers say the breakup has weakened the electoral complementarity that once benefited both parties.

Why is every interaction between the two parties closely watched?

Against this backdrop, every public statement involving the BJP and the Shiromani Akali Dal is scrutinised for signs of either continued hostility or possible accommodation. A senior RSS leader said this was precisely why Badal’s interpretation attracted attention. Similarly, a senior BJP leader said that had Badal publicly accused the Prime Minister of targeting the Shiromani Akali Dal, it would have reinforced the perception that relations between the former allies remained deeply adversarial. By attributing the remarks to another Akali faction, he avoided creating another political flashpoint, even though Modi himself had made no such distinction.

EYE SECRETS

Editorial

9/11 at 25—Memo-
ries of a macabre
event

The world woke up to a new, brutal reality on September 11, 2001, when America came under the worst terrorist attack in history, a terrible event that reshaped the global security architecture. Till then, the United States had been basking in the glory of being the sole superpower in the post-Cold War era. 9/11 inflicted a rude shock, raising terrorism from what was barely background noise to an existential dread. The attacks, spearheaded by al-Qaeda, completely rewrote the public understanding of terrorism and reset the national security assessments. Airports became fortresses and intelligence agencies gained sweeping powers. Nearly 3,000 people were killed as 19 al-Qaeda hijackers seized control of four airliners, slamming two of the planes into the World Trade Center, one into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, and the fourth into a field in western Pennsylvania. The world had to pay a heavy price for the war on terror that followed. The disastrous military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq only meant more sacrifices and more grief. A quarter of a century later, the balance sheet is sobering: the war on terror may have weakened terror networks but has not eliminated the threat of terrorism. Ironically, America's 'forever wars' in foreign lands have only ended up destabilising the entire region, feeding the very extremism they sought to end.

The US invaded Afghanistan to destroy al-Qaida and topple its Taliban protectors, a war that would drag on for a record 20 years, only for the Taliban to return to power. The war in Iraq was totally unjustified as it was launched on the false premise that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. The global war on terror expanded into a sprawling enterprise of military intervention, intelligence operations, detention, and interrogation. More than 7,000 soldiers were killed and over 53,000 wounded in the military campaigns. It drained resources that could have been put to better use. Looking back, the key lesson for the world is that military force can weaken extremism, but only justice and a more equitable world order can address its deeper roots. Iraq's collapse gave birth to ISIS. Afghanistan's 20-year war ended with the Taliban back in power. The clearest lesson is that force alone cannot defeat an ideology. Donald Trump rode to power partly by criticising the nation's post-September 11 response more harshly than any other prominent politician — only to repeat some of the mistakes himself, including through a pointless, prolonged war in Iran. He is compounding the errors of his predecessors with his own reckless foreign policy. Since 9/11, the world of intelligence and counter-terrorism has changed almost beyond recognition. With the advent of AI and quantum computing, it is only going to continue changing, and in some areas, at exponential speed.

This festive season,
Tukaram Mundhe has an
eye on your favourite snacks

The Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA), led by Tukaram Mundhe, has started the festival crackdown. As people in Maharashtra gear up to celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi and Navratri, the food safety regulator, acting on concerns over the quality of the namkeen, banana chips, sev, and other snacks people typically have during the festive season, has seized nearly 29 tonnes of food products, raw materials and edible oil worth Rs 20.48 lakh from 11 establishments in Thane's Shil-Diva area. Following a tip-off on September 9, the FDA conducted a surprise inspection at establishments in Bhaskar Compound, Khadi Gaon and found poor-quality stocks of potato wafers, farali chiwda, spicy wafers, mixed farsan, sev, bhakarwadi, banana chips and other products, besides maida, besan, pea flour, palmolein and used cooking oil. Maharashtra FDA raids namkeen thane Maharashtra FDA has seized Rs 20.48 lakh worth of farsan, wafers and namkeen from multiple Thane establishments (

The food safety body said it seized 28,955 kg and 56 litres of food products and raw materials on suspicion of adulteration and poor quality. It also cited extremely unhygienic and unsafe conditions in which the food was being manufactured. Other violations include establishments running without valid food licences, dirty and greasy production floors, partly open production areas and inadequate drainage. Officials reported stagnant wastewater and foul odours around some premises, along with cockroach and rodent infestation. Workers were also found preparing food without aprons, gloves or head covers. Maharashtra FDA raid namkeen banana chips The department said 28,955 kg and 56 litres of food products and raw materials were seized on suspicion of adulteration and poor quality (Sourced photo)The FDA has ordered the suspension of licences/registrations of all 11 establishments and directed them to stop operations.

Drug tests ordered
for pilots across all airlines

New Delhi: Aviation watchdog DGCA has ordered drug tests for pilots across all airlines, with the exercise to be completed by July 2027, according to sources. Separately, Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu on Thursday said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is expected to finalise the draft of new norms for drug testing of pilots by the end of this month. The moves come against the backdrop of the pilot-in-command of an Air India Phuket-Delhi flight, which suddenly lost nearly 300 feet in altitude, testing positive for drug use after the aircraft incident on August 4 left many passengers injured. On September 4, Air India terminated the services of the pilot-in-command, hours after the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)'s preliminary report into the Phuket flight incident said the pilot's drug use was a serious concern and asked the regulator DGCA to take appropriate action.

The sources on Thursday said the DGCA had ordered drug testing for pilots across all airlines last month and that the carriers had been asked to complete the exercise by July next year. Naidu, on the sidelines of a conference in the national capital on Thursday, said the draft of the revised Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) regarding testing of pilots for psychoactive substances is expected to be finalised by the end of this month after discussions with stakeholders. Currently, drug tests for pilots are conducted on a random basis. Under the DGCA's present Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR), random tests for psychoactive substances have to be conducted on 10 per cent of pilots and air traffic controllers, among others, annually. There are more than 12,000 pilots with various commercial airlines. Following the Phuket flight incident and the pilot-in-command testing positive for drug use, Air India Group in August decided to conduct drug tests for all pilots across Air India and Air India Express. In the



preliminary report on the Phuket flight incident released on September 4, the AAIB said the plane, carrying 145 people, suffered a near-simultaneous loss of all three hydraulic systems while cruising at 36,000 feet, triggering an autopilot disconnect, a brief stall warning and an altitude upset that injured 24 people. The report disclosed that the pilot-in-command tested non-negative for a psychoactive substance in a confirmatory test conducted after the flight. The AAIB recommended that the aviation regulator take appropriate action to prevent the abuse of psychoactive substances. "

The confirmation of use of psycho-active substance is a serious concern and AAIB recommends appropriate actions by DGCA on priority," it had said. Hours later, on September 4, Air India said the pilot-in-command of the Phuket-Delhi flight had tested positive for a psychoactive substance. "In line with Air India's zero-tolerance approach to violation of safety, fitness or regulatory requirements, the pilot's employment has been terminated with immediate effect," the airline had said in a statement.

Lilac for women teachers, blue for
men; students to get green uniforms

The decision was taken at a meeting of the state Education Department chaired by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. The decision was taken at a meeting of the state Education Department chaired by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. Himachal Pradesh on Thursday approved a new colour theme for 158 government schools newly brought under the CBSE curriculum, with the uniform and building colours drawing inspiration from the state's green cover and forest landscape.

Green uniforms for students, lilac for women teachers and light blue for men — the schools are set for a makeover in appearance as well as in attire. The school buildings will be painted in olive green and sand beige shades. The decision was taken at a meeting of the state Education Department chaired by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. A senior officer said a letter was issued in this regard on Thursday. Education Secretary Rakesh Kanwar told The Indian Express, "Green for the students' uniform and the school buildings was chosen to reflect the green cover and forest cover of Himachal Pradesh. Our state is known for its greenery, dense forests, flora and fauna." Kanwar said all the teachers in 158 schools will adopt the new dress code from the 2026-27 academic session. Students, however, will switch to the green-themed uniform from the next academic session. According to broader guidelines discussed in the meeting, teachers' uniforms will be expected to be formal, modest and professional, with minimal accessories. They will also be required to wear their identity cards while on duty. Education department officials said teachers' uniforms are not limited to 158 schools. A senior official said, "Earlier this year, the department asked all around 6,000 government schools in the state to select a dress code for their teaching staff. While the process is still underway, teachers in the 158 CBSE-affiliated government schools have opted for light lilac-purple for women teachers and light blue shirts and trousers for men teachers." At the



meeting, Sukhu said the government was committed to providing quality education and ensuring better educational facilities for students closer to their homes. "The state has already released Rs 80 crore for developing the required infrastructure in the CBSE schools and strengthening facilities for students and teachers. An additional Rs 5 crore will also be released to improve the educational environment in these institutions further." Approximately 5,100 teachers in the 158 CBSE-affiliated government schools will be instructed to follow the decided dress code from October 1. Additional Director (Education) Jeevan Singh Negi said, "We have decided to provide financial assistance of Rs 5,000 to the teachers in the CBSE-affiliated government schools for purchasing the dress.... A file was moved to the finance department for further sanction." MLAs Suresh Kumar, Chander Shekhar and Neeraj Nayyar, Member of the Himachal Pradesh Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Commission Vijay Pal Singh, Education Secretary Rakesh Kanwar, Director of School Education Ashish Kohli and other senior officers were present at the meeting. Kangra has the highest number of government schools brought under the CBSE curriculum, with 29 schools; followed by Shimla with 25, Mandi with 19, and Hamirpur with 18 schools.

Delhi PG operator warned building
may collapse hours before tragedy

Hours before a five-storey paying guest (PG) accommodation for boys crumbled in Southwest Delhi's Satya Niketan on Sunday afternoon, a labourer had allegedly called the PG operator to warn him that one of the walls of the building could collapse amid the ongoing construction work, The Indian Express has learnt. The construction work is said to have weakened the structure of the building.

The labourer told police, according to sources, that he had called Sudhanshu, 31, who ran the 'Hostel Daze' chain in the area, to warn that the building won't be able to take the load of the construction work in the basement. During the questioning, Sudhanshu, who was arrested on Wednesday, told police that he had also warned Mahesh, the son of the property owner, to not go ahead with the renovation work.

