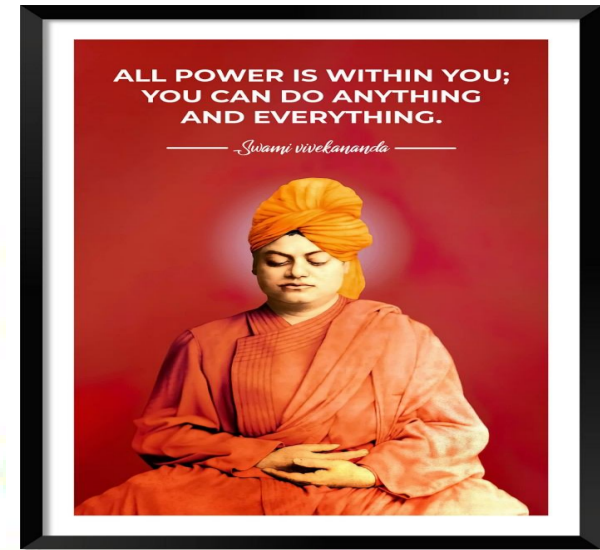


# YOUTH SPIRIT

## ENGLISH DAILY



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## Heatwave Claims 16 Lives In Telangana



**Hyderabad:** Telangana Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy on Saturday said 16 people died due to heatwave conditions prevailing in the state during the current summer. Reddy, who held a meeting with officials on the situation arising out of the heatwave, said the 16 deaths took place in seven districts of the state. Quoting reports received from district Collectors, he said four persons died in Jayashankar Bhupalpally district, followed by three each in Warangal Urban, Karimnagar and Nizamabad and one each in Jogulamba Gadwal, Ranga Reddy and Suryapet. Also

Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 The government would provide an ex gratia of Rs four lakh each to the kin of the deceased persons, he said, according to an official release. The revenue minister directed officials to identify villages recording very high temperatures and send alerts about the heat through media, social media and other means to those villages. He said drinking water, butter milk, and ORS packets should be made available at bus stations, markets, major roads and places where workers work in large numbers. Steps should be taken to

## Marco Rubio Meets PM Modi, Extends Invite To Visit White House

**New Delhi:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Saturday extended an invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit the White House in near future. The US ambassador to India Sergio Goro confirmed the same on his social media account. Taking to X, Goro wrote, "Secretary Marco Rubio extended an invite on behalf of President Donald Trump, for Prime Minister Modi to visit the White House in the near future!" Also Read - Heatwave Claims 16 Lives In Telangana



relations that have faced headwinds since mid-last year. The top US diplomat is scheduled to visit New Delhi. On Sunday, he is scheduled to horice Hike "Landed in India. Looking forward to a great visit," Rubio said in a social media post after he reached Kolkata this morning. He visited the Mother House -- the headquarters of Saint Teresa's Missionaries of Charity -- before

flying to the national capital. "Warmly welcome Secretary of State Marco Rubio of the USA to New Delhi. Iso Read - From Coolers To Sprinkler, welcoming the Secretary of State, outlig President Donald Trump's strategic vision for a stronger US-India partnership. Rubio called onstrategic vision for a Prime Minister Narendra Modi after reaching the national capital.

## Dy CM Tells Forest Officials To Increase Green Cover By 50% In AP

**Amaravathi:** Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan directed the forest officials to constitute AP Green Society within a week to increase the green cover by 50 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. He also warned of strict action against those neglecting duties. He interacted with the forest officials at a review meeting on Saturday. He asked the officials about the recovery of red sanders belonging to the state smuggled to China, Japan, Singapore and other countries. Also Read - Faction Politics Started in AP with Jagan's Family: Keshav At the same time, he admonished the forest officials who had failed to complete assigned tasks in a stipulated time. Vanajeevi Ramaiah, Dusrarla Satyanarayana had created wonders by dedicating their lives to conservation of environment. When they could achieve so much by working individually, you can achieve much more by working as a system, he said. The Dy CM asked the officials to upload all details about the land encroached and recovered, individuals on whom cases had been registered on the forest department's official website. Also Read - Jana Sena



MLA Arava Sridhar Resigns To Assembly Whip Post Recently, the land encroached by former minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy in Mangalam forest, Chittoor district and YSRC leader Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy in Kadapa districts have been recovered. Cases should be registered lands. To protect the forest land from encroachment, Geotag Spatial Survey should be held. He directed the officials to use the help of technology in detecting encroachment, felling of trees and other crimes happening in the forests within minutes. The forest department would take up manufacture of 2.5 crore seed balls, which would be dispersed in July, August through drones.

# Revanth Reddy Lays Foundation Stone for Rs.99.55 Cr Works at Yadagirigutta Temple

**Hyderabad:** Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Saturday laid the foundation stone for the development works worth Rs.99.55 crore at the sacred shrine of Yadagirigutta Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple. He laid foundation stone laid for a Veda Pathashala to be constructed at a cost of Rs.43.80 crore and for constructing the Lord's Nitya Kalyana Mandapam atop the hill at a cost of Rs.9.87 crore. Also Read - Part Time Job

Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 Revanth Reddy also laid foundation stone for the construction of a roof covering over the stairway from Vaikuntha Dwaram to the hilltop at a cost of Rs.1.41 crore and for the construction of steps towards the Mada Veedhis near the Rathashala at a cost of Rs.1.35 crore. The foundation stone laid for the construction of dormitory halls and accommodation facilities for devotees



undertaking Deeksha at a cost of Rs.43.12 crore was also laid.

# Rozgar Mela Empowers Youth with Jobs, Self-Reliance: Kishan Reddy

**Hyderabad:** Kishan Reddy distributed appointment letters to 218 newly recruited candidates across six different central government departments Union Minister for Coal and Mines, G. Kishan Reddy, attended the 19th 'Rozgar Mela' held at Rail Kalarang, Secunderabad, on Saturday. During the event, Kishan Reddy distributed appointment letters to 218 newly recruited candidates across six different central government departments. The 19th tranche of the nationwide 'Rozgar Mela', was organized by the Central Government across 47 locations and distributed appointment letters to around 51,000 recruits. Prime Minister Narendra



Modi virtually addressed the event. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 Addressing the gathering, Kishan Reddy said that since 2022, lakhs of youth

have secured central government jobs through these mega recruitment drives. He stated that the Central Government is actively filling vacancies across all government departments and Public Union Minister for Coal and Mines, G. Kishan Reddy, attending the 19th 'Rozgar Mela' held at Rail Kalarang, Secuendard, attending the 19th attending the 19th rday. Sector Undertakings (PSUs) to provide jobs to unemployed youth. He noted that today, India's youth are transforming from job-seekers into job-creators. Also Read - TG Polycet

Results Released He further added that startups are generating lakhs of jobs, and the 'Make in India' initiative has significantly boosted employment in the manufacturing sector. Congratulating the newly selected candidates, Kishan Reddy reminded them that a government job offers a valuable opportunity to serve the nation for the next 20 to 30 years. He urged them to work with dedication and a spirit of public service for the country's development. He also advised them never to neglect their parents, who made numerous sacrifices for their success, and to support them wholeheartedly in their old age.

## Telangana emerges as leading startup State, says KTR

**Hyderabad:** Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president KT Rama Rao said flourishing businesses and commercial activity play a crucial role in generating revenue for both individuals and governments besides also supporting welfare and development programmes. He was speaking as the chief guest at the convocation ceremony organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India here on Saturday. Addressing the gathering, Rama Rao said chartered accountants contribute significantly to the economy through their services and by helping governments generate revenue. He said their work indirectly brings transformative changes in people's lives. He noted that India had witnessed a sharp rise in businesses and startups in recent years, with many youngsters moving towards entrepreneurship and self-employment. According to him, such entrepreneurs require



financial guidance and professional support from chartered accountants. The role of CAs would become even more important in the future growth of business, commerce and the national economy, said. "Telangana has emerged as one of the country's most successful startup ecosystems," said. "Telangana has emerged as one of the country's most successful startup ecosystems," said. "Telangana has emerged as one of the country's most successful startup ecosystems," said.

State's overall revenue growth had increased from around 14 percent to 24 percent during the same period. The BR S working president also said Telangana's per capita income, which stood at around Rs.94,000 before the State formation, had crossed Rs.3 lakh by 2023. Telangana had overtaken larger States such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in per capita income, he stressed. He advised chartered accountants to focus on emerging technologies and Artificial Intelligence and explore ways to integrate them into professional practice.

## Telangana reports 16 heatwave deaths; Govt announces Rs 4 lakh ex gratia

**Hyderabad:** Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy said 16 deaths were reported from seven districts due to heatwave in the State and announced an ex gratia of Rs. 4 lakh each to the families of the deceased persons. Of the 16 deaths, four were reported from Jayashankar Bhupalpally, three each in Warangal Urban, Karimnagar, and Nizamabad and one each in Jogulamba Gadwal, Rangareddy, and Suryapet districts, he said. The Minister convened an emergency review meeting with senior officials at the Secretariat here on Saturday. As per the Meteorological Department latest report, intense heat, extreme temperatures, and heatwaves were expected to persist until May 26. These conditions would prevail in Karimnagar, Peddapalli, Jayashankar Bhupalpally, Mulugu, Khammam, Nalgonda, Suryapet, Mahabubnagar,



Hyderabad, and Rangareddy districts, he said. The Minister wanted the Collectors of these districts to remain alert and implement special precautionary measures. "The intensity of the summer heat is reaching unprecedented levels. The severity of heatwaves has intensified due to the impact of a strong El Nino phenomenon," Srinivasa Reddy said. The government machinery should remain highly vigilant. There should be no negligence in protection of human lives, he said to officials. They were instructed to identify mandals and villages

recording the highest temperatures and to issue advance warnings to the residents in those areas. Officials were ordered to ensure the availability of cool drinking water, buttermilk, and ORS packets at bus stands, markets, major thoroughfares, and other areas with high concentrations of laborers. The Minister appealed to the public, especially the elderly, pregnant women, young children, and those suffering from health ailments to refrain from venturing outdoors between 11 AM and 4 PM, except in cases of absolute emergency.

## Telugu States Bake As Piduguralla Hits 47.6°C Amid Intensifying Heatwave

**Hyderabad:** A severe and punishing heatwave has gripped the Telugu states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, sending temperatures soaring to dangerous levels. Mercury levels have breached the 45°C mark across multiple districts, prompting disaster management authorities to issue caution. The onslaught of summer has pushed temperatures past 46°C in 19 districts of Telangana, while 11 districts in Andhra Pradesh saw temperatures climb above 45°C. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 According to weather officials, Piduguralla in Andhra Pradesh emerged as the hottest location, recording a blistering maximum temperature of 47.6°C. Other areas in



AP also witnessed extreme heat, with Kankipadu in Krishna district and Nandanama rella near Markapuram registering 46.1°C, followed closely by Tanuku at 46°C. In Telangana, Nirmal district recorded the state's highest temperature at 46.5°C. Severe heatwave conditions also prevailed in

Hanumakonda (46.4°C), Jagtial (46.3°C), and Adilabad (46.2°C). Also Read - Street Vending Zones Fail To Take Off in Hyderabad Residents are unlikely to get a respite anytime soon. The Andhra Pradesh Disaster Management Zones Fail To Take Off in Hyderabad Authority has warned

that the heatwave's intensity is projected to escalate further over the next four days. Authorities have advised people to take necessary precautions, avoid stepping out during peak afternoon hours, and stay adequately hydrated as the region braces for an harsher week ahead.

