

PNG process accelerated in the state; Continuous review underway for fertilizer availability – CM Fadnavis

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Mumbai, Date 27: In the wake of the global crisis, India has implemented a balanced and effective policy, and the central government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has an important role in this, said Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. As per the instructions of the central government, PNG (piped distribution) distribution is being accelerated in Maharashtra during this crisis and the availability of fertilizers is being reviewed continuously, he said. The meeting of the Chief Ministers of various states, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was held through a video conference.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis also participated in this meeting. At that time, Chief Minister Fadnavis presented issues on behalf of Maharashtra. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Defense Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Cabinet Secretary as well as Chief Ministers of various states and Lieutenant Governors of Union Territories were present on this occasion. Chief Secretary Rajesh Agarwal, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Dr. Shrikar Pardeshi were present at the meeting. Chief Minister Fadnavis thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the decisions taken to ensure that the citizens of the country are not adversely affected during the current global crisis



caused by the war situation in the West Asian continent. While giving information about the measures implemented by the Maharashtra government at present, Chief Minister Fadnavis said that there is sufficient availability of fertilizers in the state and it is being continuously reviewed. Necessary precautions are being taken to ensure that farmers do not face

any problem in the upcoming Kharif season. Along with this, strict action is being taken to prevent black marketing and hoarding. Work is underway to link agriculture-related matters with the 'Agristack' system, which will curb malpractices. He also said that meetings are being held continuously to monitor the situation closely. Stating that



the state government will fully follow all the instructions of the central government, Chief Minister Fadnavis said that the distribution of PNG (Piped Natural Gas) has been accelerated and the process is being simplified through 'Ease of Doing Business'. He also expressed confidence that the state government will effectively discharge its responsibility

under the leadership of the central government in this time of crisis. Chief Minister Fadnavis said that this crisis has caused great disruption all over the world. A national emergency has been imposed in the Philippines and extensive travel restrictions have been imposed in Thailand. Sri Lanka has extended two public holidays a week, while Pakistan has

closed schools and offices and introduced 'work from home'. Countries like South Korea, New Zealand, Bangladesh and Egypt have also imposed various restrictions. However, India has managed to keep the situation relatively normal, he said. Mr. Fadnavis said that the reduction in excise duty by the central government in the wake of fuel price hike is a big relief for the common man. While petrol and diesel prices have increased by 20 to 30 percent in many countries of the world, India has not allowed the burden to fall on the citizens. He also clarified that the central government itself bore this financial burden in line with the principle of 'Nation First, India First'. He

also said that the changes made in the energy sector in the last eleven years are yielding great benefits today, saying that earlier fuel was imported from 27 countries, which has now been increased to 41 countries. Due to this, the risk of supply disruption has reduced. The emphasis on alternative sources like e-buses and solar energy is also proving helpful in this situation. The Chief Minister said that the supply of LPG is going smoothly and the positive results of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan are being seen. At this time, Union Defense Minister Rajnath Singh informed about the measures taken by the Central Government in the situation arising out of the war in the Middle East.

Wave of devotion of devotees at Karveer Niwasini Ambabai; Donations of 1 crore 40 lakh 61 thousand per month

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Kolhapur: Lakhs of devotees visit the Karveer Niwasini Ambabai temple, one of the three and a half Shakti Peethas, every year. These devotees offer generous donations to the goddess. This is measured from time to time by the Devasthan Committee. Recently, the donation box in the temple has been counted again. The counting of the donation boxes has once again revealed that there is a huge crowd of devotees coming to have darshan of the goddess. In the last one month, donations worth Rs 1 crore 40 lakh 61



thousand 865 have been collected in 12 donation boxes. The 12 donation boxes kept at various places in the temple were filled with the generosity of devotees. For this counting, which takes place every two to three months, 30 employees were working under strict

police security for the last four days. Every note and balance was counted under the supervision of CCTV cameras. Temple manager Mahadev Dinde said, "This donation of the devotees is their faith in the goddess. For transparency, all the processes have been carried out in an