The building didn't have the base to bear the weight of the extra floors, he claimed to have said. "We are also trying to get details of the timeline of the construction work, and ask neighbours how the building came up and whether it was inspected during the construction," said a police officer. On Thursday, multiple people from the neighbourhood in the area where the building crumbled were questioned by the police to re-create the sequence of the events. The building collapse killed seven people, including five students. In Satya Niketan, all seven PGs operated by Hostel Days have been inspected by the MCD with the officials preparing a report on the possible violations. Most of the company's PGs visibly violate certain norms, specially the single entry- exit point, according to sources.

When The Indian Express visited the site on Thursday, one of the PGs, just opposite a Metro station, was found to be empty. "All the students left the day the other building came down. But this building hasn't been sealed," said a worker at the PG. "If there were to be a fire, we won't even have space to run. We took it because it was the only place with decent food. The MCD official came today, and inquired about the whole building. But we are happy that Sudhanshu was arrested. He was very rude," said a second-year Delhi University student, living at a



four-floor girls PG, just 100 meters away from the collapsed building. Sudhanshu was among those who rushed to the five-storey building after it came crashing down on Sunday. But when students, mostly from DU, at the spot began recognising him, he left, fearing he would be beaten, The Indian Express reported on Thursday. Police on Wednesday traced him to a friend's house in Burari and arrested him. A graduate from DU's Hans Raj College, police said Sudhanshu had started the PG business in 2022, primarily catering to students studying at his alma mater.

Sudhanshu was in charge of installing the 16-bed facility with amenities, looking after maintenance, and overseeing the repair and construction work needed at the 50-year-old building that collapsed. He was the main person prospective tenants met when they came looking for rooms, sources in the police said. They added that Sudhanshu took the building on rent as it was being offered at a lesser price than the usual market price, primarily due to its poor condition. The owner of the building, Hariram, his son Mahesh, wife Urmila, and labour contractor Saroj were arrested earlier in the case. "The owners allegedly knew that the building wouldn't be able to bear the weight of four additional floors. And yet, they decided to give the construction a go-ahead and lease it out to a PG company last year," a senior officer said.

Central Bank of India launches
Bharat Connect for Business for
digital B2B payments

Hyderabad: Central Bank of India has become the first public sector bank to launch 'Bharat Connect for Business', in partnership with NPCI Bharat BillPay Ltd. (NBBL), marking a significant step towards strengthening India's digital B2B payments ecosystem.

The initiative was launched in the presence of Kalyan Kumar, MD & CEO, Central Bank of India, and Noopur Chaturvedi, MD & CEO, NBBL, at the NPCI Pavilion at Global Fintech Fest 2026. The platform offers businesses an integrated digital solution to generate invoices, make and receive payments, and manage collections and settlements, enabling secure and seamless transactions between buyers, sellers and banks, a press release said. The new initiative is expected to particularly benefit MSMEs and businesses by simplifying digital transactions and improving efficiency through technology-driven financial solutions, it added.

Delhi Police issues cyber
security dos and don'ts

With the three-day BRICS Summit set to kick off in the capital Friday, the Delhi Police has issued guidelines to guard against potential cyber attacks and the spread of misinformation during the high-profile event. The advisory, issued for government officials and contractual staff handling technology and computer-related work, lays down precautions ranging from password and data security to warnings against phishing links, unauthorised software, external cloud services and remote-access tools.

Issued from the Delhi Police Headquarters and signed by Additional Commissioner of Police, IFSO, Sanjay Bhatia, the guidelines cite the widespread use of information and communication technology across government departments and the presence of foreign dignitaries during the summit as factors increasing the risk of cyber threats. Use passwords of at least eight characters containing a combination of upper- and lower-case letters, numbers and special characters. Change passwords at least once every 45 days, and enable multi-factor authentication wherever available.

Officials have been advised to keep backups of important data on secondary or offline drives, regularly update operating systems and BIOS firmware, and install the enterprise anti-virus client provided by the government on official desktops and laptops. Log out even when stepping away from computer systems for a short period. Keep GPS, Bluetooth, NFC and other sensors disabled on computers and mobile phones unless required, and download applications only from official app stores. The advisory also recommends encrypting important data and documents before sending them through electronic means. Officials may use licensed encryption software or OpenPGP-based applications, while files can also be compressed into password-protected ZIP folders. Officials have been warned to exercise caution while opening shortened URLs, with the advisory noting that malware and phishing sites can use URL-shortening services. Similarly, users have been asked to be careful while opening links received through SMS and social media platforms, particularly those accompanied by attractive offers, discounts or claims of providing information about current affairs. Such links could redirect users to phishing or malware websites and pose a risk to their devices.

Suspicious emails and cyber security incidents are to be reported to the designated email addresses, while personnel have been directed to follow security advisories issued by NIC-CERT and CERT-In. The guidelines prescribe several system-level safeguards, including automatic logout after 20 minutes of inactivity on websites, web pages and applications requiring authentication. Screen savers with auto-lock facilities are to be enabled on client and server machines. Inactive users are to be disabled after 90 days, while user accounts should be locked after three unsuccessful login attempts and remain locked for 30 minutes before another attempt can be made. Don't use third-party cloud services, remote administration tools. Officials have been told not to reuse the same password across multiple services, websites or applications, or store passwords in browsers or other insecure documents. Sensitive information such as passwords, IP addresses and network diagrams should not be written on unsecured material such as sticky notes or papers posted on desks. Government data and files should not be stored on system drives or uploaded to non-governmental cloud services such as Google Drive and Dropbox. Don't use outdated or unsupported operating systems, third-party DNS or NTP services and unauthorised third-party services such as free VPNs, Tor and proxies. Use of unauthorised external devices, including unknown pen drives or USB drives, is prohibited. For sensitive internal meetings and discussions, employees have been advised against using unauthorised third-party conferencing or video-conferencing equipment. External mobile scanner applications should not be used to scan internal government documents.

Four Army personnel
held in Madras
Regiment arms theft case

Hyderabad: In a major breakthrough in the investigation into the theft of service weapons from the Madras Regiment premises at Bolarum in Secunderabad, four persons, all Army personnel, were taken into custody by the Malkajigiri police. Police are said to have recovered AK-47/AK-series rifles, INSAS rifles and around

Indian crew member killed in black sea attack on commercial vessel: MEA



New Delhi: An Indian national was killed in an attack on a commercial vessel while it was reportedly transiting Russian territorial waters in the Black Sea on July 18, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday. The fresh incident comes to light days after the MEA said four Indians were among 10 killed in an attack on a commercial vessel off the coast of Ukraine on July 19.

"It has come to our attention that on July 18, the commercial vessel MV OMORFI was attacked while transiting the Black Sea, reportedly in Russian territorial waters. At the time of the incident, there were 10 crew members on board, including three Indian nationals," the MEA said.

"As per available information, one Indian national tragically lost his life in the attack. We extend our deepest condolences to the bereaved family of the deceased. The other two Indian nationals on board are reported to be safe," it said in a statement.

The MEA said the Indian mission in Russia has reached out to the relevant authorities and is making efforts to extend all possible assistance to the affected family. "India unequivocally condemns such attacks targeting commercial shipping and placing the lives of innocent civilian crew members at risk. It is a matter of serious concern that the freedom of navigation and international commerce is facing increasing threats," it said. "India calls upon all concerned parties to uphold international obligations to ensure the safety and security of maritime navigation and uninterrupted flow of global commerce," the MEA added. New Delhi summoned the Russian charge Charge d'affaires on Tuesday following the killing of the four Indians in the strike on the MV Golden Leo vessel on July 19.

US court rejects Trump administration bid to revive USD 100,000 H-1B visa fee

A US federal appeals court has refused to stay a lower court order striking down the Trump administration's decision to impose a USD 100,000 fee on H-1B visas for highly skilled foreign workers. The three-judge bench at the Boston-based First Circuit Court of Appeals denied the federal government's motion to stay US District Judge Leo T Sorokin's June 8 ruling that struck down the fee, terming it an unlawful tax not authorised by Congress...we deny the defendants' motion to stay pending appeal to this Court, the district court's June 8, 2026, Memorandum and Order and accompanying Judgment," the bench ruled on Friday.

The judges agreed with the plaintiffs -- 20 Democrat-ruled states -- that "the question here is not whether Congress may delegate the authority in question. It is whether Congress has done so". President Donald Trump had issued a proclamation in September last year imposing a USD 100,000 fee for obtaining new H-1B visas. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. American technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. Citing a 1989 US Supreme Court ruling, the appeals court said the executive must show that Congress had spoken "clearly" in conferring discretionary authority to impose financial burdens, whether described as "fees" or "taxes". "However, the Trump administration has not explained why that clear standard isn't required in this case," the order said. The court also said the administration had failed to show why the plaintiff states would not suffer substantial injury if the stay was denied. The defendants "cursorily assert that the plaintiffs would face 'minimal' harm without developing that argument -- if it does constitute an argument as to the plaintiffs' lack of substantial injury -- further," the order said. The US issues 65,000 H-1B visas annually, along with an additional 20,000 visas for foreign workers holding advanced educational qualifications. These visas usually cost between USD 2,000 and USD 5,000 in fees.



ministration has not explained why that clear standard isn't required in this case," the order said. The court also said the administration had failed to show why the plaintiff states would not suffer substantial injury if the stay was denied. The defendants "cursorily assert that the plaintiffs would face 'minimal' harm without developing that argument -- if it does constitute an argument as to the plaintiffs' lack of substantial injury -- further," the order said. The US issues 65,000 H-1B visas annually, along with an additional 20,000 visas for foreign workers holding advanced educational qualifications. These visas usually cost between USD 2,000 and USD 5,000 in fees.

As AI grows more powerful, a US-China feud threatens safety efforts



Unlike U.S. giants OpenAI and Anthropic, many Chinese AI labs lack the computing resources for extensive safety training and instead focus on improving model capabilities, industry observers say. "It's plausible China reconsiders allowing open-weight releases for frontier models down the line, but the bar for doing so is high,"

BEIJING, U.S. threats to sanction Chinese AI developers over alleged intellectual property theft and export-control violations risk unravelling efforts to establish a bilateral dialogue on AI safety, analysts say, just as increasingly powerful models raise concerns over serious security ?breaches. U.S. officials on Wednesday accused Chinese AI lab Moonshot of distilling its Kimi K3 model from Anthropic's advanced Fable 5 model, prompting Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to warn of potential sanctions. Jumpstart your morning with the latest legal news delivered straight to your inbox from The Daily Docket newsletter. Sign up here. Distillation is the process of training AI models using output from more advanced ones to lower the costs of training a powerful new AI tool.

The Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security is also investigating whether Chinese firms like Moonshot are accessing advanced U.S. chips illegally to train their models. A Moonshot ?spokesperson did not respond to Reuters' request for comment. The dispute exposes a growing tension at the heart of the U.S.-China AI race. Both sides increasingly view frontier AI as a ?strategic asset and a security risk, yet experts argue cooperation on safety standards is becoming more urgent as powerful models could be misused for cyberattacks ?or other harmful applications. The accusations, coupled with reports Washington is weighing restrictions on Chinese open-weight models, could provoke tit-for-tat measures and jeopardise a planned U.S.-China AI dialogue in September, analysts say.

The tensions come atop years ?of U.S. export controls designed to curb China's access to cutting-edge

chips, measures that have increasingly dominated trade talks between the two countries. "Depending on the number of Chinese companies targeted, (and) the nature of the punitive ?actions taken... the retaliation has the potential to scuttle both the AI dialogue and the September 24 meeting between Presidents Trump and Xi," said Paul Triolo, a partner at DGA-Albright Stonebridge Group. Beijing meanwhile is considering whether to restrict overseas users' access to its models as a retaliatory measure, Reuters previously reported.

CLOSED AND OPEN-SOURCE SECURITY RISKS New York-based Hugging Face last week used a Chinese model, Z.ai's GLM-5.2, to contain a cyberattack by a rogue OpenAI agent that escaped during safety testing, ?since American closed models' safety guardrails were ironically too strong. As Chinese and U.S. frontier models achieve recursive self-improvement (RSI), where systems can autonomously enhance their own capabilities, researchers say both countries have an incentive ?to cooperate on safety standards before a more serious incident occurs.

Industry experts are also highlighting the risks posed by open-weight models, which can be downloaded, modified and redistributed with little oversight, limiting the effectiveness of software-based export controls. "Godfather ?of AI" ?Yoshua Bengio warned at China's flagship AI forum last week that the deployment and sharing decisions of open-weight models are irreversible, and their safeguards are easier to remove. "The logical thing to do is to find a good evaluation of these models, share the models that are not too dangerous, and not share those above the threshold of risk," he said via videolink. Chinese AI models must undergo government safety and content reviews before release, though current rules do not cover post-release modifications.

Unlike U.S. giants OpenAI and Anthropic, many Chinese AI labs lack the computing resources for extensive safety training and instead focus on improving model capabilities, industry observers say. "It's plausible China reconsiders allowing open-weight releases for frontier models down the line, but the bar for doing so is high," said Kristy Loke, a MATS research fellow studying China's AI governance. Some AI safety researchers argue that frontier models in both the U.S. and China should face stricter pre-release testing and independent third-party evaluations. In the U.S., firms can voluntarily submit models for testing by ?the state-funded Center for AI Standards and Innovation (CAISI), though some lawmakers have called for mandatory federal reviews. "In an ideal world, the two countries will ?come together to work on ?safer models... agree to build common standards around pre-release testing and set red lines for the most advanced open models," said Loke. Some U.S. government and AI industry officials remain split on how to respond to Chinese models, which account for about 60% of token usage by U.S. companies on the OpenRouter platform. OpenAI and Anthropic have lobbied Washington against lower-cost Chinese models, arguing they could undermine their business ?models. OpenAI lead strategist ?Dean Ball wrote on X that the Trump administration could "create large amounts of regulatory risk around the use of open-weight ?Chinese models" to curb their adoption by U.S. firms.

Death of Black teen Nolan Wells to go to Mississippi grand jury



A grand jury ?in Mississippi will review the circumstances around the death of Nolan Wells before the evidence is made public ?in the case of the Black teenager whose body was found in the water off an island he had visited with white friends, a local prosecutor said this week, but as of Friday had not said when jurors would take up the matter. This week, an attorney for the ?teenager's family said a private autopsy could not rule out foul play. The family's calls for answers have ?been amplified by civil rights leaders and social media, feeding a debate about the safety of ?young Black Americans in predominantly white environments.

Jumpstart your morning with the latest legal news delivered straight to your inbox from The Daily Docket newsletter. Sign up here. The district attorney for Jackson County said that, as a matter of routine, case ?information would be withheld from the public to protect the "integrity" of the grand jury which will decide if there is ?evidence

dence a crime may have taken place and someone should be charged. Every death in the county -- except those of natural causes and non-criminal car wrecks -- is presented to your grand jury," Jackson County District Attorney Angel Myers McIlrath said in a video message on Thursday. "Nolan's case is ?being handled the same way." The prosecutor did not respond to questions from Reuters about when jurors would be convened and ?what kinds of evidence they would consider. She promised a thorough, careful and uncompromised investigation into a case that has become a flashpoint for ?race ?relations in America. Wells, 18, died after he went to a Fourth of July party on Horn Island with three white friends he had known since high school in nearby Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The three friends returned to the mainland without him and were in possession of his mobile phone, according to the family's lawyer Ben Crump. A pathologist who conducted an independent autopsy of Wells ?on behalf of his family could ?not draw conclusions and ?requested further information from the state medical examiner's initial autopsy, Crump told a press conference earlier this week. Wells' mother, Christine Wonsley, said Jackson County Sheriff John Ledbetter told her less ?than an hour after her son's body was recovered on July 6 that he believed ?the death was ?accidental and he did not see foul play. Ledbetter did not respond to requests for comment. Crump, civil rights leader Al Sharpton and some Democratic lawmakers have said the case highlights the lack of scrutiny given to deaths of young Black men. Mississippi Governor Tate ?Reeves, a ?Republican, said in a statement on Friday that authorities were conducting a ?thorough investigation and Crump and Sharpton were "stoking division for political gain." Crump's office, and Sharpton, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. There was no ?one available for comment at Myers McIlrath's office.

Trump orders signs outside Smithsonian history museum to correct what he calls 'inaccurate information'

WASHINGTON, President Donald Trump directed federal officials on Friday to ?install signs outside the Smithsonian's flagship National Museum of American History to reflect his administration's criticism of how the institution portrays the United States. Trump's executive order cited a White House Domestic Policy Council report accusing the museum of "thinly veiled ?anti-Americanism" and "extreme political activism." He said he directed officials to install temporary signs on ?sidewalks maintained by the National Park Service to correct "inaccurate information presented in the ?Museum." The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here. While the Park Service falls under the secretary of the interior's authority, the 180-year-old Smithsonian is ?an independent institution. Trump has for months denounced the Smithsonian in what critics say is part ?of a larger campaign to present U.S. history from a conservative point of view. In his order, Trump said the "current leadership of both the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum cannot be trusted to tell America's story with honesty and ?gratitude." The White House Domestic Policy Council report had recommended the museum post a notice ?at its entrance reading: "Warning: the exhibits in this museum were prepared by people who don't want you to ?love ?your country." National Museum of American History director Anthea Hartig and Smithsonian Institution secretary Lonnie Bunch have both said the White House report unfairly characterized the museum's work.

Hartig testified before a House of Representatives oversight subcommittee this week, saying the museum is most powerful when patriotism is "not instructed but inspired." The ?Organization of American Historians, ?the country's largest group ?of U.S. history scholars, rejected claims made in the 162-page White House report re-



leased on July 4. The Smithsonian said it had no comment on ?Friday's executive order. Trump's other declarations and executive orders have led to the ?dismantling of ?slavery exhibits, the restoration of Confederate statues, and reviews into the work of museums. Trump says he aims to remove "anti-American ideology." Civil rights advocates say Trump's actions are reversing decades of social progress and undermining ?the acknowledgment ?of critical phases of U.S. history. The Smithsonian is a ?vast museum and research complex and a premier exhibition space for U.S. history and culture, with 21 museums and galleries and ?the National Zoo. Kanishka Singh is a breaking news reporter for Reuters in Washington DC, who primarily covers US politics and national affairs in his current role. His past breaking news coverage has spanned across a range of topics like the Black Lives Matter movement; the US elections; the 2021 Capitol riots and their follow up probes; the Brexit deal;

International Criminal Court members dismiss prosecutor Khan over sexual misconduct allegation



Khan's dismissal follows an announcement by the United States that it will launch a renewed diplomatic campaign to dismantle the ICC, which it says is a threat to its sovereignty

Member states of the ?International Criminal Court voted to dismiss prosecutor Karim Khan for serious misconduct, the ICC said on Friday. Diplomats running the executive bureau of the court's governing body said last month the British barrister had an inappropriate sexual relationship with a junior ICC lawyer and should be fired, documents seen by Reuters showed. On Friday, a ?large majority of the ICC's 125 member states voted to follow that recommendation. Get a look at the day ahead in European and global markets with the Morning Bid Europe newsletter. Sign up here.

"The assembly decided by a majority of 82 ?states

parties that the elected official, prosecutor, Karim Khan, committed serious misconduct and a serious breach of ?duty ... and to remove ... Karim Khan from office," the president of the court's governing body, Paivi Kaukoranta, said.

"Mr. Khan ?will challenge the lawfulness and fairness of the decision through all available legal mechanisms," his lawyer, Tayab Ali, said after the vote. Khan's dismissal immediately riggers the election process for a new ICC prosecutor who is not expected to be voted in before next year. "Members of the court acted swiftly and decisively to remove an embattled and discredited official so that the court can move forward with its important work in all the situations on its docket," ?said Leila Sadat, professor of international criminal law at Washington University.

Khan's dismissal follows an announcement by the United States that it will launch a renewed diplomatic campaign to dismantle the ICC, which it says is a threat to its sovereignty. During a visit to the Philippines on Thursday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said there were "lunatics and crazies involved in the ICC" and there was no way any U.S. political or military officials would ever go on trial at the court, reiterating previous criticism. State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott welcomed Khan's removal but said, "he is only one small cog in this irredeemably corrupt institution. Today's outcome will have no impact on the United States' plans to dismantle ?the ICC." The U.S., which is ?not a member, has imposed ?sanctions on 11 ICC judges and prosecutors, including Khan, citing the ICC's arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant, and a past probe into U.S. troops in Afghanistan. While removing Khan helps the ICC's credibility by showing it has accountability for its own leadership, the ?court has more ?hurdles to overcome, said Kyra Wigard, assistant professor of law at Utrecht University. "The bigger challenge going forward is whether the court can restore confidence internally and externally while maintaining the perception of independence amid intense geopolitical pressure," she said.