## Street Vending Zones Fail To Take Off in Hyderabad

**Hyderabad:** Civic bodies have failed to create and operationalise exclusive street vending zones in Hyderabad, resulting in the encroachment of footpaths. In places where designated vending zones were created, they remain unused. The area near Shilparamam has vacant stalls, while facilities such as the Begum Bazaar Fish Market and a fish market in LB Nagar are non-operational. Vendors have instead set up stalls outside these premises, occupying roads and footpaths, with vehicles parked in front adding to congestion. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 Despite the completion of construction in some cases, markets have not been made operational due to factors including court cases. According to vendors, poor site selection for vending zones has prevented them from shifting to designated locations. In the erstwhile GHMC limits, 127 vending zones were



identified, but most were not located on busy stretches, and the initiative did not progress. Objections were raised by corporators, and approached the Praja Vani programme opposing the identified sites. On busy stretches such as Ameerpet, Koti, Hitec City near the Metro station, and Durgam Cheruvu, vendor stalls continue to occupy footpaths and roads. Though GHMC and traffic police have conducted clearance drives, encroachments have

returned within hours. Engagements in Hyderabad on Thursday, May 21, 2026 Efforts to relocate vendors near the Charminar have also been unsuccessful. A proposed 100-metre buffer zone around the monument is now occupied by stalls, and the yellow demarcation marking has faded. "While the footpaths are occupied by vendors, the road adjacent to it is used for parked vehicles and the pedestrians are forced to walk on the portion of the road

where vehicles move fast," said Ratneswari Babu, a van driver. Vendors, however, said enforcement drives hood. According to GHMC officials, over 1,000 encroachments were recently cleared from footpaths. They added that vendors with pushcarts returned after the drives, while those operating from permanent encroachments such as tin sheds and shops did not return, indicating a limited and temporary impact of enforcement.

## Heat Wave, Red Alert: CM Naidu Orders Holidays in Extreme Situation

**Vijayawada:** Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Friday directed officials to declare local holidays in areas recording extremely high temperatures. He said public safety must remain the government's top priority during the present heatwave conditions. "Officials must remain on high alert and take urgent steps to protect the people from soaring temperatures." Reviewing the heatwave situation at Amaravati, the CM instructed officials to identify regions recording the highest temperatures and continuously issue warnings and advisories to residents through the media and social media platforms. Also Read - Pawan Pulls Up Officials Over Forest Protection Lapses He also authorised local authorities to declare holidays in areas experiencing extreme heat



conditions. Officials informed the CM that the heatwave intensity had increased due to severe El Niño conditions. Temperatures, they said, had risen from 45 to 48°C over the past three days, while during the severe El Niño year of 2015, the state had recorded a peak temperature of 50.1°C. Naidu said officials must ensure the availability of drinking water, butter-milk and ORS packets at crowded locations and public gathering points, women, children and those with health issues

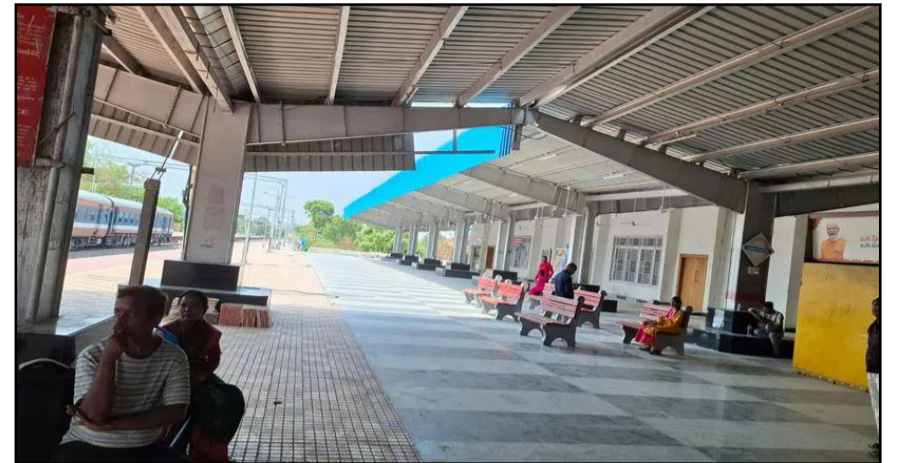
to remain indoors between 11am and 4pm. District collectors and mandal-level officials must be fully prepared to tackle the related emergencies. According to officials, 1,349 heat shelters and cooling centres have been set up in urban areas, while shade arrangements were made at 446 traffic junctions for motorists and police personnel. Also Read - AP Power Grid Scales New Peak As Heat Wave Drives Record Demand Naidu directed the authorities to prevent shortage of drinking

water in rural and urban areas and deploy water tankers wherever necessary. Place water troughs and earthen pots for animals and birds affected by the heat, he told them. Highlighting the long-term need for environmental protection, the chief minister stressed the importance of increasing green cover and improving groundwater levels to reduce the impact of rising temperatures. He cited Annamayya district as an example, noting that it had recorded comparatively lower temper-

## Malkajgiri Railway Station redevelopment nears completion, opening likely in two months

**Hyderabad:** Residents of Malkajgiri and surrounding colonies may have to wait for about a month or two more to use the redeveloped Malkajgiri railway station facility. The works were in the final stage with nearly 95 per cent completed, railway authorities said.

The residents have urged the South Central Railway (SCR) authorities to speed up the remaining redevelopment works, which include setting up of escalators and lifts and take steps to inaugurate the upgraded facility at the earliest. The station is being modernised under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Locals say the transformation is clearly visible, but are keen to see the project fully finished and opened to the public soon. As part of the upgrade, a 12-metre-wide foot overbridge is under construction to streamline passenger movement between platforms. Three escalators and three lifts are



also being installed to improve accessibility, particularly for senior citizens and differently-abled passengers. Decorative arches at the 'In Gate' and 'Out Gate' of Terminal-2 on the western side have been completed, while similar works on the eastern side are progressing. Key amenities such as a waiting hall, VIP lounge, tea stall and RPF office on the platform have already been readied. Residents say this road will be particularly helpful during festivals and

Cement concrete flooring across the circulating area is being laid, alongside foundation works for high-mast lighting. The station building elevation and portico are in the final stages of completion. Additionally, a CC approach road connecting Gouthamnagar Gate Road to the booking office within railway land has been developed, providing improved access towards Anutex Chourasta. Residents say this road will be particularly helpful during festivals and

special events when the main road often witnesses heavy congestion. Noor Ahmed Ali, General Secretary of the Suburban Train Travellers Association, said they have sought stoppage of express trains passing via Malkajgiri to further benefit commuters. He echoed the demand of local residents, requesting authorities to complete the remaining works swiftly and dedicate the redeveloped station to the residents, who majorly depend on train travel.

## BRS stages protest over drinking water shortage at Khairatabad Water Board office

**Hyderabad:** Scenes reminiscent of earlier summer water crises resurfaced after a decade in the city as residents staged a protest at the HMWSSB office in Khairatabad on Saturday over inadequate drinking water supply. Holding empty pots, men and women from different localities gathered at the office under the leadership of BRS LB Nagar MLA Devireddy Sudheer Reddy. The protesters raised slogans against the Congress government and demanded immediate measures to resolve the drinking water shortage in several Hyderabad. Addressing the gathering, Sudheer Reddy said Hyderabad requires nearly 750 Million Gallons per Day (MGD) of drinking water,



but the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWSSB) was supplying only around 550 MGD. He alleged that the shortfall had left residents in many colonies struggling failing to meet the city's for drinking water during peak summer. The MLA also questioned the government's claim of supplying water through

12,000 tankers every day. If such a large number of tankers were required, it clearly indicated that the existing pipeline network was failing to meet the city's needs, he said. Sudheer Reddy failing to meet the city's of the officials and the government of neglecting the issue despite a severe drinking water crisis. Sudheer Reddy accused risis per-

sisting in parts of the LB Nagar constituency for the last two months. He demanded that officials take up special measures to ensure uninterrupted water supply and warned that the BRS would intensify its agitation if the issue remained unresolved. corporators, senior BRS leaders, activists and party workers participated in the protest.

## AP Power Grid Scales New Peak As Heat Wave Drives Record Demand

**Vijayawada:** Power utilities in Andhra Pradesh have successfully managed the highest-ever electricity demand in the state's history amid severe summer conditions and intense heat wave temperatures this season. The state grid on May 21 recorded an all-time high energy consumption of 288.9 million units, along with a record day peak demand of 15,016mw and an evening peak demand of 12,474mw. Officials cited this as the highest electricity load ever handled by the state power system. Also Read - Pawan Pulls Up Officials Over Forest Protection Lapses According to the power utilities, the unprecedented surge in demand was driven by extreme heat wave conditions and high humidity levels prevailing across Andhra Pradesh, with temperatures in several districts nearing 46 degrees Celsius. The widespread use of air-conditioners, cooling appliances, drinking water systems



and agricultural pump sets significantly increased electricity consumption across domestic, industrial, commercial and agricultural sectors. Also Read - Millers Offer Above MSP For Bondalu Paddy Despite the extraordinary demand, AP Transco, in coordination with AP Genco and the Discoms, maintained uninterrupted and quality power supply across the state without any major disruption.

Officials attributed the achievement to advance planning, continuous grid monitoring, efficient load management and optimum utilisation of available power resources. Special chief secretary to chief minister, K Vijayanand, said additional power was also procured through available power resources. Special chief secretary to chief minister, market purchases to maintain grid stability during peak demand periods. These measures

helped ensure uninterrupted supply to households, farmers, industries, commercial establishments and essential services during the ongoing heat wave season. Officials said engineers, fiewer was also procured through available power staff, system operators and maintenance teams had been working round the clock to maintain reliable power supply and public convenience under challenging weather conditions.

# UP Cong Chief Booked Over 'Abusive' Remarks Against PM

**Mahoba/Lucknow:** Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai was booked for allegedly making objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a programme in Mahoba district, police said on Saturday.

The FIR was lodged at Kotwali Nagar police station on Saturday on the complaint of Neeraj Rawat, a BJP worker. According to the complaint, Rai attended a programme organised on May 22 in Samad Nagar locality by former Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee secretary Brijraj Ahirwar. Rawat alleged that Rai arrived with a convoy of 15-16 vehicles and 25-30 supporters, causing obstruction on a public road and affecting normal movement in the area.