official manner with all due care and security." In the Mojdadi, the maximum amount of Rs 33 lakh 10 thousand 941 was withdrawn from box number 2, while Rs 33 lakh 903 was withdrawn from box 11. There were also large amounts in boxes like box 7 (28

lakh 60 thousand 425), box 1 (27 lakh 14 thousand 256), box 12 (7 lakh 15 thousand 914). The remaining donations have been counted as Rs 8 (2 lakh 23 thousand 905), 5 (2 lakh 17 thousand 757), 6 (2 lakh 8 thousand 782), 3 (1 lakh 62 thousand 767), 4 (1 lakh 12 thousand 717), 10 (1 lakh 24 thousand 354) and 9 (1 lakh 9 thousand 144). Meanwhile, due to these donations in the donation boxes, the treasury of the goddess has been added, and the number of devotees is also increasing. Devotees also say that these donations are a testimony to the religious glory of Kolhapur.

Plane engine fails, full emergency declared and high alert; 161 IndiGo passengers die

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New Delhi: There was a commotion at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi on Saturday morning. A rush was started at the airport after information was received that an Indigo flight coming from Visakhapatnam to Delhi had a technical fault. A full emergency was declared on runway number 28 due to fear of engine failure of the plane. Fortunately, a major accident was averted due to the punctuality of the pilot and the vigilance of the airport administration. The plane made a full emergency landing very safely. As per the emergency protocol, Indigo flight 6E579 made a safe



landing on runway number 28 of the Indira Gandhi International Airport at 10:54 am. Fire brigade vehicles and ambulances were deployed at this time. The entire system was on alert to deal with any unfortunate incident. According to initial information, the plane had a technical fault. There were 161 passengers on this plane. These passengers narrowly escaped death. They returned from the brink of death. The Boeing 737-800

aircraft was entering Delhi airspace at 10:50 am when it reported a serious engine failure. According to aviation experts, in the event of an engine failure, there is a risk of the aircraft losing its balance. The hydraulic system may be affected. The pilot informed the ATC without wasting any time. After this, a full emergency was declared at the airport at 10:53 am. Runway number 28 was put on high alert.

Maharashtra will be built with world class healthcare facilities – CM Fadnavis

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Mumbai: The health system in the state is functioning from primary health facilities to referral services. The government is working through modern technology to make this system more capable and strong. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis expressed his intention to create a prosperous Maharashtra with world-class health facilities and appealed to companies in the health and pharmaceutical sectors to partner with the government. Chief Minister Fadnavis was speaking at a round table discussion organized by the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum with various pharmaceutical and health sector companies on the topic of 'Future-ready Healthcare and Skill

Development Ecosystem for India' on the occasion of the Pulse 2026 Medical Conference at the Geo World Center. The discussion was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Ajit Pawar, Medical Education Minister Hassan Mushrif, Minister of State for Medical Education Madhuri Misal, Principal Secretary, Industries Department P. Anbalgan, Secretary of the Medical Education Department Dheeraj Kumar, Commissioner Anil Bhandari, Chief Protocol Officer Rajesh Gawande etc. were present. During the discussion, Chief Minister Fadnavis answered various issues raised by the CEOs and Managing Directors of various companies. Global Capability Center in the pharmaceutical sector too Chief Minister Fadnavis said, Maharashtra has created the

capacity of Global Capability Center in many areas in the country. Now the government is focusing on creating a Global Capability Center in the pharmaceutical sector too. Stress and mental health have become very important in this hectic life. The government is working to create mental health treatment facilities in the state. Emphasis is being placed on research required in the pharmaceutical health sector and skill development for skilled manpower, quality medical education. For this, a platform will be created using artificial intelligence. 'Digital infrastructure' is being built in the health sector. A favorable policy is being created in the state for this. It is necessary to increase research in biology to successfully overcome the crises



of future diseases. Chief Minister Fadnavis also clarified that research in the form of PhD in new subjects will be promoted by encouraging this field. Chief Minister Fadnavis said, the government has a large amount of data related to health and medical education. By linking this data with artificial intelligence, it will be possible to take permanent measures on various problems related to the health