BCCI president Mithun Manhas: ‘I don’t see India-Pakistan players shaking hands, as of now ... our tradition is namaste’



This has been an extremely demanding and packed year. The women’s World Cup, followed by the Women’s Premier League, then the men’s T20 World Cup and finally the IPL. While I’m relatively new to this role, I have been fortunate to receive excellent support from my colleagues at the BCCI. I also benefited from the guidance of Mr Jay Shah, the ICC president who was the BCCI chief back then. His insight and support have been very valuable. Not just BCCI, even when I joined the Jammu & Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) in 2021 and even now, he has guided me.

Sriram Veera: You got into cricket administration in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The year you became BCCI president, J&K made history by winning the Ranji Trophy.The victory can be a turning point for cricket in J&K and Ladakh. We were always rich in talent but it was just about channelling the potential in the right direction. When I joined, my idea was: we play to win, and even if we lose while doing that, it doesn't matter.

In the 67 years of J&K cricket history, we have never done anything particularly special. But we have always shown glimpses of talent. This time, eight of our teams qualified for the knockout stage in various domestic competitions. Our effort was to be very transparent and honest in our approach. You will be surprised to know that the JKCA in Jammu still holds matches at a college ground. They don't have a stadium, even after 67 years. In Kashmir, they have a stadium, but it's in poor condition. Jay Shah bhai was the first from the BCCI to visit our region in our 67-year history. After that, there was no looking back. Now, we don't need to go outside our state to play cricket. We have the best red soil and black soil wickets. The SG Test and Kookaburra balls that are used in national tournaments are used for training at our camps as well. We start early, and before the season begins, the age-group teams and the senior teams each play about 40 to 50 games.Ajay Sharma has been around since I started my cricket. I believe in him and have worked very closely with him. I understand how he operates. He's a demanding coach who knows the fine nuances of batting. We have been struggling with our batting — bowling has always been our strength. He's also very disciplined and firm. I'm very happy for him. He's got his due. ON WHY AHMEDABAD GETS BIG GAMES | 'It is the rotation policy... also about generating revenue. Ahmedabad is our biggest stadium and BCCI benefits from that. If we generate a lot of revenue from one stadium and can accommodate more fans, why not?'

Nihal Koshie: Ajay Sharma is a Delhi cricketer and comes from a different culture. Did he take time to adjust?

Everything takes time. If you want to do something good, it takes time — kharab karne ke liye do minute hi lagte hain. (to spoil something it takes two minutes)?It is all about understanding their point of view and where they were coming from. Coach and players need to gel. If they don't trust each other, players wouldn't talk about their faults. It's like going to a doctor. Unless you tell him what the problem is, he can't help. Or he will continue doing the tests and nothing will happen. It takes time. It was not about me or Ajay bhai or anyone — it was all about maximising their potential.

Sandeep Dwivedi: What has been the impact of the Ranji Trophy win beyond the sporting field in J&K? What does this win mean to the people of the region?

When we were playing the final, bazaars were empty as everyone was glued to their television sets. There was not a home where the final was not being watched. This win will help us not just in cricket but will be very beneficial for the youth as well. There is a lot of struggle here. Every boy and girl has a story. I think this win means something very special to us.Now they've started believing that boys and girls from JK can move ahead in life because of cricket. Parents from remote areas are sending their children to cricket centres. Imagine, today we have a girl from Gurez who wants to be a trainer. Players from Ladakh, Kargil, Gurez, Chenab Valley, Poonch, Rajouri and border areas want to play cricket. It is a wave that has swept the whole of JK. Special credit goes to Jay bhai because he was the one man who believed that we could do it. Whatever we asked of him, he provided. And here we are, Ranji Trophy champions in 2026, only the 11th association to do so.

Sandeep Dwivedi: Has cricket been able to drop the hyphen that connected Jammu and Kashmir?

Back in the day, there used to be an 8-8 quota for Jammu cricketers and those from the Kashmir valley. I never believed in it. For me, it doesn't matter which religion you follow. My religion is cricket and that should come to the fore. Whenever I speak, I call it JK, never J&K. On the change in J&K team | 'Back in the day, there used to be an 8-8 quota for Jammu cricketers and those from the Kashmir valley. I never believed in it. For me, it doesn't matter which religion you follow. My religion is cricket'Sandeep Dwivedi: India's presence in world cricket keeps spreading. Indian or Indian-origin cricket entrepreneurs own teams in most leagues around the world. Do you think Indian players also need to be allowed to play in these leagues?

It is a very pertinent question but there are a lot of factors. The international cricketing calendar is extremely demanding, followed by a long domestic season and the high-intensity IPL. In addition, many states have their own T20 leagues, which means players are engaged in cricket almost throughout the year. Our focus is that the domestic system remains strong. This can be achieved only if our established players are playing with young talent in domestic leagues — they transfer their experience and that's how the system grows. So at this time it will be challenging to permit our players to participate in overseas T20 leagues. It is also about their mental and physical health and keeping them fresh whenever they play for India.Mihir Vasavda: How can the BCCI improve the fan experience? There are complaints about ticket availability, poor stadium conditions, unhygienic toilets and overpriced water

at nearly every venue.Enhancing the fan experience is a key priority. It is extremely important and we are actively working on it. Whenever incidents are reported, we look into them seriously and make amends. We are in constant dialogue with our member associations to identify gaps and implement improvements across stadiums.We are also in the process of appointing a professional agency to assess some of our major venues and provide detailed recommendations on areas that require attention.

Mihir Vasavda: Given what is happening with FIFA World Cup media rights, do you fear IPL rights could stagnate or even decline in value?

No, not really. I don't agree with that assessment, although it is something we need to remain mindful of. The IPL and Indian cricket continue to be extremely strong properties with a robust fan base in India and across the world. The growth over the past decade has been phenomenal. The IPL continues to offer unmatched reach and consistently high-quality cricket. Engagement across platforms remains strong and we are also seeing evolving consumption patterns, especially on digital, which are opening up new avenues for value creation. Our focus remains on maintaining the quality and competitiveness of the tournament because that is what ultimately drives value. Given those factors, we are confident the value of the rights will continue to grow.

Shankar Narayan: Almost every year, Test matches in north India are scheduled in October or November despite an obvious pollution issue. Have any measures been taken to ensure avoiding this in the future?

There are a lot of factors that go into allocating matches. The BCCI broadly follows a rotation policy to ensure fair distribution across venues. We are also very careful about external factors — weather conditions, logistical requirements and pollution in northern regions during certain times of the year. We take these very seriously. We try to plan the schedule in a way that avoids hosting matches in such conditions, and we have done that in the past. If you look at the Ranji Trophy season, breaks have been deliberately created so that we play fewer matches in the north when conditions are bad — fog, smog, pollution — which would cause health issues.Shankar Narayan: Grounds like Ahmedabad and Guwahati are getting Border-Gavaskar Trophy games but traditional venues like Wankhede and Eden Gardens haven not hosted Australia for a very long time...It is the rotation policy. It is also about generating revenue. If you look at Ahmedabad, that's our biggest stadium and the BCCI benefits from that. If we generate a lot of revenue from one stadium and can accommodate more fans, why not? That has been done in consultation with our respective state associations.

Nihal Koshie: What is the BCCI's policy on India playing Pakistan? And if India plays Pakistan, will we see players shake hands?

The BCCI has always consistently maintained that any decision regarding bilateral series with Pakistan is subject to Government of India's policy. We fully respect and abide by that position. Any future engagements will entirely depend on the prevailing situation.

Nihal Koshie: What about handshakes?

I don't see it happening as of now. Though it's the prerogative of players — if they don't feel like doing it, they won't. As Indians, our tradition is to do namaste. We were never a hand-shaking nation.

Venkata Krishna B: How important is it to send a strong team to the 2028 Olympics?

I can talk about it from an organisational standpoint, because I don't get into selections as such. But I can assure you that we will leave no stone unturned in ensuring that India sends its strongest possible team to the 2028 Olympics. Proper planning and preparation will be put in place well in advance. It's about winning gold, not just participation. So we assure you that we aim to have the best team representing the country at that stage. And it's very important for us.

Venkata Krishna B: With the international calendar packed, is player fatigue becoming a concern?

Not really. Test cricket is something we are very mindful of. Though it is the selectors' job, we keep a watch on the load. There is a lot of cricket happening and that's why we don't allow our players to play foreign leagues. We also follow a rotation policy. So the team management is constantly in touch with the selection committee and that's how they operate. Players' fitness and mental health is of paramount importance to us.

Venkata Krishna B: Given recent Test setbacks against New Zealand and South Africa at home, what is being done to improve performance?

We always get back to the drawing board. We want more senior players to play domestic cricket — not just the one-day format but the days format too. We need preparatory camps before Test series like we used to have in the past — a 10-15 day camp before a series. Before the next series, you will get to see that.

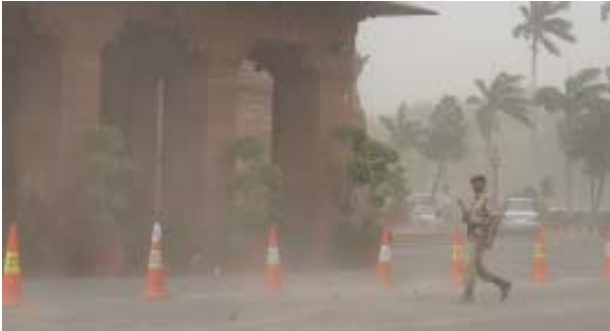
Nitin Sharma: You played with Virat Kohli and Gautam Gambhir in Delhi. Any memories?

Well, I not just played with Virat, but with Gautam too — the Indian team coach. I had also coached them (laughs). So to comment on just them and not others won't make any sense. They are all equal to me.

How lighting choices at home influence mood, focus and daily lifestyle

Hyderabad: Lighting has become more than just a practical element in homes. From warm bedside lamps to bright white LEDs, the kind of lighting people prefer often reflects their emotional state, daily habits and even energy levels.Soft yellow-toned lighting is often linked with feelings of ease and relaxation. Many people prefer warm lights in bedrooms or living spaces because they create a calming atmosphere after long hours of work or screen time. This kind of lighting can make spaces feel more personal, peaceful and emotionally comforting, which is why it is commonly used during moments of rest or social gatherings.Cool-toned white lighting is usually associated with alertness and concentration.