The complainant further alleged that police and administrative personnel had to leave their regular duties to maintain law and order at the venue. He also accused Rai of using "abusive and objectionable language" against the prime minister during the programme, claiming that videos of the remarks later went viral on social media. A purported video of Rai went viral on Friday in which he was heard mak-



ing "abusive" remarks against Modi in Mahoba. Terming the video fake and AI-generated by the BJP, Rai told PTI that he would lodge a police complaint in the matter once he reaches Lucknow. BJP leaders, including Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and BJP state president Pankaj Chaudhary, have condemned the "abusive" remarks. Police said the FIR was registered against Rai, Brijraj Ahirwar and 25-30 unidentified supporters. The FIR has been

registered under multiple provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) including sections 126(2) (wrongful restraint), 132 (assaulting "abusive" remarks against Modi in Mahoba. Terming the video fake and AI-generated by the BJP, Rai told PTI that he would lodge a police complaint in the matter once he reaches Lucknow.

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social tension. He submitted a pen drive containing the purported viral video to the police as evidence and sought legal action against Rai, Brijraj Ahirwar and 25-30 unidentified supporters.

The development comes amid a political row in Uttar Pradesh over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's recent "traitor" remarks targeting the prime minister, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh during a rally in Raebareilly. Earlier this week, cross-complaints were filed in Lucknow against Gandhi and Uttar Pradesh (unlawful assembly), 189(2) (unlawful assembly), 196(1) (promoting enmity between different groups) and 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), police said. Rawat alleged in his complaint that the remarks hurt public sentiments, triggered anger among BJP workers and created minister Dinesh Pratap Singh over the remarks and the BJP leader's response to them.

## West Asia Conflict: Govt Announces Credit Line Guarantee Scheme For Airlines, MSMEs

**New Delhi:** The government on Tuesday announced an Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) with an outlay of Rs 18,100 crore to provide relief for MSMEs and airlines impacted by the West Asia conflict. The scheme -- expected to help in providing additional credit flow of Rs 2.55 lakh crore, including Rs 5,000 crore for airlines -- was approved by the Union Cabinet on Tuesday. Briefing the media on the Cabinet decisions, Information and Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the ECLGS 5.0, having an outlay of Rs 18,100 crore, would help airlines as well as MSMEs impacted by the West Asia crisis. "The scheme has been brought to address the stress in MSME and airline sectors due to the West Asia conflict," he said. According to the minister, passenger airlines would be eligible for up to 100 per cent of peak credit up to Rs 1,500 crore while institutions can access up to 20 per cent of fund-based working capital up to Rs 100 crore. In an official release, the government said



the scheme aims to enable businesses to tide over the challenges arising from the West Asia conflict. "Additionally, this is expected to help businesses maintain their operations, protect jobs, and sustain supply chains. The proposed credit guarantee scheme is a major step to help businesses, particularly MSMEs and airline sector, to ensure their additional working capital needs are catered by the banks short-term liquidity mismatches in view of West Asia crisis," the release said. There will be conditions for availing the loans. The tenor for the airline sector would be seven years from the date of first disbursement, including a moratorium of two years, and for MSMEs and non-bank MSMEs, it would be five years from the date of first disbursement, including one year of moratorium.

The scheme would be applicable to all loans sanctioned during the period from the date of issue of these guidelines by NCGTCLGS was a very imperative initiative, especially for the aviation sector, enabling airlines to navigate short-term liquidity challenges and maintain seamless operations amid global disruptions. "It will provide strong financial backing to safeguard jobs, sustain connectivity, and ensure resilience across the aviation ecosystem, while also supporting MSMEs," he said in a post on X. MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) as well as airlines have been facing substantial financial headwinds due to the West Asia conflict that started in February. ECLGS was first launched in May 2020 to mitigate economic distress during the coronavirus pandemic.

## US Secretary Of State Marco Rubio Visits Saint Teresa's Mother House In Kolkata

**Kolkata:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Saturday visited Mother House, the headquarters of Saint Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata. Rubio arrived in the West Bengal capital this morning, marking the opening leg of his maiden four-day diplomatic tour to India. He was welcomed by US Ambassador Sergio Gor at the city airport. Rubio visited the headquarters of the Missionaries of Charity and spoke with its officials. Accompanied by US Ambassador Gor and other officials, Rubio later visited Nirmala Shishu Bhavan - a children's home run by Missionaries of Charity - during his Kolkata stopover.

The Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa in Kolkata, is a Catholic congregation dedicated to serving the poor, sick and destitute across the world. "Joined @SecRubio in Kolkata for



a visit to the Missionaries of Charity. Moments like these remind us the U.S.-India partnership rests not only on strong policies, but also on shared values and the spirit of selfless service that transcends

borders," the US Ambassador to India posted on X. Rubio's arrival in Kolkata ended a 14-year gap since a US secretary of state last visited the city. It also came only weeks after West Bengal

witnessed a major political transition with a BJP-led government assuming office. In a post on X, the US Ambassador to India said, "Secretary Marco Rubio has landed in Kolkata. This is his first

trip to India. Later today, we will call on Prime Minister @narendramodi in New Delhi. Trade, Technology, Defence, QUAD, and many other items to discuss and advance over the next few days! Rubio became the first US secretary of state to visit Kolkata since Hillary Clinton travelled to the city in May 2012. Rubio's India itinerary, scheduled from May 23 to 26 and also covering Agra, Jaipur and New Delhi, is being viewed as diplomatically significant because of planned energy discussions with India and meetings involving ministers from the Quad nations. The New Delhi meeting will be attended by Rubio, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshihiro Motegi, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will preside over the meeting.

## At FBR 2026, Internet Lifestyle Hub Showcases Rise of India's Creator-Led Economy



As India's digital coaching and creator-led knowledge economy continues to expand, Internet Lifestyle Hub concluded its annual Freedom Business Retreat (FBR) 2026 at The Leela Palace Chennai with a strong turnout of founders, coaches and creators from across the country. Held on April 27 and 28, the event brought together nearly 700 participants and highlighted the rapid growth of the community built by digital reformer Siddharth Rajsekar, who says his long-term mission is to reform India's education and employment systems through digital entrepreneurship and knowledge-sharing models. Also Read - ED Raids Ex-Kolkata Police Officer's Palace During the retreat, Siddharth revealed that the Internet Lifestyle Hub community has now generated over Rs 1,500 crore in measurable business impact since its inception, with nearly Rs 600-700 crore added in the past year alone. The

community, which now includes more than 50,000 active members, has also enrolled over one million learners across its various programmes. One of the key announcements at the retreat was Siddharth's new leadership philosophy titled the 'Omega Shift'. Positioned as an alternative to hustle-driven entrepreneurial culture, the framework maps the evolution of an individual from a 'Beta', or learner, to an 'Alpha', seen as a driver and leader, and finally to an 'Omega' — someone who returns to serve the community, continuously reinvents themselves, and leads without sacrificing personal balance. Also Read - Key Trends Shaping India's Start-Up Ecosystem During the retreat, Siddharth revealed that the Internet Lifestyle Hub community has now generated over Rs 1,500 crore in measurable business impact since its inception, with nearly Rs 600-700 crore added in the past year alone. The

the Omega represents the most evolved role in a community because it focuses on service and collective growth rather than individual dominance. The event also highlighted the scale at which the ILH ecosystem has been expanding independently through its regional Nalanda X chapters. The network currently has over 2,000 members spread across eight regional chapters and has reportedly hosted more than 60 city meetings in a span of 45 days without Siddharth being physically conducted by Dr Monicka Singh. Participants also received an "Omega Lamp" as a symbolic reminder of reflection and reinvention. The organisation additionally announced plans for an AI-first roadmap across its learning systems and structure, including deeper integration with creator-economy platform TagMango, which many ILH members already use to host courses, memberships and paid communities.

## JK Government Orders Probe Into Demolition Of Gujjar-Bakerwal Homes In Jammu

**Jammu:** In a significant development following the sudden demolition of houses belonging to Gujjar-Bakerwal families at Raika, Sidra in Jammu, the Omar Abdullah government late on Friday evening has ordered a high-level inquiry into the entire episode, amid mounting outrage and allegations of gross abuse of power by officials of the Forest and other Departments. The government has constituted a broad-based Inquiry Committee headed by secretary of forest department, Rajinder Singh Tara, with the Assistant Commissioner Revenue (ACR) Jammu and the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Jammu as mem-

bers. The Committee has been directed to submit its report within one week. Sources said that "several heads may roll" in the Forest Department as the Government has taken a serious and uncompromising view of the demolitions, especially after revelations that many of the affected families were migrant Gujjars from rural Kashmir and Pir Panjal who had fled militancy and violence over the years and were struggling to rebuild their lives in Jammu. The Tribal Affairs Department has also stepped in by constituting a separate fact-finding committee headed by senior KAS officer Mumtaz Ali to examine possible violations of the Forest



Rights Act, 2006, and the constitutional safeguards guaranteed to Scheduled Tribes. The demolitions have triggered shock

waves across the Gujjar-Bakerwal community, with tribal organisations terming the action as "targeted persecution" carried

out under the garb of anti-encroachment and anti-drug operations in Jammu.

## Air India London Flight Issue: DGCA Directs 787 Plane's Fuel Switch Inspection In Presence Of Its Officers

**New Delhi:** Aviation watchdog DGCA has directed the inspection of an Air India Dreamliner aircraft's fuel control switch, which possibly had issues as reported by a pilot in February, at the original equipment manufacturer's facility in the presence of the regulator's officers.

On February 2, an Air India pilot reported a defect with the fuel control switch of the Boeing 787-8 plane VT-ANX after operating the A1132 flight. The plane faced a fuel control switch issue during engine start in London on February 1.

Later, Air India carried out a precautionary re-inspections of the fuel control switch across all its operational Boeing 787 aircraft and no issues were identified



during these checks. "The DGCA India, as part of continued airworthiness of the involved Fuel Control Switch, has directed for their inspection at OEM facility in presence of DGCA officers," the civil aviation ministry said in a late evening statement on Tuesday. Earlier, sources said the detailed examination of the particular switch module will be carried out at Boeing's

facility in the US. Based on recommendations received from Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), Air India had carried out inspection and functional testing of the Fuel Control Switches (FCS) in accordance with OEM-prescribed procedures in the presence of DGCA officers, the statement said. Upon review of the inspection results and

evidence provided, the statement said the OEM concluded that the FCS was mechanically functioning as designed and considered the unit serviceable. The aircraft was grounded on February 2 based upon an entry made in the Pilot Defect Report stating that the left FCS slips from 'RUN' to 'CUTOFF' when pushed slightly and does not lock positively in its selected position. In response to a query about the particular fuel control switch, an Air India spokesperson on Tuesday said the fuel switch module had already been confirmed as fully functional by both the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) and the DGCA. "The decision to proceed with further review and testing is understood to be intended to ensure a

## US Green Card New Rule: Overseas Applicants Asked To Return To Home Country To Complete Application

**New Delhi:** The Trump administration announced on Friday that most foreigners seeking a Green Card, granting permanent US residency, must apply from their home countries. "From now on, an alien who is in the US temporarily and wants a Green Card must return to their home country to apply, except in extraordinary circumstances," US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) spokesman Zach Kahler said in a statement. "Nonimmigrant migrants, like students, temporary workers, or people on tourist visas, come to the US for a short time and for a specific purpose," Kahler said. "Our system is



designed for them to leave when their visit is over," he said. "Their visit should not function as the first step in the Green Card process." According to The Washington Post, the

United States grants more than one million Green Cards each year, and, up until now, more than half of the applicants are already in the United States. Kahler said having Green Card

seekers apply from their home nation "reduces the need to find and remove those who decide to slip into the shadows and remain in the US illegally after being denied residency."