sector. A system is being created for early diagnosis of cancer and treatment facilities are being expanded. The state government will definitely provide significant support for research that creates effective, less expensive treatment methods for cancer. Partnership with medical and health sector companies The investment agreements signed at Davos also include investments in the health sector. This

will definitely strengthen the health system in the state. New technology is coming in medical education. A 'Unified Learning Platform' will be created by making full use of this technology. Maharashtra is making its mark in the wellness sector. Medical tourism is increasing in the state and the government is taking steps forward at a fast pace. The Chief Minister also clarified that the state government is ready

to partner with companies in this sector to work on new ideas in the medical and health sectors. The vaccine being developed for this disease will be used for a 'dengue free' state. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis also said that the government will provide necessary support to companies interested in investing in the pharmaceutical manufacturing and health sectors. The round table discussion was moderated by Nivedita Mehra, Managing Director of the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum. Principal Secretary of the Industries Department P. Anbalgan highlighted the government's policy on industry. Also, CIDCO Managing Director Vijay Singhal gave information regarding medicity and educity. The seminar was attended by Bhushan

Akshikar, Managing Director of GSK Company, Neerja Birla, Founder and Chairman of Aditya Birla Education Trust, Sanjay Murdeshwar, Regional President of Danehar India Company, Pushkar Kulkarni, Managing Director of Johnson & Johnson Company, Shripad Joshi, President of Revity India Life Sciences and Diagnostics Company in India, Vishwajit Kadam, MLA and Deputy Registrar of Bharati University, Prabhat Sinha, Head of Corporate Affairs of Takeda India, P. C. Sood of Hinduja Group, Avinash Phadke of Ajilas Diagnostic, President of Vishwakarma University Bharat Agarwal, Edwards Life Sciences Director (Government Affairs) Dr. Niranjan Pai, Chaitanya Saravate, Deputy Director of CSR Branch of Sanofi Company, Dr. Kavita Chaudhary, etc.

Dr. Vithalrao Vikhe Patil College of Engineering, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth Ink MoU to Boost Digital Agriculture in Ahilyanagar

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Ahilyanagar : In a significant step towards advancing smart and precision farming, Dr. Vithalrao Vikhe Patil College of Engineering (DVVPE) and Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth (MPKV), Rahuri, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote digital agriculture. The agreement focuses on fostering innovation in the agricultural sector by integrating advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, mechanization, and mechatronics. Through this collaboration, both

institutions aim to develop smart solutions that will benefit farmers and enhance agricultural productivity. As part of the MoU, several joint initiatives will be undertaken, including drone-based crop monitoring, IoT-enabled farm management systems, AI-driven decision support tools, and resource mapping. The partnership will also facilitate collaborative research, academic exchange, and specialized training programs. The agreement, valid for three years with provisions for renewal, emphasizes capacity building among students, faculty, and



farmers. Various initiatives such as workshops, hands-on training sessions, internships, and certificate courses in AI, Machine Learning, drone technology, IoT-based agriculture, and smart farming will be organized under this

collaboration. The MoU signing ceremony was held on March 23, 2026, at the auditorium of Dr. Annasaheb Shinde College of Agricultural Engineering and Technology in Rahuri. Vice-Chancellor of MPKV, Dr. Vilas

Kharche, presided over the event. In his address, he noted that the collaboration with DVVPE—an institution with over four decades of academic excellence—would lead to the development of technologies beneficial for

farmers, agricultural scientists, and professionals across both agriculture and engineering sectors. Prof. Sunil Kalhapure, Director (Technical) of the Dr. Vithalrao Vikhe Patil Foundation, highlighted the

institution's diverse educational ecosystem, encompassing engineering, agriculture, pharmacy, and medical streams, along with the global achievements of its alumni. Former Vice-Chancellor of Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth, Dr. V. M. Mayande, attended the event as the chief guest. The MoU was formally signed by Prof. Sunil Kalhapure on behalf of DVVP Foundation and Dr. P. S. Bodkhe, Director of Research at MPKV. The event witnessed the presence of several dignitaries, including Principal Dr. Ravindra Navthar, former