Why road dust is emerging as Delhi’s biggest pollution threat



It is persistent, it lingers in the air. It is inhaled deep into the lungs, it even enters the bloodstream. And it carries toxic metals that can trigger disease, damage lungs, and raise cancer risk, especially among children.A January 2026 report by a panel of top experts constituted by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) identified road dust as a major pollution source in Delhi because it acts as “both a primary emission and a persistent source”. The panel defined road dust broadly to include airborne dust from roads and shoulders, vehicle movement, dry soil, and road wear. It said poor road surfaces, potholes, broken edges, unpaved stretches, road-tyre-brake wear, and debris falling from the transport of construction and demolition (C&D) material all contribute to the dust load.The report also underlined the mechanism that makes road dust difficult to control: dust deposited on road surfaces is resuspended by vehicular movement, particularly during dry conditions. This keeps pollution levels elevated even in the absence of active dust-generating activities.

Mohammed Rafiuddin, Programme Lead for Clean Air at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), said, “Scientifically, road dust is a very different kind of source compared to C&D dust. It is a line source (spread along a corridor), but at a construction site, the dust generated is from a point source.” In other words, road dust requires corridor-wide, routine removal and surface management, while construction dust depends on site-level containment and enforcement.Why it persistsA road-dust committee set up by the CAQM last year said resuspension is driven by continuous dust deposits along road edges and medians, unsuitable road infrastructure design, poor maintenance, and inadequate dust-management practices.The committee noted that dust from unpaved medians frequently blows onto carriageways. Irrigation practices can further worsen the problem, as thick hose pipes used for watering median and footpath plantations often spill soil onto roads, which later dries and adds to dust levels. Encroachments and unauthorised parking were also flagged as operational barriers that obstruct cleaning and allow dust to accumulate.

Local roads and secondary streets, the report said, are often excluded from regular maintenance schedules. “Maintenance is often carried out after significant road damage, leading to prolonged dust emissions,” it noted.A separate joint study by CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) and CSIR-Central Road Research Institute (CRRI), submitted to the CAQM on February 7, 2025, noted: “The re-suspension of road dust is influenced by continuous dust deposition at the edges of road medians, poor road design or condition and its maintenance, limited dust management practices.” The study also noted how few road stretches in the capital reported “alarmingly high levels” with PM10 emissions as high as 1700 µg/m3 up to 10 m distance from the road — the permissible limit is 100 µg/m³ (24 hours) and 60 µg/m³ (annual).Arpan Patra, Programme Associate at CEEW, said three elements need to be distinguished when assessing road dust: the sources of dust, the share that is wind-blown versus anthropogenic (including construction-related), and the amount of loose material available on road surfaces for resuspension.Evidence suggests that road dust is becoming relatively more important as exhaust emissions decline. A multi-city 2023 study led by

She leaked urine whenever she exercised: How a 43-year-old discovered a hidden problem

For nearly two years, Priya Bhuvad, 43, a corporate professional, quietly adjusted her life around a problem she found embarrassing: urine leakage whenever she jumped, exercised, danced or did other high-impact activities.There were other signs, too. She often felt that her bladder was not completely emptying. She noticed her vaginal laxity and reduced sensation during intercourse, but, like many women, did not initially connect these symptoms to a pelvic floor problem. The pelvic floor is a group of muscles and supportive tissues at the bottom of the pelvis that hold the bladder, uterus, vagina and bowel in place and help control urination and bowel movements. Pregnancy, obesity and menopause may weaken them and you need exercises to strengthen them.

Fit and busy with work, Bhuvad had not prioritised pelvic floor exercises, core strengthening or rehabilitation after childbirth. She had had two normal vaginal deliveries, the last six years earlier. An examination eventually showed that her urinary bladder was bulging into the vagina, the rectal wall was protruding into the vaginal space and there was first-degree uterine prolapse, a condition in which the uterus slips downward from its normal position into the vagina.

She underwent surgery to repair the front and back walls of the vagina and strengthen the tissue between the vagina and anus. Surgery for the uterus was not required because the descent was minimal. Six months later, her urinary incontinence and other pelvic floor symptoms had improved substantially. “Many women believe that urine leakage or a feeling of heaviness after childbirth is a normal part of becoming a mother, so they continue to live with these symptoms for years without seeking medical help or doing muscle-strengthening exercises,” says Dr Surabhi Siddhartha, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, Motherhood Hospital, Kharghar, Navi Mumbai.

More than a childbirth problemAt her hospital, Dr Siddhartha sees women in their 40s frequently present years after vaginal delivery with pelvic floor problems that may have gone unaddressed since childbirth. “Pregnancy and delivery put considerable stress on the pelvic floor muscles; without rehabilitation, weakness may become more apparent with ageing and the hormonal changes of menopause,” she adds.The scale of urinary incontinence is reflected in Indian studies. A 2023 study of 118 women aged 20 to 70 reported urinary incontinence in 27.1% of

researchers from IIT Delhi found that even as tailpipe emissions fall with cleaner fuels, non-exhaust sources such as “resuspendable road dust, tyre wear and brake wear” are gaining significance.

The study showed that Delhi’s higher silt load is driven by construction activity, heavy traffic, and dust storms during April and May. Across 32 cities, silt loads ranged from 0.2 g/m² to 111.2 g/m², with Delhi averaging 14.47 g/m².Researchers also pointed out that the degradation of the Aravalli range has weakened a natural dust barrier around Delhi, allowing more wind-blown dust to enter the city. Nationwide, the study said, exposure to road dust is linked to more than 10,207 premature deaths annually.

What Delhi is doingAlong with the clearing of dust by Mechanical Road Sweeping Machines (MRSMs), the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) deploys a total of 57,000 sanitation workers, sweeping areas where the machines can’t enter.But the NEERI-CRRI report flags that mechanised sweeping needs to become more scientific, not just more frequent. “There is a need to prepare a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the operation of mechanical road sweepers on a particular type of road based on scientific study,” it said. The frequency and efficiency of application, and particle-size analysis of lifted dust during and after use, should be studied, it said.Other measures include water sprinklers, mobile anti-smog guns (ASGs), and repair of roads and potholes. The MCD, for instance, has a total of 167 water sprinklers and 63 ASGs installed at roads. There are also processing facilities for construction and demolition waste, Sanitary Landfill Facilities for residual ash and Waste-To-Energy plants to treat non-recyclable waste.

What can be fixed — what can'tExperts say Delhi’s natural environment places it at a disadvantage. Rafiuddin said that even with improved road conditions, “there is bound to be some amount of dust always”, which then needs to be actively removed and managed. This is due to the city’s natural baseline for dust from dry summers, frequent dust storms, loose alluvial soil, and relatively low rainfall.Some commonly used mitigation measures offer limited benefits. Dipankar Saha, former head of the air laboratory at the Central Pollution Control Board, who led a 2017 pilot study on the efficacy of anti-smog guns, said such measures are ineffective for dust control.“There should not be a reliance on water sprinklers or mist guns. They only transport dust from one area to another. Once the particles settle and the surface dries, the dust is re-suspended again. It also leads to humidification,” he said.

The CAQM-appointed road-dust committee said in its 2025 report that anti-smog guns “should be deployed selectively on high priority situations”, recommending their use only in emergencies and describing them as “a lower priority for dust control on roads”.Instead, the committee called for a standardised framework that combines paving, greening within the right-of-way, and improved maintenance practices, explicitly stating that solutions must go beyond sweeping alone.On greening, the report said vegetation helps by arresting airborne dust and preventing resuspension from unpaved areas. It recommended road-side planting with drought-resilient species that are better at trapping dust, such as those with wide canopies and rough or large leaf surfaces. It also suggested practical design measures, including leaving an 8-12 inch gap between soil level and the top of kerb stones to reduce soil blow-over during windy periods.This was also echoed by the 2025 CSIR-NEERI joint study, as it flagged poor maintenance and visible dust accumulation along major road stretches, particularly at edges and medians. It called for improved road design, vegetative barriers, and greening using drip-irrigation methods from wastewater alongside metro infra, and a three-tier plantation system to stabilise loose soil and act as dust filters.Road dust is a major source of PM2.5 and PM10, the fine particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream. Inhaling these particles can cause lung irritation and inflammation



participants, with stress urinary incontinence — leakage triggered by activities that increase abdominal pressure — the most common subtype. A separate 2025 study of 500 women aged 40 and above reported urinary incontinence in 37% of participants, with stress incontinence accounting for more than half of the cases.For women, this can mean leakage while coughing, sneezing, laughing, exercising, jumping or dancing.Story continues below this adBut leakage is only one warning sign. Pelvic floor dysfunction can also cause heaviness or pressure, a vaginal bulge, difficulty emptying the bladder or bowel, urinary urgency, painful intercourse and persistent pelvic or lower-back pain.It can affect younger women, too

Pregnancy is an important risk factor, but it is not a prerequisite. Dr Anjali Talwalkar, consulting gynaecologist associated with Cama & Albless Hospital, Mumbai, recalls the case of Kiran Kadam, 25, an unmarried woman who developed persistent pelvic pain after treatment for tuberculosis. She had subsequently developed a chronic, irritating cough and an allergic variant of the cough.Investigations eventually pointed to pelvic floor weakness, for which she was advised intensive pelvic floor rehabilitation. Recovery took time: regular exercises, physiotherapy and home practice were needed over several months.Dr Talwalkar attributes the weakness primarily to the repeated increase in intra-abdominal pressure caused by prolonged coughing. Weight loss during her illness had also contributed to physical deconditioning. “Somebody who is having a lot of intra-abdominal pressure symptoms, like chronic cough or chronic constipation, and they are pushing all the time — then the pelvic muscles say, give up,” she explains.