He said Green Card applications would be handled by the State Department at US consular offices abroad. President Donald Trump campaigned for the White House on a pledge to expel millions of undocumented migrants and his administration has also closed several legal pathways to US residency since he took office.

## US Secretary Of State Marco Rubio To Begin 4-Day India Visit On Saturday With Pitstop In Kolkata

**Kolkata:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is set to arrive in India on Saturday on a four-day diplomatic tour, with Kolkata marking the first leg of his visit that carries considerable political and historical resonance. Rubio's visit to the eastern metropolis will be the first by a US secretary of state in 14 years and comes weeks after the BJP formed the recent assembly elections. Rubio will become the first US secretary of state to set foot in Kolkata since Hillary Clinton visited the city in May 2012. During that high-profile visit, Clinton met then Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at the historic Writers' Buildings in a formal engagement that extended beyond an hour. Notably, Banerjee's administration too had only recently come to power after ending the Left Front's uninterrupted 34-year rule in Bengal. According to sources in the US Consulate, Rubio is expected to arrive in Kolkata from Sweden around 7 am and visit Mother House, the head-



quarters of Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Teresa. Rubio's India itinerary, scheduled from May 23 to 26 and also encompassing Agra, Jaipur, and New Delhi, is being viewed as diplomatically significant not merely for its timing, but also for its symbolic emphasis on Kolkata, home to one of the oldest American consular establishments in the world and the first in India. The roots of the American diplomatic presence in Kolkata stretch back more than two centuries. On November 19, 1792, US President George Washington appointed Benjamin Joy of Newburyport as the first American Consul to

Kolkata, according to records maintained by the US Embassy and Consulates in India. Although Joy, who arrived in the city some 17 months later, was never formally recognised by the British East India Company as consul, he was permitted to remain in Kolkata as a commercial agent under British jurisdiction. What began under uncertain circumstances ultimately evolved into a longstanding diplomatic relationship between the United States, Kolkata, and British jurisdiction. Today, the US Consulate in Kolkata oversees American interests across 11

eastern and northeastern states, including West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. Political observers believe Rubio's decision to include Kolkata in his itinerary reflects the rising geopolitical and economic significance of eastern and northeastern India, particularly within the broader Indo-Pacific framework, since the visit also comes at a time when Washington is seeking to deepen strategic partnerships across the region amid mounting global uncertainty on account of the continuing in West Asia.

## Trump 'Seriously Considering' Launching New Strikes Against Iran

**Washington:** US President Donald Trump is "seriously considering" launching fresh strikes against Iran if last-minute negotiations do not result in a peace deal, US media outlet Axios reported on Friday. It said that Trump met with a senior national security team in the morning to discuss the war with Iran, even as Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir visited Tehran and was joined by a delegation from Qatar in a last-minute bid to hammer out a deal. President Trump convened a meeting with his senior national security team regarding the war with Iran on Friday morning, two US officials told Axios. Trump is seriously considering launching new strikes against Iran, barring a last-minute breakthrough in negotiations, sources who have spoken directly with the president say. Munir is expected to meet on Saturday with Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and a key player in the Iranian decision-making process. Axios reported that a US official briefed on the diplomatic efforts described the negotiations as "agonising" with drafts "going back and forth every day" without much progress.



The Friday morning meeting at the White House with Trump was attended by Vice President J D Vance, Secretary of Defence Pete Heggseth, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles and other officials. "Iran is dying to make a deal. We'll see what happens. But we hit them hard, and we had no choice because Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon. They cannot have it," Trump said at an event at the White House on Friday. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters in Sweden that "slight progress" was made during talks with Iran. Rubio, who was in Sweden for the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, said he did not want

to exaggerate the progress in talks, saying there had been "a little bit of movement, and that's good". Trump visited New York for a political rally ahead of the midterm elections in November. Earlier, he had planned to spend the weekend at the Bedminster Golf Club in New Jersey, but cancelled it and returned to the White House on Friday evening. Trump also wrote on his Truth Social account that he was not going to attend his son Don Jr.'s wedding this weekend. "I feel it is important for me to remain in Washington, DC, at the

White House during this important period of time," he wrote. A source close to Trump and a second source with knowledge of the situation told Axios that Trump had grown increasingly frustrated about the negotiations with Iran over the past several days. On Tuesday, he told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he wanted to give diplomacy another chance, but by Thursday night, he was leaning toward ordering a strike, the two sources told Axios. A source close to Trump said the president has raised the possibility of a final "decisive" major military operation, after which he could declare victory and end the war.

## India-Cyprus Defence Roadmap Signals New Strategic Equation In Eastern Mediterranean

**New Delhi:** The announcement of a five-year India-Cyprus roadmap New Delhi for defence cooperation following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's summit meeting with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides here Friday signals far more than the expansion of bilateral military ties. Coming soon after Turkey openly backed Pakistan during India's Operation Sindoor, launched in response to the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, the agreement reflects a wider geopolitical recalibration unfolding across the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides look on as Indian and Cypriot officials exchange a MoU during a joint press statement after delegation level talks at the Hyderabad House, in New Delhi, Friday, May 22, 2026. (PTI)



"Defence and security cooperation is also an important pillar of our relationship," Modi said during a joint media briefing with Christodoulides following the bilateral summit during the course of which ties between the two nations were elevated to that of a Strategic Partnership. "We are pleased to see increased military exchanges and training cooperation between our two countries over the past few years. Today, we also decided to further strengthen cooperation in cybersecurity, maritime security, and counter-terrorism." Modi further stated that India and Cyprus will work together to ensure connectivity through key

initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC). In a special media briefing here following the bilateral summit, Sibi George, Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), said that defence and maritime cooperation have emerged as a very important pillar in India's engagement with Cyprus. Ties between the Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat, in New Delhi on May 22, 2026. (ETV Bharat via Press Information)

in Jammu and Kashmir. During the crisis, Turkey strongly supported Pakistan militarily, diplomatically and politically, reiterating its traditional position on Kashmir and criticising India's military. For New Delhi, Turkey's position reinforced concerns about the deepening Turkey-Pakistan strategic partnership, which has expanded significantly over the last decade in areas like defence production, drone technology, naval cooperation and Turkey has supplied Against this backdrop, India's decision to deepen defence engagement with Cyprus — a country that has longstanding disputes with Turkey — carries North Africa. The island's substantial geopolitical position in the Eastern Mediterranean, close to critical maritime routes connecting Europe, West Asia and North Africa. The island has historically faced tensions with Turkey, particularly over the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus since 1974 and competing maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean.

## Tulsi Gabbard Resigns As Director Of National Intelligence, Citing Her Husband's Health

**Washington:** Tulsi Gabbard resigned as President Donald Trump's director of national intelligence on Friday, saying she needed to leave office as her husband battles cancer, becoming the fourth Cabinet member to depart during Trump's second term. In her resignation letter, which she posted on social media, Gabbard said she told Trump she would leave her job overseeing the coordination of 18 intelligence agencies on June 30. She said her husband had recently been diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer and "faces major challenges in the coming weeks and months."

"At this time, I must step away from public service to be by his side and fully support him through this battle," she wrote in the letter, which was reported earlier by Fox News. Trump, in his own social media post, said: "Tulsi has done an incredible job, and we will miss her." He said her principal deputy, Aaron Lukas, will serve as acting director of national intelligence.

While Gabbard says her departure is for personal reasons, the juxtaposition between her long-held anti-interventionism stance and Trump's series of overseas military operations had seemed to put them on a collision course. Iran put Gabbard and Trump at odds. There had been rumblings that Gabbard would split with Trump after the president decided to strike Iran, which caused some division



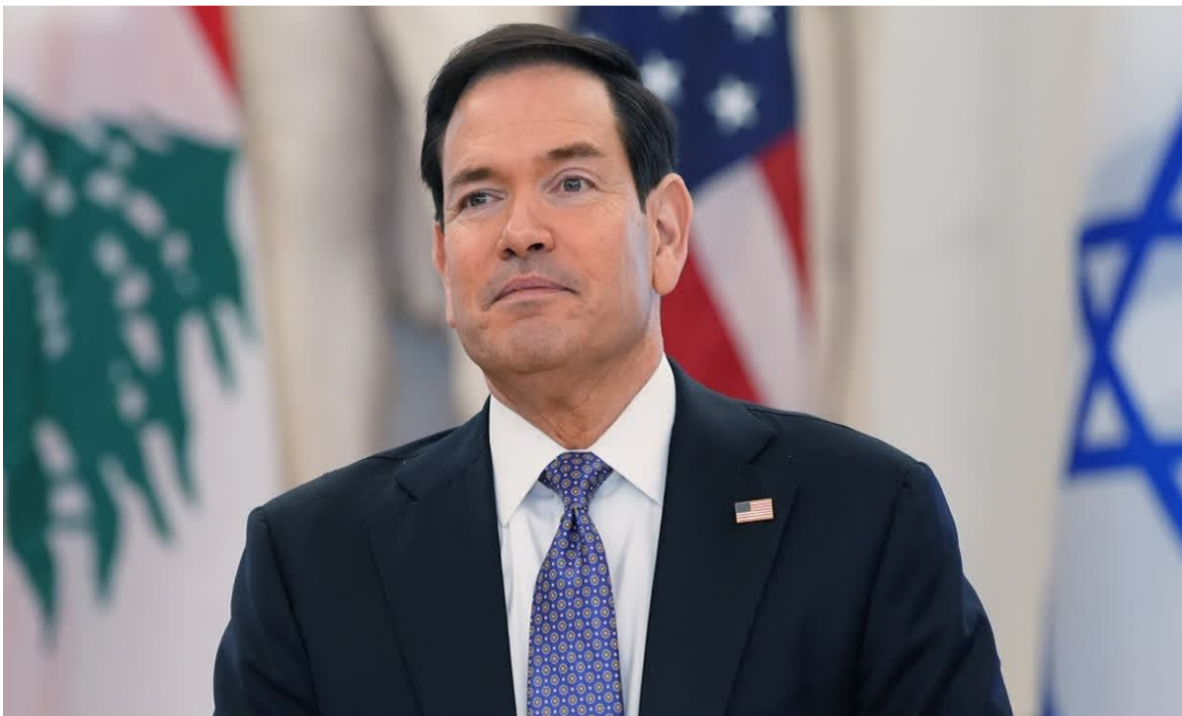
within his administration. Joe Kent, director of the National Counterterrorism Centre, announced his resignation in March and said he "cannot in good conscience" support the war. Gabbard, a veteran and former Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, built her political name on her opposition to foreign wars. This put her in an awkward position when the U.S. joined Israel in launching attacks on Iran on Feb. 28. During a congressional hearing in March, her measured comments were notable for their careful non-endorsement of the Iran war. She repeatedly dodged questions about whether the White House had been warned of potential fallout from the conflict, including Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway crucial for shipments. Gabbard said in written remarks to the Senate Intelligence Committee that there had been no effort by Iran to rebuild its

nuclear capability after U.S. attacks last year "obliterated" its nuclear program. That statement contradicted Trump, who has repeatedly asserted that the war was necessary to head off an imminent threat from the Islamic Republic. This created several awkward exchanges with lawmakers who asked Gabbard for her opinion on the threat posed by Iran as the nation's top intelligence official. She repeatedly said it was Trump's decision to strike, not hers.