India beat Bangladesh by 40 runs to reach Women’s Asia Cup final



Dubai: Shafali Verma lived a charmed life for her stroke-filled 64 off 40 balls as India marched into yet another Women's Asia Cup final with a comfortable 40-run win over Bangladesh here on Thursday.On a slow surface where batting was a struggle for the majority of the batters, Shafali stood out with her fluent effort to take India to 149 for six. The Indian opener was dropped as many as three times and duly made Bangladesh pay for those mistakes.Considering the conditions and India’s bowling resources, the seven-time champions were expected to defend the target, and they did so rather comfortably, limiting Bangladesh to 109 for seven in 20 overs.Bangladesh never threatened India despite the aggressive intent of opener Juairiya Ferdous (14 off 18). Eventually, Ferdous and her opening partner Dilara Akter (21 off 26) fell while attempting to clear the mid-wicket boundary. Kranti Gaud's running catch to get rid of Akter was a brilliant effort on an otherwise ordinary day for the fielders.Like in the last game, Pratika Rawal dropped a couple of catches.The Indian spin trio of Deepti Sharma (3/26), Shree Charani (1/14) and Prema Rawat (1/21) also delivered in spin-

friendly conditions.

It has been a low-scoring tournament, mainly due to the slow nature of the pitches here. Considering that and Bangladesh's batting, India knew deep down that they had got enough on the board.They will play either Pakistan or Sri Lanka in the final scheduled for Sunday.With seven titles (four in 50-over cricket and three in T20s), India are the most successful team in the tournament. They had suffered a shocking loss to Sri Lanka in the previous edition.Earlier, the Bangladesh bowling attack, which has been impressive in the tournament, was able to keep the accomplished Indian batters quiet for the majority of the innings.In total, four dropped catches let Bangladesh down; otherwise, India would have struggled to get past the 120-run mark.India captain Harmanpreet Kaur (24 not out off 28), usually a good player of spin, struggled for the majority of her innings, managing only four runs off her first 16 balls.Shafali single-handedly steered India to a competitive total notwithstanding her remarkable stroke of luck, having been dropped on 6, 11 and 56. While the batters in the top four batted at a sub-100 strike rate, Shafali ended with an impressive strike rate of 160, which included three sixes off the spinners.The destructive opener played her shots all around the park, and her innings included a front-foot pull off pacer Marufa Akter, a reverse sweep and massive hits down the ground off the spinners.India did well to reach 45 for one in the powerplay but could not accelerate in the middle overs.India's new number three, Pratika Rawal (20 off 24), has been under pressure in the tournament, but on Thursday she made a sizzling start with a copybook cover drive off Akter. Later in her innings, she came out of the crease to hit a six before falling to the same bowler.Richa Ghosh (21 off 16) too was slow to get off the blocks but managed to add valuable runs. Skipper Harmanpreet re-deemed herself with a couple of sixes towards the end.

Sabalenka reaches US Open final as Rybakina takes No. 1 ranking

New York: Aryna Sabalenka realised she was probably going to lose the No. 1 ranking to Elena Rybakina. There was not much she could do about that.The US Open trophy is a different story.Rybakina can only take that away from Sabalenka by winning it on the court on Saturday, and the two-time defending champion showed in an overpowering semifinal display how serious she is about a three-peat — which would be the first at Flushing Meadows since Serena Williams from 2012-14."I wanted badly to go to the finals, and of course I want to go all the way," Sabalenka said.

Rybakina set up a matchup between the top two players in women's tennis by rallying past Coco Gauff 3-6, 6-4, 6-4. Sabalenka beat Jessica Pegula 7-5, 6-2 in the first semifinal, running away with the second set after the two played largely even in the first.Sabalenka is currently No. 1 and Rybakina No. 2 in the WTA rankings, but that changes Monday after Sabalenka held the top spot for 99 consecutive weeks.Rybakina won the Australian Open to start the season, beating Sabalenka, then kept closing the gap after the four-time Grand Slam champion had a poor summer by her standards.Rybakina needed only to reach the semifinals in New York to clinch the No. 1 ranking."It's a lot of work, and yeah, that was one of my goals, but right now not much I could do. I didn't really perform well in the middle of the season," Sabalenka said, "Elena took it over and played really well, and she took away No. 1 position."The second semifinal was more of a battle, with Gauff trying to fight from behind in the final two sets, but Rybakina not letting her come all the way back.Gauff jumped on Rybakina with a strong start — she had four aces to one for Rybakina, who leads the WTA Tour in that category — in a first set that she took in 38 minutes."Took a deep breath, was trying to talk positive with myself and just told myself that I need to fight and try to show good tennis," Rybakina said.Gauff trailed 4-1 in the second set and battled back to 4-all before Rybakina won the next two games. Rybakina went ahead 5-3 and served for the match, but Gauff broke to give herself one more chance while being cheered by a crowd that included former first lady Michelle Obama."I thought it was a good match, and it honestly came down to a couple of service games of mine in both sets and I didn't quite hold," Gauff said. "I mean, I have to look back and see what happened, but she does a great job of just being there every point and putting a lot of pressure on you on service



game and return game."Gauff won her first major title as a teenager when she rallied past Sabalenka in the 2023 US Open final, but nobody has been able to knock off the Belarusian in Flushing Meadows since. Pegula put up a good fight in the 2024 final and last year's semifinals, but she couldn't keep it close the way Sabalenka played Thursday — and wasn't sure anybody else would have, either.I think that's definitely — you can ask her — probably the best match she's played this year," Pegula said. "I mean, I thought her level was insanely high."Sabalenka pounded 29 winners to Pegula's 12. She has won 19 straight matches at the US Open since losing to Gauff in the 2023 final.The top four seeds made it to the women's semifinals at the US Open for the first time since 1975. Sabalenka, Rybakina and Gauff have all won multiple major titles, while Pegula is still looking for her first.Sabalenka won 14 of 19 points on Pegula's second serve, smashing balls back more quickly than they were coming at her.It was already 4-all in 25 minutes, and Sabalenka appeared to be getting frustrated with not getting anywhere on Pegula's serve, waving at her coaches' box in disgust after one miss. Pegula had won 18 of 20 points on her first serve when she stepped to the line serving with Sabalenka leading 6-5.Then Sabalenka suddenly hit a backhand winner, Pegula sent a forehand long and Sabalenka hit another winner to set up a set point, finishing off the set a couple of points later.Sabalenka put Pegula in huge trouble in her second service game of the second set, eventually pouncing on a 77 mph second serve and hammering a forehand back at 90 mph that Pegula had no chance of getting back, giving Sabalenka a 3-1 lead.

Gukesh has everything to gain in title defence: Carlsen

Bengaluru: World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen considers challenger Javokhir Sindarov the favourite to win the World Championship but said D Gukesh should not approach his upcoming title defence as a burden, insisting that the reigning champion has "everything to gain".Gukesh will take on challenger Sindarov of Uzbekistan in the upcoming World Chess Championship, which will take place in Geneva, Switzerland, from November 24 to December 12.

"I think the word defend is really not a good place to begin, because in terms of how Gukesh has played for the last couple of years, he should not be in a position where he has to defend anything. He should be in a position where he has everything to gain," Carlsen said on the sidelines of the ongoing Global Chess League here."He has shown previously in 2024 that when things click, he has the potential to play at an extremely high level. I don't think a lot of people believe that he will do it now, but I think it's even more of an interesting challenge for him to try and get back to that.

"Chess is a highly psychological game, so it probably won't take a lot to potentially place some doubts in Sindarov's mind and some confidence for Gukesh. Obviously, as it stands, there's no question that Sindarov is the favourite," he added.Carlsen said Gukesh has to take the initiative from the start to keep Sindarov on the back foot."If Sindarov is ahead early on, it's probably very, very bad news for Gukesh. If Gukesh is ahead early on, he automatically becomes a significant favourite. That's how these matches work."Talking about his personal career, Carlsen said he now prefers rapid chess to classical chess."I think in terms of their chess styles, the current generation, I don't know if they're making conscious choices about it, but they're doing very well, for sure. In that sense, chess is in very good hands with the kids."It depends on the tournament. Honestly, I was excited here to experiment a little



bit, and that is certainly fun. I think it's an important step for chess to rate slightly faster games as classical. We kind of have needed a more universal system of rating every tournament game for a long time. Attempts have been made, but it's always been that the classical rating has been the gold standard," he said."Every tournament that doesn't have a classical rating for certain people matters less for this reason. I'm happy that Total Chess can both be classically rated and be a mix of formats that makes it harder for people to master weaknesses," he added.Carlsen said that after becoming a father, he decided to give up the classical format."I think after I became a father as well, it made even more certain for me that I was never coming back to the classical World Championship."There are so many things that I like about chess. There are a lot of tournaments that I like. Classical, especially the classroom tournaments are classical. Maybe not as steady a diet, but at least once in a while," he said."It's hard to imagine me completely stepping away from competitive chess and not being good at it. That's because I like it. I love it. My son is the greatest human being alive. It's fantastic. It's a joy."

Washington back in nets, Bumrah to join India camp



New Delhi: A fit-again Washington Sundar slogged hard at the Indian team's afternoon net session on Thursday as the team management awaited the arrival of Jasprit Bumrah and Nitish Reddy ahead of the three-match away series against Afghanistan, starting Sunday.With Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Ishan Kishan and Tilak Varma finishing their Duleep Trophy final assignment in Chennai on Thursday, only 10 players were available for training under the scorching Delhi heat.Bumrah, who has recovered from his impact injury, has completed his return-to-play protocols and, along with Nitish, will join the team in training from Friday.

On the day, Washington and Varun Chakravarthy bowled a lot in single-wicket drills under the watchful eyes of head coach Gautam Gambhir and spin-bowling coach

Bangladesh opt to bowl against India in Asia Cup semi-final

Dubai: Bangladesh won the toss and elected to bowl first against India in the first semi-final of the 2026 Women's Asia Cup at the Dubai International Stadium on Thursday.Both teams are unchanged from their previous matches for the high-stakes knockout clash.The winner will seal a place in the final, to be played on Sunday.

Seven-time champions India enter the crucial semifinal on the back of an unbeaten run in Group A, where they recorded clinical victories over Thailand, Hong Kong-China and Pakistan."To be honest, we thought of batting first only because we thought having runs on the board would give us a lot of confidence, and it's good that we got batting first. Definitely. T20 format is like that — you can't take any team lightly, and the result is always uncertain. Today is a fresh game, and we have to go with a positive approach," said India captain Harmanpreet Kaur."I've been saying that this pitch is really tricky. You can't really set something in your mind, but let's see how our batting powerplay goes, and accordingly we'll see how much we can put on board," she added.In contrast, 2018 champions Bangladesh navigated a turbulent campaign to reach the last-four stage, including a victory over the UAE in a must-win game on Tuesday to finish second in Group B."We want to bowl first, seeing the conditions. We want to give our bowlers the wicket to work on. I think it's just a new day. We're just looking forward to playing good cricket here because it's been a long time," said Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty."We definitely have some good memories from (the 2018 triumph), but it's an important day for all of us because it's our last game in this tournament. It could not be the last game because if we could do well here, maybe we might get another chance (in the final)," she added.India: Shafali Verma, Smriti Mandhana, Pratika Rawal, Harmanpreet Kaur (captain), Deepti



Sharma, Bharti Fulmali, Richa Ghosh (wk), Prema Rawat, N Sree Charani, Kranti Gaud, Nandni Sharma.Bangladesh: Dilara Akter, Juairiya Ferdous, Sobhana Mostary, Nigar Sultana (captain & wk), Sharmin Akhter, Shorna Akter, Fahima Khatun, Nahida Akter, Rabeya Khan, Sultana Khatun, Marufa Akter.

Salil Arora targets SMAT, IPL success for India dream



New Delhi: Punjab and Sunrisers Hyderabad batter Salil Arora is looking ahead to the upcoming Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and the Indian Premier League as he seeks to fulfil his "dream" of playing for India in the future.The 23-year-old, who is currently playing for Ludhiana Lions in the ongoing Sher-E-Punjab T20 League, had a stellar Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy campaign in 2025-26 and also impressed with his exploits in IPL 2026.

Arora was Punjab's leading run-scorer in the SMAT 2025-26, scoring 358 runs in eight innings, including a blistering unbeaten 125 off 45 balls against Jharkhand.His SMAT exploits helped him earn an IPL contract with SRH ahead of the 2026 season, and he impressed in his limited

time at the crease, particularly in the death overs. A notable knock of 30 off just 10 balls was one of his major highlights of the season.Speaking to IANS, Arora said his dream remains to play for India. He is now eyeing another strong SMAT campaign and a successful IPL season, while not looking to put pressure on himself because of his previous performances.

"Yes, I see the upcoming Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy as a strong opportunity. I want to perform there and then go to the IPL. And then I want to perform in the IPL and play for the Indian team. This is my dream and my goal," he told IANS.Arora, the wicketkeeper-batter, is currently part of the leadership group of Ludhiana in the Sher-E-Punjab T20 League and has led the side in the absence of Arshdeep Singh. He has played a few fiery knocks, including a 38-ball 78 against Fazilka Falcons, and has also batted higher up the order at No. 3 in the tournament.The young batter said his outings in the state franchise league have helped him, while also explaining the change in his batting position in the league."I am getting a lot of confidence (from these knocks). So, I will try to carry this momentum forward in the next match. We want to win the next match and play the semifinals."I felt the need to bat higher up the order, as per the requirements of the team. So, as I changed the batting order, the result was also positive. So, I thought I should play up," he said, highlighting his unbeaten 78 off 38 deliveries.

Centuries stand out in HCA Super League

Hyderabad: Centuries by Aaron George (119) for Team G and Sai Pragnay Reddy (162) for Team E were among the highlights of the HCA Senior Men's Multi-Day Super League Cricket Championship here on Thursday.Senior Men's Multi-Day Super League: Team F 226 in 73.5 overs & 354 in 64.2 overs bt Team H 99 in 26 overs & 246 in 39.2 overs (A Avanish Rao 57, Mickil Jaiswal 46, Madhukar Manne 63no, M Dheeraj Rao 5/76).

Team G 342 in 107.5 overs & 227/2 in 53 overs (G Ritish Reddy 60, Aaron George 119) vs Team E 362/10 in 95.3 overs (Sai Pragnay Reddy 162, Rahul Buddhi 66, Tarun Rajan 6/60, Saqlain Arafat 3/75).Team A 348 in 83 overs & 231 in 50.5 overs (Sacheet Binirajka 39, S Dheeraj 61, Harshit Sai 3/46, TVS Narayana Reja 3/45) vs Team D 460 in 94.1 overs (Harshith Sai 39, Nishanth Saranu 4/91) & 36/1 in 11 overs.Team B 600 in 138.3 overs vs Team C 242 in 77.1 overs (Nihaal Reddy 44, Yash

Satwalekar 37, SM Hussain 54, Shaunak Kulkarni 5/40) & 129/3 in 35 overs (M Abhirath Reddy 59).Men's Under-23 Emerging Multi-Day Tournament: Team B 299/9 in 90 overs (Ashish Sawariya 49, Mohd Samad 31, Abdul Rafeay Bin Abdullah 129 batting, K Sri Sathvik 30, M Koushik Reddy 4/55) vs Team C.Under-19 Men's Super League: Team C 166 in 43.5 overs (M Abhinav 32, B Hishanth Prem Charan 5/22) lost to Team D 170/2 in 24.1 overs (B Mohit Sai 48, P Srinivasa Manikanta 54no, P Charan Teja 36no).Team E 268/9 in 50 overs (Vikash Gupta 86, Y Harry Stanes 5/46) lost to Team B 270/2 in 42.1 overs (M Hansin Reddy 151, P Prince 68).Team A 233 in 48.2 overs (P Advith Reddy 32, R Swaran Reddy 81, B Sessa Sai Sarath 38, P Varun 4/40, Siddharth G 3/28) lost to Team F 235/3 in 43.5 overs (K Sai Nehal 81, B Varshit Reddy 125).Inter-Schools & Colleges Under-16: Sri Chaitanya School, Hayathnagar 13 in 8 overs (U Ashwith 7/6) lost to Warangal Dist 2 14/0 in 1.2 overs.

Salman Khan says ‘jo darr gaya vo mar gaya’ amid backlash over CJP protest remarks



Salman Khan has once again grabbed headlines after sharing a cryptic post that many believe is aimed at those trolling him over his recent comments on the ongoing NEET paper leak protests. The backlash began after Salman expressed support for protesting students on Instagram. He urged them to return home after Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured strict action against those responsible for the paper leak. While the actor did not mention anyone directly, social media users were quick to link the post to the criticism he has been facing over the last two days. Posting pictures from his workout session, the actor wrote, “Salman Khan darrrrr gaya.... Hmmmm. Jo darr gaya vo mar gaya....”

A day prior, Salman had posted on social media where requested Sonam Wangchuk to end his fast. He wrote, “The students are the top priority, educationally and security-wise, so they need not worry or have their parents worried for them. The Hon’ble Prime Minister has tweeted, and I am sure he will take strict action against all those responsible for this leak. So students, please go

Aamir Khan’s daughter is staying away from CJP protests, Imran Khan speaks up for students



Aamir Khan's daughter Ira said that she has intentionally staed away from visuals of violence. Imran Khan questioned the state's response to the agitating students.

As the nation remains gripped by the ongoing student protests demanding education reforms, several celebrities have come forward over the past few days to express solidarity with the demonstrators. Prominent Bollywood names including Salman Khan, Alia Bhatt, Kareena Kapoor, Hrithik Roshan, Varun Dhawan, Ratna Pathak Shah and Naseeruddin Shah have all voiced their support. The latest to weigh in is Aamir Khan's daughter, Ira Khan, who shared her thoughts on the issue in a six-minute-long video posted on Instagram. Aamir Khan has maintained silence on the ongoing CJP protests. Sharing the video, Ira admitted that she had consciously maintained a distance from the protests as consuming news often leaves her emotionally overwhelmed. In the caption, she wrote, “I see that being able to, being able to afford to... having the option at all to look away... is a privilege. I'm figuring out what my most helpful role can be that aligns with my values and that's what I'll do. Be safe.” Beginning her video, Ira addressed the question many had been asking: why she had not spoken about the protests sooner. “Why am I not speaking up about the protests? It's true that I advocate for mental health, and I ask for your attention whenever I speak on these topics. And I think that mental health is all of life. So I guess, in a way, I've chosen to say things and speak up about certain things. There are a couple of reasons why I haven't, and I'm going to do my best to articulate them,” she said.

Explaining her silence, Ira said she initially felt she had little to contribute to the conversation and had deliberately stayed away from distressing news coverage. “The first that comes to my mind is that I didn't think I had anything to say that was going to add to the conversation in any meaningful manner, especially because I'm not having feelings about it. And that's something that I do actively with all news. I usually just don't look at it. I don't go to my Explore page. I have not seen any videos of violence or any videos of the protests. I know that they're happening, and I know what is happening, I think. But I don't let it emotionally reach me because it really bothers me, and I get overwhelmed, and I start feeling really helpless.” She further explained that, instead of constantly following the news, she prefers to channel her energy into understanding how individuals can make a difference within their own capacity. “So my way of not getting overwhelmed and helpless, but still not ignoring things, is that I divert my energy and my focus, whatever I have in

back to your parents and homes.”

He also addressed activist Sonam Wangchuk, adding, “Sonam, it's done, bro. Don't extend this. Keep the spirit for another day if there be a need, which I doubt, and eat something. If you want, I'll send you food from home.” A few hours later, it just so happened that Sonam actually ended his fast while in the hospital. However, the CJP protests are still continuing as students are demanding strict educational reforms. The remark quickly went viral and drew various opinions online. While some users appreciated Salman's message, many mocked the actor. One user commented, “And if you need some books to read, let me know, I'll send you.” Another wrote, “Not the plot twist I was expecting.” Several others posted, “You are scared,” while another remarked, “Camera ke saamne sher, system ke saamne...?”

Two days earlier, Salman had shared a childhood photograph and voiced support for the students. Calling the paper leak a “very serious issue,” he praised students for protesting peacefully and said he was proud to see young people demanding a stronger education system. “It was such a peaceful movement. I feel so sad that it had to take a violent turn. My heart goes out to the students and their families who were hurt,” he wrote. The actor also urged students not to let the movement become politicised, saying the issue should remain between students and the education system. He expressed confidence that the government would address their concerns and hoped India would eventually become a global education hub. The protests continue at Jantar Mantar, although activist Sonam Wangchuk ended his 26-day fast after meeting BJP president JP Nadda, who assured him that the demands related to education reforms would be addressed. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a video promising the strictest punishment for those involved in paper leaks, including the use of fast-track courts.

me, into the attempt to figure out: how can an individual person navigate the best they can with what they have in their individual capacity, outside of any system or regardless of any system? I'm not saying this is the best approach, but this is what I do. I don't look at the news, and I don't look at social media. I purposefully spend time and energy focusing on, regardless of the topic, regardless of the system, regardless of the kind of discrimination or unfairness or whatever I may think and feel, I shift my energy that way.”