"It is not the intelligence community's responsibility to determine what is and is not an imminent threat," Gabbard's departure follows Trump having ousted Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem in late March, in the midst of mounting criticism over her leadership of the department — including the handling of the administration's immigration crackdown and disaster response. The second Cabinet member to leave

was Attorney General Pam Bondi, in response to growing frustration over the Justice Department's handling of files related to Jeffrey Epstein. And Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer resigned in April, after being the target of various misconduct investigations. Lukas, who will be taking over for Gabbard, was as an intelligence aide to the acting director of national intelligence when he began his second term and tapped Gabbard to lead OONI, which was set up after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to improve coordination between the nation's intelligence agencies. As last June, he said Gabbard was wrong and that he didn't care what she said. She appeared to be back in Trump's good graces when she was named to lead the FBI search of election offices in Fulton County, Georgia, even though her office was created to focus on foreign espionage, not state elections.

## US Secretary Of State Marco Rubio To Visit India From May 23-26



**Washington:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will undertake a four-day visit to India beginning May 23 to further cooperation in the fields of trade, defence and energy. This will be his first visit to India. The Department of State announced the visit that would take Rubio to Kolkata, Agra, Jaipur and New Delhi.

"Secretary Rubio will travel to India from May 23-26, where he will visit Kolkata, Agra, Jaipur, and New Delhi," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said. The Secretary will discuss energy, security, trade,

and defence cooperation during meetings with senior Indian officials, Pigott said. Rubio will travel to India from Sweden, where he will attend the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting on May 22. Meanwhile, the US embassy in New Delhi said that India will host a meeting of the "Quad" group, which includes Australia, Japan and the United States. The embassy said Secretary of State Marco Rubio would attend the meeting and that it looked forward to welcoming him "for his first visit to India, ministerial

Quad meetings, high level engagements, and celebrating 250 years of America". India is set to host a meeting of Quad foreign ministers next week that is expected to deliberate on pressing global challenges, including the fallout of the West Asia crisis. The New Delhi meeting is planned for May 26, and it is scheduled to be attended by Rubio, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu, with Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar presiding over it.

## Indian-Origin Man Jailed For Role In Drug Smuggling Gang In UK

**London:** An Indian-origin man is among five gang members jailed in the UK for a total of 84 years for their involvement in what the Metropolitan Police described as a large-scale drugs conspiracy. Jagjit Singh, a 30-year-old from Birmingham, was sentenced to 10 years and six months for his role within a major organised crime group responsible for importing and supplying Class A banned drugs worth millions of pounds into London. Over the course of the investigation, more than 300 kilograms of cocaine and more than 60 kilograms of heroin, with an estimated wholesale value of almost 8 million pounds in total were seized. The gang members were sentenced at Kingston Crown Court in south-west London on Thursday to prison terms ranging from 14 to 26 years each. Singh had previously pleaded guilty on the first day of trial in October last year. "This case has centred on a criminal venture planned on a gigantic commercial scale which would have likely caused violence and destruction on our streets," said Detective

Constable Leon Ure from the Met Police's Specialist Crime unit, who led the investigation. "These offenders organised a significant drug line into London and the surrounding counties over a prolonged period of time. If people wonder why we are so relentless in going after those involved in drug supply, it's because this criminality fuels violence and rips families and communities apart," he said. The sentencing this week follows what the police force said was a "complex" investigation into the organised criminal network responsible for importing and distributing significant quantities of cocaine and heroin across the UK. "We are very grateful to our partners for their assistance. Our coordinated response has resulted in the disruption of a major threat to public safety and has taken this group of criminals off our streets," added Detective Constable Ure. The gang used a sophisticated method involving legitimate haulage routes and so-called "ghost warehouses" to move drugs from mainland Europe into



the country. Lorries arriving at UK ports would divert from their legitimate delivery routes to covert storage sites where drugs were secretly offloaded before the lorries continued to their intended destinations. Drugs that were found hidden at the warehouses would be removed, repackaged and distributed onward. Men flew in from Poland specifically to assist with unloading and onward supply, often using hired cars to make short trips from the sites to distribute wholesale quantities to drug dealers. Several other individuals linked to the organised crime group have already been convicted and sentenced for their roles in

the wider conspiracy. The investigation, led by the Met's Specialist Crime Command, began in July 2024 following surveillance of a suspect handover of boxes between cars linked to the network in Slough. A subsequent stop by the West Midlands Regional Organised Crime Unit led to the seizure of five kilograms of cocaine and 25 kilograms of heroin. This early interception provided crucial intelligence about the scale and logistics of the operation, the Met Police said. In April last year, officers identified a lorry travelling from the Netherlands, making an unexplained stop at the site instead of continuing to its legitimate delivery address in

## H-1B Registrations Down In FY27; More Approvals For Higher Degrees, Salaries

**Washington:** Registrations for H-1B visas dropped by 38.5 per cent in fiscal year 2027, with the US saying it had approved more applicants with advanced degrees and higher salaries of those "making a real impact on the economy." The decision by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is likely to affect the Indians the most, who made up an estimated 71 per cent of all approved H-1B applications in recent years. In a post on X on Thursday, the USCIS said only 17.7 per cent of all selected registrations were in the lowest wage category. "The number of properly submitted registrations plummeted by 38.5 per cent, from 3,43,981 in



fiscal year 2026 to just 2,11,600 in fiscal year 2027," the USCIS said. Nearly three-fourths of the applications approved were of persons holding master's degrees or higher, the USCIS said. "We're approving more applicants with advanced degrees and higher salaries — especially those who studied at US universities. An overwhelming 71.5 per cent of selected aliens hold a

US master's degree or higher, compared to 57 per cent last year," it said. It said these skilled workers are making a real impact on the economy, and the US was closing the door on the low-wage and low-skilled foreign labour pipeline approved under Biden administration policies. "This year, only 17.7 per cent of all selected registrations were in the lowest wage category," the USCIS

said. "This data is a clear sign that the days of abusing the programme with mass, low-wage registrations are over, and that the programme is better serving its intended purpose of attracting highly skilled foreign workers and protecting the wages, working conditions, and job opportunities of American workers," it said. The USCIS said President Donald Trump's policies of plac-

## Labbaik Echoes, Hearts Turn To Kaaba As Millions Gather In Makkah For Hajj 2026

**Jeddah:** Tens of thousands of Muslims from across the globe are converging on the holy cities of Makkah and Madina in Saudi Arabia for the annual Hajj pilgrimage starting this weekend. Both men and women are seen emerging from aircraft, chanting 'Talbīyah' 'Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik... (Here I am, O Allah, here I am), in praise of God and hurrying toward vehicles to catch their first glimpse of the Holy Kaaba, the central attraction in Makkah. Most men are draped in Ihram, the two-piece white unstitched cloth worn by those undertaking the obligatory pilgrimage for every financially able Muslim, while women wear traditional stitched clothes with their faces uncovered. Labbaik Echoes, Hearts Turn To Kaaba As Millions Gather In



Makkah For Hajj 2026 Muslim pilgrims move between the hills of Safa and Marwa during Umrah at the Grand Mosque complex in Saudi Arabia's holy city of Makkah on May 21, 2026, ahead of the annual Hajj pilgrimage. (AFP) Despite the war situation in West Asia, the flow of pilgrims to the holy sites remains steady, although flight operations from some regional and international destinations have faced disruptions. An

official told ETV Bharat that the flight hiccups have disturbed some pilgrimage visits, but the elaborate arrangements on the ground offset the uneasiness caused to the affected pilgrims. Every year, more than two million pilgrims arrive at the holy sites to participate in the annual pilgrimage that signifies sacrifice, devotion, and belief. Labbaik Echoes, Hearts Turn To Kaaba As Millions Gather In Makkah For Hajj 2026 Muslims pray at holy

Kaaba in Saudi Arabia ahead of Hajj 2026 (ETV Bharat) Dr Saleh bin Abdullah bin Humaid, who leads prayers at the Grand Mosque and advises the royalty on religious affairs, boasted of the kingdom's Hajj experience as "a global model for serving pilgrims in line with sustainable humanitarian and national values." He noted that this was reflected in the culture of excellence and responsibility demonstrated by personnel working across the Hajj and Umrah system, embodying the values of Saudi society. "The service to the pilgrims is in tune with the enduring principles of generosity, care, and respect throughout their journey from their arrival in the Kingdom until their departure," he said.

# India's diplomacy needs a new strategic playbook



On May 11, 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking at a public event in Hyderabad, asked 1.4 billion Indians to carpool, work from home, and stop buying gold. The image is striking. Riding high on a historic electoral sweep in West Bengal after 46 years, a landslide victory in Assam, and continuing on the path of quietly increasing vote share in Kerala, the Prime Minister is in a position of rare domestic strength. He can now appeal to citizens to conserve cooking oil and cut back on foreign travel without the political cushioning. But this is a moment of exposure where foreign policy has a bearing on domestic economic realities.

Opinion: India's foreign policy faces tougher tests ahead

Venezuela's turmoil, India's tightrope—why New Delhi must put interests before impulses

Opinion: Rise of Plurilateralism — A quiet revolution in global governance

Has India's strategic ambiguity stopped being a diplomatic asset and quietly become a liability? Diplomatic Asset

A recent US-based think tank's report observed that India resists binding commitments that subordinate its autonomy. This worked for India for decades, allowing it to maintain relationships with Washington, Moscow, and Tehran simultaneously. This was an achievement that even big powers could not replicate. Strategic autonomy was seen as a reasonable stance for a pluralist democracy operating on its own terms. But now this is being tested by circumstances that do not wait for principled positions. The Council on Foreign Relations report comes at a time when the world is facing several crises simultaneously. The Russia-Ukraine war has entered its fourth year, while the Israel-Gaza conflict has dragged into its third. In addition, 2026 has brought the US-Iran conflict, which has shut the Strait of Hormuz to global shipping. For India, the consequences have been grave. The rupee has fallen to a record low of 95.63 against the US

dollar. Brent crude has risen sharply, with India holding roughly 60 days of crude oil stock. Moody's has slashed India's growth forecast to 6 per cent. Strategic autonomy was built for a more flexible world. In 2026, India is balancing ties with Moscow, Washington, and Tehran as geopolitical divisions deepen

Changing Geopolitics Strategic autonomy was designed to work for a world with some room to breathe. The world in 2026 has very little. India is dependent on Moscow, Washington, and Tehran, all of which are currently standing at opposite ends of the geopolitical spectrum. India imports \$134.7 billion of crude petroleum. Roughly 45 per cent of those come from the Strait of Hormuz. When the supply shock hit, India secured Russian crude under the US waiver and negotiated direct transit rights from Tehran.

Under Operation Sankalp, the Indian Navy evacuated India-flagged LPG and oil tankers. That was a quiet, effective diplomacy. However, the American asterisk struck. India does not want to antagonise the US. And the US blockaded the Strait of Hormuz to arm-twist Iran. India realised that it was deeply reliant on a region it could not influence! New Delhi has been in strategic stress with the US since the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack. India launched Operation Sindoor, demonstrating real military capability and political resolve. However, US President Donald Trump repeatedly claimed the credit for the ceasefire between the two countries, much to India's irritation. Pakistan, on the other hand, rather than being diplomatically isolated, expanded its regional footprint. It has been playing a role in US-Iran mediation efforts.

Binding Alliances While India has deepened its security ties with the US over the last decade, it does not want to form binding alliances. Pakistan, on the other hand, has seen ups and downs in its relationship with Washington. However,

over the last year, it has nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, joined his Board of Peace and launched a collaboration with his World Liberty Financial crypto platform. India today aims to be an indispensable voice of the Global South. It has a strong government at the Centre with a clear domestic 95.63 against the US dollar. Brent crude has risen sharply, with India holding roughly 60 days of crude oil stock. Moody's has slashed India's growth forecast to 6 per cent. Strategic autonomy was built for a more flexible world. In 2026, India is balancing ties with Moscow, Washington, and Tehran as geopolitical divisions deepen

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particularly alarming. Invading Editorial Domain The proposed rules blur the distinction between professional news organisations and independent digital creators. By expanding the definition of "publishers" and bringing a wide range of content creators under regulatory scrutiny, the state effectively extends its influence into the editorial domain. This raises a fundamental question: who gets to decide what qualifies as news? When journalists begin to self-censor, editors hesitate before publishing, when editors hesitate before publishing, when citizens weigh the risks of expressing dissent, freedom of speech does not disappear dramatically. It erodes q

The question, therefore, is not just about individual provisions. It is about the kind of digital democracy India seeks to build. A democratic society cannot function on conditional speech. Freedom of expression is not merely a legal sorship, but something more insidious—a chilling effect. When journalists begin to self-censor, when editors hesitate before publishing, when citizens weigh the risks of expressing dissent, freedom of speech does not disappear dramatically. It erodes q

This is the true danger of the 2026 IT Rules. They do not silence voices directly; they create conditions in which silence becomes the safer choice. Unaccountable Censorship Another critical dimension of these amendments is the outsourcing of regulatory enforcement to platforms and, by extension, to algorithms. Automated systems, designed to detect and flag problematic content, are inherently ill-equipped to interpret nuance, satire, or context. In a high-pressure compliance environment, these systems will default to caution, disproportionately targeting content that falls into grey areas.

This leads to a new form of censorship—one that is invisible, unaccountable, and difficult to challenge. Content may vanish without explanation. Appeals may be delayed or ineffective. The process becomes opaque, leaving both creators and audiences in the dark. Such a system fundamentally alters the public sphere. It replaces deliberation with discretion, and accountability with opacity. Supporters of the amendments may argue that all rights are subject to reasonable restrictions. This is true. But the principle of reasonableness demands proportionality, transparency, and oversight. The current framework, however, appears to tilt heavily towards executive control, with limited safeguards against misuse. The absence of robust judicial oversight in content regulation is particularly concerning. Decisions that affect fundamental rights should not rest solely within executive mechanisms or be delegated to

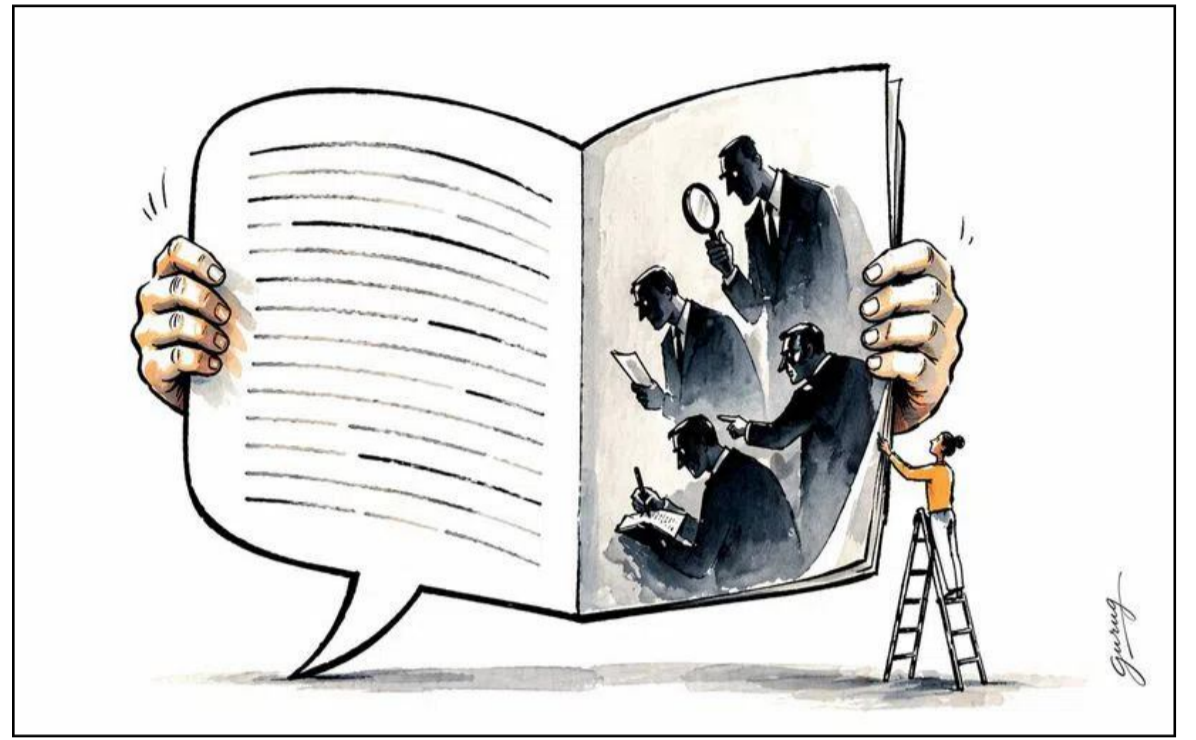
At a time when democracies across the world are grappling with misinformation, artificial intelligence, and the rapid evolution of digital ecosystems, India stands at a critical crossroads. The proposed amendments to the Information Technology Rules, 2026, are being framed as a necessary response to emerging technological threats. But beneath the language of regulation and responsibility lies a deeper, more troubling shift—one that could fundamentally alter the relationship between the state, the press, and the citizen. Opinion: The vulnerability and necessity of Free Speech

Opinion: Free(ing) Thought This is no longer just about governing digital platforms. It is about redefining the boundaries of speech itself. The government argues that the new rules are essential to curb misinformation, deepfakes, and harmful online content. On the surface, this objective appears both reasonable and necessary. The digital age has indeed complicated the idea of truth, and the proliferation of synthetic media poses genuine risks. However, the tools proposed to address these challenges risk creating a system in which the cure may prove more damaging than the disease.

Coercive Compliance One of the most concerning provisions is the imposition of an extremely narrow compliance window—reportedly as short as three hours—for content takedown. Such a mandate transforms platforms from neutral intermediaries into anxious enforcers. Faced with the threat of legal liability, they are unlikely to deliberate or verify. Instead, they will remove content first and ask questions later. This is not regulation. It is coercive compliance. In such an environment, the logic of survival will inevitably override the principles of free expression. Platforms will err on the side of caution, leading to widespread over-censorship. Content that is critical, investigative, or even mildly controversial may be taken down—not because it is unlawful, but because it is risky. For independent journalism, this shift is

particularly alarming. Invading Editorial Domain The proposed rules blur the distinction between professional news organisations and independent digital creators. By expanding the definition of "publishers" and bringing a wide range of content creators under regulatory scrutiny, the state effectively extends its influence into the editorial domain. This raises a fundamental question: who gets to decide what qualifies as news? When journalists begin to self-censor, editors hesitate before publishing, when editors hesitate before publishing, when citizens weigh the risks of expressing dissent, freedom of speech does not disappear dramatically. It erodes q

# The 2026 IT rules quietly threaten India's democratic voice



At a time when democracies across the world are grappling with misinformation, artificial intelligence, and the rapid evolution of digital ecosystems, India stands at a critical crossroads. The proposed amendments to the Information Technology Rules, 2026, are being framed as a necessary response to emerging technological threats. But beneath the language of regulation and responsibility lies a deeper, more troubling shift—one that could fundamentally alter the relationship between the state, the press, and the citizen. Opinion: The vulnerability and necessity of Free Speech

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Coercive Compliance One of the most concerning provisions is the imposition of an extremely narrow compliance window—reportedly as short as three hours—for content takedown. Such a mandate transforms platforms from neutral intermediaries into anxious enforcers. Faced with the threat of legal liability, they are unlikely to deliberate or verify. Instead, they will remove content first and ask questions later. This is not regulation. It is coercive compliance. In such an environment, the logic of survival will inevitably override the principles of free expression. Platforms will err on the side of caution, leading to widespread over-censorship. Content that is critical, investigative, or even mildly controversial may be taken down—not because it is unlawful, but because it is risky. For independent journalism, this shift is

particularly alarming. Invading Editorial Domain The proposed rules blur the distinction between professional news organisations and independent digital creators. By expanding the definition of "publishers" and bringing a wide range of content creators under regulatory scrutiny, the state effectively extends its influence into the editorial domain. This raises a fundamental question: who gets to decide what qualifies as news? When journalists begin to self-censor, editors hesitate before publishing, when editors hesitate before publishing, when citizens weigh the risks of expressing dissent, freedom of speech does not disappear dramatically. It erodes q

This is the true danger of the 2026 IT Rules. They do not silence voices directly; they create conditions in which silence becomes the safer choice. Unaccountable Censorship Another critical dimension of these amendments is the outsourcing of regulatory enforcement to platforms and, by extension, to algorithms. Automated systems, designed to detect and flag problematic content, are inherently ill-equipped to interpret nuance, satire, or context. In a high-pressure compliance environment, these systems will default to caution, disproportionately targeting content that falls into grey areas.