Ira also clarified that her silence should not be mistaken for indifference. Recalling how she briefly panicked after seeing a video that reportedly showed her cousin being detained during a protest, she said she realised she had unconsciously been distancing herself from the events. “My feelings still haven't reached me. I know that I got sent one reel, and the story was that my cousin was in it. I saw the reel, and it was that she was potentially being detained at one of the protests, and I freaked out. And as soon as I realised she was safe, again, I was like, ‘Okay,’ and I went back to work. So I'm sure there are feelings, but they're not reaching me. I did not say anything because I didn't realize that me saying anything would make a difference. And so, if me not speaking up at this point implied in any manner that I don't care, then I'm sorry. That was not my intention. While I'm not fully feeling anything, if there was any doubt, I would like to clarify that I do care.” She concluded by expressing concern over how the situation might unfold, saying, “Something I'm feeling, something I'm closer to feeling, is that I'm worried about how this is going to progress. And I really hope that it ends with the least amount of emotional, psychological, and physical pain possible for anybody.”

Ira's remarks came after her cousin, actor Imran Khan, joined a student protest march in Mumbai earlier this week. Speaking to Brut India about his experience at the demonstration, Imran said he was deeply moved by the students' determination to raise their concerns. “I was on the ground with all of these students. The average age over there must have been 16. These were kids who were 16, 17, 18 years old, genuinely raising their voice and highlighting something that affects them, that directly affects their today and their tomorrow. It was hard not to be moved by that, and to not feel empathy with a movement like that,” he said.

Elaborating on his support for the protests, Imran added, “What's happening today is that a certain section of our Indian citizens, children of this country, are standing up and trying to draw attention to an issue that affects them. If not their cause, what are we supposed to pay attention to?” He further criticised the state's response to the movement, saying, “The response from the establishment, and the response from society at large, is something that will be remembered by those who are affected by it. To club these kinds of voices and to group them under the umbrella of ‘the other’, this whole ‘anti-national’ thing which gets thrown around, to invalidate the opinion of other citizens and to deem that as counter to national interest, that in itself is creating a division.” Imran concluded by arguing that such rhetoric risks deepening divisions within the country. “You're creating a division within the country itself. The idea that the state itself is the country and not its people, that is a problematic thing. The country is its people. The state is an appointed body, appointed by public demand.”

Ira's statement also comes days after Aamir Khan addressed questions about education activist Sonam Wangchuk during a conversation at the 17th edition of the London Indian Film Festival. Responding to claims that his character in 3 Idiots was based on Wangchuk, Aamir said, “No. That's not true actually. That is a misconception. I didn't know about Mr Sonam at the time when we were doing the film 3 Idiots.”

He further explained, “Neither Raju and Abhijat, who were the two writers, nor I knew about Sonam. However, what Mr Sonam is doing doesn't have to be based on the character of 3 Idiots for us to respect him. In fact, Mr Sonam himself has said that the character is not based on him. He has also clarified.” Speaking about Wangchuk's then ongoing fast, Aamir had added, “I think all of us are very concerned for his health and life.

Jyotika backs CJP protest, demands Dharmendra Pradhan’s resignation: ‘Proud of you Gen Z’



After more than a month of silence, actor Jyotika has spoken out strongly on the ongoing CJP protests, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Taking to Instagram, the actor wrote, “Step down Dharmendra Pradhan. Resign.” Her statement comes amid the increasing number of protests

Salman Khan says ‘jo darr gaya vo mar gaya’ amid backlash over CJP protest remarks

Salman Khan has once again grabbed headlines after sharing a cryptic post that many believe is aimed at those trolling him over his recent comments on the ongoing NEET paper leak protests. The backlash began after Salman expressed support for protesting students on Instagram. He urged them to return home after Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured strict action against those responsible for the paper leak. While the actor did not mention anyone directly, social media users were quick to link the post to the criticism he has been facing over the last two days.

A day prior, Salman had posted on social media where requested Sonam Wangchuk to end his fast. He wrote, “The students are the top priority, educationally and security-wise, so they need not worry or have their parents worried for them. The Hon’ble Prime Minister has tweeted, and I am sure he will take strict action against all those responsible for this leak. So students, please go back to your parents and homes.” He also addressed activist Sonam Wangchuk, adding, “Sonam, it's done, bro. Don't extend this. Keep the spirit for another day if there be a need, which I doubt, and eat something. If you want, I'll send you food from home.” A few hours later, it just so happened that Sonam actually ended his fast while in the hospital. However, the CJP protests are still continuing as students are demanding strict educational reforms. The remark quickly went viral and drew various opinions online. While some users appreciated Salman's message, many mocked the actor. One user commented, “And if you need some books to read, let me know, I'll send you.” Another wrote, “Not the plot twist I was expecting.” Several others posted, “You are scared,” while another remarked, “Camera ke saamne sher, system ke saamne...?”

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Shabana Azmi diagnosed with swine flu, to skip CJP protest on doctor’s advice



However, there is now concerning news for her admirers. Shabana has been diagnosed with swine flu and has been advised complete bed rest after developing a high fever. A statement issued by her team said, “Shabana ji was meant to go to the protest today but she has contracted swine flu with 102 fever and has been advised rest by the doctor.”

One of the first prominent voices from the film industry to publicly back the ongoing CJP protests was veteran actor Shabana Azmi. She expressed solidarity with the students and also joined the widely covered Chalo Sansad march, walking alongside protesters as they marched towards Parliament. Videos of her participation quickly went viral across social media, with many praising her presence at the demonstration.

However, there is now concerning news for her admirers. Shabana has been diagnosed with swine flu and has been advised complete bed rest after developing a high fever. A statement issued by her team said, “Shabana ji was meant to go to the protest today but she has contracted swine flu with 102 fever and has been advised rest by the doctor.” Shabana shared a post on Instagram where she shared that she has been asked to maintain isolation for the next five days. “My dear Mumbaikars, I was meant to join your protest yesterday, but I've come down with H1N1 and need to remain in isolation for the next five days. Even so, I want to express my solidarity and appreciation. I'm receiving first-hand reports from the young people on the ground, many of them have taken part in a protest for the first time and have experienced how much their voice counts. I continue to be inspired by your courage and commitment and stand by you in solidarity.” On Monday, July 20, the veteran actor had joined thousands of citizens participating in the Chalo

across the country where students of all age groups have banded together to demand the resignation of the Education Minister.

In her post, Jyotika wrote, “Step down Dharmendra Pradhan. Resign. I stand with the students and the future of our nation! I stand with accountability. I stand for a democratic India! I stand for a reformed education! Sonam Wangchuk, Abhijeet Dipke and Saurav Das, as mothers we want to raise our children to be like you. Proud of you, Gen Z, for being unfiltered. You have proved that together 'WE' are India. Thank you for breaking the pressure. Thank you for making us fearless, CJP. Jai Hind.” Jyotika's statement comes days after Suriya's fan club released a message saying the actor had requested fans not to celebrate his birthday as a mark of respect for students protesting across the country. According to the statement, Suriya urged fans to keep the focus on the concerns raised by students rather than on celebrations. With her post, Jyotika joins several South Indian actors, including Prakash Raj and Kamal Haasan, who have criticised the government's handling of the issue and expressed support for the protesting students. The protest, spearheaded by the Cockroach Janta Party, has brought together students from across the country to demand reforms following the NEET paper leak. The movement gained further momentum after educationist and engineer Sonam Wangchuk joined the demonstration on June 28 and began an indefinite hunger strike, which ended on Thursday.



dents for protesting peacefully and said he was proud to see young people demanding a stronger education system. “It was such a peaceful movement. I feel so sad that it had to take a violent turn. My heart goes out to the students and their families who were hurt,” he wrote. The actor also urged students not to let the movement become politicised, saying the issue should remain between students and the education system. He expressed confidence that the government would address their concerns and hoped India would eventually become a global education hub. The protests continue at Jantar Mantar, although activist Sonam Wangchuk ended his 26-day fast after meeting BJP president JP Nadda, who assured him that the demands related to education reforms would be addressed.

Sansad march towards Parliament. Later that day, she shared photographs on social media showing herself alongside veteran actor Prakash Raj atop a truck surrounded by protesters. Welcoming reports that the government had finally agreed to hold talks with the students, Shabana stressed that the agitation remained “a peaceful protest,” rejecting allegations suggesting otherwise.

She also posted a video of herself walking through a sea of demonstrators. Sharing it, she wrote, “Climbing up with the help of young colleagues to the protest site at Jantar Mantar to demand reforms within our educational system and an overhaul of the entire system. Allocate 6 per cent of GDP to education, public health and women's empowerment to measure the success of our country.” In addition, Shabana shared videos of herself reciting poems by her father, the celebrated poet Kaifi Azmi, saying that his verses reflected the price people often pay for speaking the truth. ‘Got an attack because of the tear gas’

Earlier, in an exclusive conversation with SCREEN, Shabana recalled suffering an asthma attack after tear gas was used during the protest march. “I am an asthmatic and got an attack because of the tear gas, but I had my pump with me so I am okay now. I was respectfully escorted to a nearby building and after catching my breath, I went right back and spoke to the students who had been lathi charged. Their spirit is unprecedented. My salaams to all of them,” she said.

Speaking about why she chose to join the demonstration, Shabana added, “I came to Jantar Mantar in solidarity with the students who have been on a hunger strike for over 20 days and whose health is now failing. What they are demanding is not sinister or evil. Students are asking for educational reforms to safeguard their future and an overhaul of the education system. Demanding that an allocation of 6 percent of the GDP for education is urgently required. Listen to them, give them an ear, and give them hope.” The protests at Jantar Mantar, spearheaded by the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP), have intensified over the past few weeks after educator and environmentalist Sonam Wangchuk began an indefinite hunger strike, which concluded on Thursday night. On Monday, July 20, as the Monsoon Session of Parliament commenced, students from across the country gathered in New Delhi and marched towards Parliament under the banner of the Chalo Sansad march.