This leads to a new form of censorship—one that is invisible, unaccountable, and difficult to challenge. Content may vanish without explanation. Appeals may be delayed or ineffective. The process becomes opaque, leaving both creators and audiences in the dark. Such a system fundamentally alters the public sphere. It replaces deliberation with discretion, and accountability with opacity. Supporters of the amendments may argue that all rights are subject to reasonable restrictions. This is true. But the principle of reasonableness demands proportionality, transparency, and oversight. The current framework, however, appears to tilt heavily towards executive control, with limited safeguards against misuse. The absence of robust judicial oversight in content regulation is particularly concerning. Decisions that affect fundamental rights should not rest solely within executive mechanisms or be delegated to

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private platforms under pressure. Without independent checks and balances, the potential for arbitrary action increases significantly.

It is also important to situate these developments within a broader trajectory. Over the past decade, there has been a gradual but discernible expansion of state influence over digital spaces. From intermediary guidelines to data governance frameworks, the direction has consistently pointed towards greater control. The 2026 amendments appear to be another step along this path.

Digital Democracy The question, therefore, is not just about individual provisions. It is about the kind of digital democracy India seeks to build. A democratic society cannot function on conditional speech. Freedom of expression is not merely a legal guarantee; it is the foundation upon which public discourse rests. It enables citizens to question authority, journalists to hold power accountable, and societies to evolve through debate.

Yes, misinformation must be addressed. Yes, technological harms must be mitigated. But these objectives must be pursued without compromising the core values that define a democracy.

The challenge lies in striking a balance—one that protects both truth and freedom. This requires a regulatory framework that is transparent, proportionate, and subject to independent oversight. It requires trust in citizens, not suspicion of them. Most importantly, it requires a digital ecosystem where speech is constantly monitored, journalism is perpetually constricted, and citizens are subtly discouraged from speaking freely. That is not regulation. That is restraint. And history has shown, time and again, that when speech is placed under watch, democracy itself begins to fade from view.

## Defending Champions To Play GT In Qualifier One

Exceptional fifties from Ishan Kishan, Abhishek Sharma and Heinrich Klaasen and a fine bowling spell from Eshan Malinga helped Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) beat Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) by 55 runs at Hyderabad on Friday.

Despite this loss, RCB finished at the top of the table with nine wins and five losses, with 18 points. They have sealed the Qualifier one clash with the Gujarat Titans (GT), who are also placed second with 18 points. SRH also finished at third with the same points, with nine wins and five losses and will be playing the eliminator. In the chase of 256 runs, Venkatesh Iyer started with fiery intent, smashing the SRH skipper Pat Cummins for a four and a six. Venkatesh kept going, smashing the Aussie skipper again for a four in the third over, while Virat also got a couple of fours. A total of 15 runs came from the over. In the fourth over, Venkatesh smashed a fellow Madhya Pradesh spinner for three sixes and a four, bringing up the 50-run mark in 3.4 overs. Eshan ended the 60-run stand, removing Venkatesh for 44 in 19 balls, with four boundaries and four sixes. RCB was 60/1 in 4.3 overs. In the next over, Sakib Hussain got the dream wicket of Virat for 11-ball 15, with two fours, caught by Smaran Ravichandran at covers. RCB sunk to 74/2 in 5.5 overs. Skipper Rajat Patidar and Devdutt Padikkal tried to put on a partnership, but Eshan removed Padikkal with a fine catch from Abhishek at midwicket for 14-ball 21, with two fours and a six. RCB was 94/4 in 8.5 overs. RCB reached the 100-run mark in 10 overs, with skipper Patidar and Krunal Pandya at the crease. SRH bowlers contained the power-packed duo with their



bowling, with RCB reaching only 149/3 in 15 overs, with Rajat (31) and Krunal (32) unbeaten. Patidar brought up his fourth fifty of the tournament in 37 balls, with six fours. The 84-run stand between him and Krunal ended as Travis Head removed him for a 39-ball 56, with six fours and a six. RCB was 178/4 in 18.2 overs. RCB ended their chase at 200/4, with Tim David (15\*) and Krunal Pandya (41\*) unbeaten. Eshan Malinga (2/33) was sensational for SRH, as their pick of the bowlers. Sakib Hussain (1/31 in four overs) and Travis Head (1/7) were also among the wickets. Earlier, half-centuries from Ishan Kishan, Heinrich Klaasen and Abhishek Sharma helped Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) to reach 255/4 in 20 overs. After SRH won the toss and opted to bat first, openers Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma started off by punishing Bhuvneshwar Kumar, the Orange Cap holder, with Head hitting a four and Abhishek smashing him for a maximum over long-off. The opening over yielded 13 runs. Abhishek, who had scored just 14 runs off 11 balls against Bhuvneshwar before this match, continued to maintain the upper hand in this meeting, taking him down for two fours to start the third over. Head tried to dominate Rasikh Salam Dar in the fourth over with three boundaries in the first

four balls, but the bowler managed to have the last laugh, sending the Aussie back to the pavilion with a scorching yorker that uprooted his off-stump. Head made 26 in 16 balls, with five fours. SRH was 45/1 in four overs. SRH reached the 50-run mark in 4.5 overs. Southpaws Abhishek and Ishan Kishan continued to make merry, pumping Rasikh for a boundary each and ending the powerplay phase at 63/1 in six overs, with Abhishek (26\*) and Kishan (8\*) unbeaten. In the next over, Abhishek got a lifeline as after smashing Suyash Sharma for a six, he was caught on the fourth ball by Jordan Cox near the boundary, but the fielder signalled a six, with his foot having touched the rope already while taking the catch. Abhishek made RCB pay in the next over, hitting Romario Shepherd for a couple of sixes and a four, bringing up his half-century in 20 balls, with three fours and five sixes. The next over saw the pairing of Suyash and Jordan redeeming themselves, securing the wicket of Abhishek for 56 in 22 balls, with three fours and five sixes. SRH was 97/2 in 8.2 overs. At the end of 10 overs, SRH was 116/2, with Heinrich Klaasen (2\*) and Ishan (27\*) unbeaten. Just when RCB held pressure for the next two overs, giving away just eight and five runs respectively,

Josh Hazlewood was hit for three sixes and a four, all of them by Klaasen. That, combined with three wides, made it a 27-run over. SRH crossed the 150-run mark in 12.5 overs, and the duo brought their 50-run stand in 26 balls. SRH was 156/2 in 13 overs, with Klaasen (28\*) and Ishan (38\*) unbeaten. Ishan-Klaasen continued to make merry against pace and spin alike, with the former reaching his sixth fifty of the season in 31 balls, with four boundaries and two sixes. At the end of 15 overs, SRH was 189/2, with taken down for 18 runs, including two fours and a six by the duo. Klaasen (47\*) and Ishan (50\*) were unbeaten. The duo reached the 100-run partnership in 42 balls. SRH reached the 200-run mark in 15.2 overs. Rasikh continued to leak runs, taken down for 20 runs in the next, including two fours and a six by Ishan. On the final ball, Klaasen tapped to reach his sixth fifty of the tournament in 23 balls, with two fours and five sixes. Krunal broke the 113-run partnership, getting fine assistance from Venkatesh Iyer. Klaasen was gone for 51 in 24 balls, with two fours and five sixes. SRH was 210/3 in 16.2 overs. Even after that, Nitish Kumar Reddy hit Krunal for two sixes, ending the 17th over at 225/3. SRH's innings ended at 255/4, with Ishan (79 in 46 balls, with eight fours and three sixes) taken on the final ball. Nitish (29\* in 12 balls, with a four and three sixes) stayed unbeaten. Bhuvneshwar (0/51) and Hazlewood (0/55) had poor four-over quotas without any wickets. Rasikh Salam (2/52), Suyash Sharma (1/36 in three overs), and Krunal (1/24 in two overs) were among the wickets.

Brief Scores: SRH:

## USISPF Welcomes Settlement Of Adani Cases; Will Boost Indo US Business Ties

Volatility has shot up in the financial markets due to the ongoing West Asia conflict, but the Indian bourses have the capacity to "absorb different types of shocks", SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Monday. When there is a crisis in one part of the world, it also impacts the rest of the globe, Pandey told reporters here on the sidelines of the Regional Investors Seminar for Awareness. "Due to the prevailing conflict in West Asia, the oil supply chain and its prices were affected in the rest of the world. All the economies have been affected by this and obviously, there are inflationary risks. Besides, the spillover effect and second-order effect will also come in," he said. "However, the advantages of a resilient Indian market are that it is able to absorb different types of shocks, and when these end, the market again resumes its normal trajectory," Pandey said. He also added that there have been some foreign portfolio investment outflows since September 2024, but domestic investors have "retained their confidence". Asked how SEBI is addressing



threats from AI tools, Pandey said, "Most of the recent concerns around such tools are related to cybersecurity. As you know, markets rely heavily on software systems, and if cybersecurity is threatened or vulnerabilities are found in the software, there is a risk of attacks. If such attacks are successful, they can pose a serious threat to market integrity." "Therefore, we have to proactively ensure that all the software we deploy, including that provided by third-party vendors, is well protected. There has to be aggressive patch man-

agement and extensive use of conventional tools to identify vulnerabilities," the SEBI chief said. SEBI is using a mechanism to ensure that the market, market ecosystem, and intermediaries are protected from any cyber risk, he asserted. Pandey also said that 'finfluencers', who give financial and stock-related advice, must first register themselves with SEBI. The market regulator has already removed 1.4 lakh such content from various social media platforms, he said. "For creating awareness among people, SEBI has

launched the project 'Jagruk'. Under this, we are going to make our engagement and investor awareness a 360-degree, multilingual, multi-agency and multimedia," Pandey said. Addressing investors at the event, he said municipal bonds have been the cornerstone of city-level development, enabling urban raise long-term funds for essential projects such as water supply, sanitation, transport and waste management. municipal bonds immediately," he stated. Pandey also said that SEBI will open its office in Bhubaneswar soon.

## RBI Announces Record Rs 2.87 lakh Cr Dividend To Govt Amid West Asia Conflict



The Reserve Bank on Friday announced a record dividend of Rs 2.87 lakh crore to the government for the year ended March 2025, providing a financial boost for the exchequer amid rising import bills and supply chain disruptions due to the West Asia conflict. The dividend is 6.7 per cent higher than Rs 2.69 lakh crore for the 2024-25 fiscal year. In a statement, the RBI said its net income, before risk provision and transfer to statutory funds, aggregated Rs 3.96 lakh crore in FY26 as against Rs 3.13 lakh crore in FY25. "The balance sheet of the Bank expanded by 20.61 per cent to Rs 91,97,121.08 crore as on March 31, 2026," the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said. The RBI's Central Board of Directors, at its meeting, reviewed the global and domestic economic

scenario, including risks to the outlook, and also approved the dividend. According to the statement, the revised Economic Capital Framework (ECF) provides flexibility to maintain the Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB) between the range of 4.5 per cent and 7.5 per cent of the size of the balance sheet. "Taking into consideration the current macro-economic factors, financial performance of the Bank and maintenance of appropriate risk buffers, the Central Board decided to transfer Rs 1,09,379.64 crore towards the CRB for FY 2025-26 as against Rs 44,861.70 crore in the previous year," it said. The CRB at 6.5 per cent of the size of the RBI balance sheet, compared to 7.5 per cent for 2024-25. The Central Board approved the transfer of Rs

2,86,588.46 crore to the Central Government for the accounting year 2025-26," the RBI said. The 623rd meeting of the central board was held under the Chairmanship of Governor Sanjay Malhotra. Deputy governors Swaminathan J, Poonam Gupta, Nagaraju Ma ddirala, Secretary, Department of Financial Services; Marathe, Revathy Iyer, Sachin Chaturvedi, Anand Gopal Mahindra, Venu Srinivasan and Pankaj Ramanbhai Patel, also attended the meeting. Amid the West Asia crisis, energy prices as well as those of fertilisers and other commodities have shot up, posing financial challenges. The rupee has also depreciated steeply, a scenario that makes imports costlier. India meets about 88 per cent of its crude oil requirements through

imports. For the week ended May 15, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 6.483 billion to USD 545,904 billion, the central bank's data showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves. Value of gold reserves also declined by USD 1.536 billion to USD 119.317 billion during the week, the RBI said. The special drawing rights (SDRs) were down by USD 49 million to USD 18.824 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by USD 25 million to USD 4.85 billion at the end of the reporting week, according to the apex bank's data.

## India's young boxers shine at Asian U15 & U17 championships with multiple wins

Hyderabad: India's young boxers delivered another day of impressive performances at the Asian Boxing U15 & U17 Championships 2026, registering multiple victories across the Under-15 and Under-17 categories in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

In the Under-15 boys' competition, Nong poknganba Meitei Oina (46kg) secured a convincing 5:0 victory over Kazakhstan's Abdurakhman Vushanlo, while Parshant (49kg) mirrored the result with a dominant 5:0 win against Bakdaulet Akhmet. Mohd Yasser (58kg) stood out with a commanding performance, sealing his bout via RSC (Referee Stopped Contest) in the first round against Kyrgyzstan's Akbarzhan Nabidzhanov. Nivesh Pal (54kg) also impressed with a 5:0 victory over Kazakhstan's Adilet Galiyev, while Ranveer (66kg) pro-



gressed after a walkover against Chinese Taipei's Ying-Chieh Chen. In other Under-15 bouts, Lilmani Singh Lukram (61kg) lost via RSC in the third round to Uzbekistan's Azizbek Egamberganov, and Mehul Rana (70kg) suffered a first-round RSC defeat against Bauyrzhan. In the Under-17 boys' evening session, Nivesh Pal (54kg) continued his

strong form with another 5:0 victory over Adilet Galiyev of Kazakhstan. Ranveer (66kg) registered a win by ABD (Abandonment) against Chinese Taipei's Ying-Chieh Chen. Lakshay Phogat (75kg) delivered a dominant performance, clinching a first-round RSC victory against Sri Lanka's Ranc higo dagama Arach chila. However, Pradeep (63kg) and Hanjra

Jaideep Singh (80kg) faced tough opponents and lost 0:5 against Uzbekistan's Rushen Saydullaev and Kazakhstan's Alibek Alpamys, respectively. With a mix of dominant wins and hard-fought bouts, the Indian contingent continues to showcase strong depth and promising talent across age groups as the championships progress in Tashkent.

## Kangana Ranaut Reacts To Secret Wedding Rumours After Her Mangalsutra Look Goes Viral

Actor-politician Kangana Ranaut has finally reacted to the rumours surrounding her "secret marriage" after videos of her wearing a mangalsutra and green bangles went viral on social media. The videos sparked speculation among fans, with many wondering if the actor had tied the knot secretly. The buzz began after Kangana was recently spotted in a pink salwar suit paired with traditional green bangles and a mangalsutra while stepping out of a building. Surrounded by security personnel, the actor quickly caught everyone's attention, and social media users started guessing if she had secretly gotten married. Now, Kangana has cleared the air herself. Taking to her Instagram Story on Friday, the actor shared a video carrying the headline: "Is Kangana Ranaut secretly married? The actor was spotted with a mangalsutra and green bangles." Reacting to the rumours, Kangana explained that the look was simply for one of her upcoming film shoots. Kangana Ranaut Reacts To Secret Wedding Rumours After Her Mangalsutra Look Goes Viral (Photo: Kangana's IG Story)



She wrote, "I am filming in and around the city every single day, someone clicked this random picture with character make-up, and now I am getting so many phone calls, but what is the big deal about the married woman look? Actors play all kinds of roles. I won't marry secretly, I promise." Kangana also shared another update from her shoot and

spoke about working in extreme summer heat conditions. The actor, who has been filming outdoors, said that people should stop complaining about the heat wave while many professionals continue working under difficult conditions. She wrote, "News anchors from their AC studios are complaining about the

temperature and heat wave outside, what about those like us who are filming outdoors with loads of added lights and enclosed spaces, ha ha stop complaining guys, life is great for as long as it's challenging, you feel alive if it's easy and predictable it's like death, happy summer." On the work front, Kangana

recently completed 20 years in the film industry. She made her Bollywood debut at the age of 18 with Gangster and went on to become one of the industry's most talked-about stars. She was last seen in Emergency, which also marked her solo directorial debut. Earlier, she had co-directed Manikarnika: The

## Dhurandhar - Raw & Undekha, System, Ladies First, And More To Watch



From action-packed thrillers and courtroom dramas to romantic comedies and reality shows, this weekend's OTT lineup has something for every kind of viewer. Popular streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Sony LIV and JioHotstar are bringing a fresh mix of entertainment with titles like Dhurandhar (Raw & Undekha), System, Ladies First and more. Whether you enjoy suspense, romance, comedy or luxury-filled reality drama, here are the top OTT releases to watch this weekend. Netflix Set in Dubai, this reality series gives a glimpse into the lavish lives of rich Indian expats living in the city. Adding more glamour and entertainment, Karan Kundra and

Tejasswi Prakash will also be part of the show.

The series will showcase the world of billionaire businessmen, celebrities, and socialites, filled with luxury, glamorous parties, personal secrets, relationship drama, and shifting friendships as they deal with Dubai's elite social circle. The blockbuster's first part has been released on Netflix and JioHotstar. This version includes three extra minutes of action scenes that were not shown in theatres. Meanwhile, the sequel, which focuses on Jaskirat Singh Rangji's (Ranveer Singh) story, is set to premiere digitally next month.

Directed by Aditya Dhar, Dhurandhar is an action thriller about Hamza Ali Mazar

(Ranveer Singh), a spy sent on an undercover mission into Karachi's underworld. As part of the Dhurandhar operation, he enters dangerous terror networks and faces gangsters, an ISI agent, and a corrupt police officer. Inspired by true events, the film is packed with gripping action and intense moments that keep viewers hooked. This courtroom thriller follows two women, Neha Rajvansh (Sonakshi Sinha), an ambitious public prosecutor, and Sarika Rawat (Jyotika), a courtroom stenographer, who come together to fight against the system and uncover hidden truths.

As they take on powerful people and expose deep-rooted injustice, Neha also faces difficult

choices between protecting her privileged position and standing up against the very system that gave her power. Set in Adoor, Kerala, this Malayalam romantic comedy follows Amrutharaj (Sharaf U Dheen), a bachelor living in a noisy all-male household, who falls in love with Sneha (Kalyani Panicker). Despite facing interfaith challenges, the couple convinced their families and got married. However, the romance soon turns stressful as domestic responsibilities, family interference, and everyday pressures begin to affect their relationship. The film explores the ups and downs of married life with a mix of comedy, emotions, and family drama.

## Netizens Say Ananya & Lakshya's Film Understands Modern Relationships Better Than Recent Romances



Ananya Panday and Lakshya's romantic drama Chand Mera Dil finally hit theatres today, May 22, and the film has opened to positive reactions from audiences. Directed by Vivek Soni, the movie is being praised for its emotional storytelling, music, and the chemistry between the lead pair. Soon after the first shows ended, social media platform X was flooded with reactions from moviegoers. Many viewers called the film a refreshing romantic drama that connects well with today's generation and modern rela-

tionships. While a section of the audience felt the second half could have been stronger, most people still recommended the film for its emotional impact and performances. One user wrote, "Looks like #ChandMeraDil understands modern relationships better than most recent Bollywood romances." Another viewer, who gave the film four stars, praised the lead actors and wrote, "Soulful romantic film that truly connects. #Lakshya is outstanding in an intense romantic role while #AnanyaP

anday delivers one of her best performances yet. Beautiful music, strong emotions, heartfelt chemistry make this a pure big-screen experience." Several users also spoke about the emotional turn the film takes in the latter half. A tweet read, "Seems like #ChandMeraDil starts as 'aww cute romance' and ends with audiences staring at the theatre ceiling emotionally damaged. That shift from sweetness to emotional intensity is what's making people connect with it." The performances of Ananya Panday

and Lakshya have especially received appreciation online. Fans feel the two actors have delivered sincere performances that add depth to the emotional love story. Talking about the box office, Chand Mera Dil has shown a decent start on its opening day. According to early estimates by industry tracker Sacnilk, the film has so far earned Rs 0.78 crore net in India across 2,309 shows by the morning. The film reportedly recorded 6.62 per cent overall Hindi occupancy in the morning shows.

## Arvind Kejriwal Lifted Raghav Chadha On Shoulders At His Wedding With Parineeti Chopra



Actor Parineeti Chopra and politician Raghav Chadha kept their 2023 wedding private, but new details from the grand celebration are now grabbing attention online. Singer and Vedic priest Ankit Batra, who conducted the couple's wedding rituals, opened up about what happened behind closed doors during the lavish ceremony in Udaipur. Sharing memories from the wedding on his YouTube channel, Ankit said the event looked royal from the outside, but inside, privacy rules were extremely strict. According to him, security arrangements at the Leela Palace Udaipur were so tight that guests were not allowed to keep any personal photos or videos from the ceremony. Talking about the atmosphere, he said, "The wedding day at the Leela Palace, Udaipur. The security was

insane." He further revealed that even family members had to follow the no-photo rule. One incident that surprised many involved Madhu Chopra, the mother of actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas. Ankit claimed she was requested to remove pictures clicked on her phone during the wedding functions. "It was majestic, but inside it was a fortress. No photos, no videos. Even Priyanka Chopra's mom was asked to delete photos she had taken on her phone," he recalled, adding that the families wanted the ceremony to remain completely personal and sacred. The priest also remembered how emotional the wedding rituals were for the bride and groom. He said the pheras lasted around one hour and twenty minutes and felt more meaningful than formal. "It wasn't just chanting, it was a con-

versation," he shared. Another moment that stayed with Ankit was seeing political leaders enjoying the wedding like close friends rather than guests. He spoke about former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann celebrating enthusiastically with the groom's side. "I looked out and saw Bhagwant Mann ji and Arvind Kejriwal ji. They weren't just guests, they were like family, dancing and carrying Raghav ji on their shoulders," he said. Ankit also revealed that Parineeti planned a heartfelt surprise for her husband. The actor reportedly recorded a special song for Raghav, which played as she made her bridal entry. "It was a surprise for him too," the priest added. Parineeti and Raghav married in September 2023 after dat-