Dean Dr. H. G. More, Dr. Sachin Nalawade, Dr. Sunil Kadam, Dr. Ajit Laware, Dr. A. K. Patil, Dr. D. A. Vidhate, Dr. Kanif Markad, and Prof. M. A. Tamboli, among others. The initiative has been widely appreciated by Dr. P. M. Gaikwad, Dr. Sujay Vikhe Patil, and Chairman and State Water Resources Minister Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil of the Dr. Vithalrao Vikhe Patil Foundation. The collaboration is expected to bring transformative changes in the agricultural sector, paving the way for technology-driven farming and improved outcomes for farmers.

Kopergaon police bust inter-district gang

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Ahilyanagar: Are you in a hurry to get married? Then this incident in Kopergaon taluka of Ahilyanagar district will open your eyes. The Kopergaon taluka police have busted a high-profile gang that lures young men into a trap by showing them the lure of marriage and flees with jewelry and cash during the honeymoon period. Two young women, including a woman, have been arrested in this case. The police have also seized the looted goods from them. The other three are absconding and the police are searching for them. There is currently talk in Kopergaon that the bride was married and got married within two days. A young man from Rawanda in Kopergaon taluka was lured with marriage by some middlemen from Nashik. The marriage was negotiated between September 21, 2025 and October 31, 2025. The boy also happily agreed to the marriage. However, the poor groom had no idea that this marriage was not the beginning of happiness but a trap for fraud. Within two days of the



wedding, the new bride fled the house with gold and silver ornaments and cash. As soon as the groom realized that he had been cheated, he immediately reached the Kopergaon Taluka Police Station. A case was registered in this case on February 18, 2026. Under the guidance of Police Inspector Sandeep Koli, a team searched for the accused from the Adgaon Naka area of Nashik. The police laid a trap and arrested three people, Kashish Sukdev Bhalerao, Namrata Sukdev Bhalerao, and Bhumir Kiran Nikam. During thorough interrogation, they confessed to having conspired to arrange this fake marriage. The police have seized some of the gold and silver ornaments and cash worth Rs. 2,29,000 obtained by cheating from the accused. There is talk in the area that this

gang has duped many other young people in a similar way, and there is a possibility that some shocking information will come to light during the investigation. "While arranging a marriage, thoroughly investigate the person and his family. Do not blindly trust intermediaries. If such a fraud has occurred, contact the police immediately," has appealed to Police Inspector Sandeep Koli of Kopergaon Taluka Police Station. Under the guidance of Superintendent of Police Somnath Gharge, Additional Superintendent of Police Somnath Waghchaure, Deputy Superintendent of Police Amol Bharti, Inspector Sandeep Koli of Kopergaon Taluka Police Station and his team (Karkhele, Rahane, Valve, Gaware, Wagh, Darekar, Dhanad, Vetal) have taken this bold action.

CEO Vivek Gaikwad Honoured by CM Devendra Fadnavis in Mumbai for Administrative Excellence

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Hingoli : In recognition of outstanding administrative performance under the Maharashtra Government's ambitious '150 Days Sevakarmi Programme', Chief Executive Officer of Zilla Parishad Hingoli, Vivek Gaikwad, was felicitated by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis at a state-level ceremony held in Mumbai on Friday. The prestigious award is presented to select Zilla Parishads across the state for exemplary governance, with Hingoli district earning a notable position through its impactful administrative reforms and performance. During the 150-day special campaign, Zilla Parishad Hingoli prioritized transparency, efficiency, and speed in governance. A major focus was placed on clearing pending administrative matters within stipulated timelines, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of the



government machinery. Key initiatives included updating and publishing seniority lists across all cadres, expediting promotion processes to ensure justice for eligible employees, and accelerating direct recruitment to fill vacant posts. The administration also updated and authenticated roster records, ensuring transparency in reservation and service-related matters. Additionally, the process of compassionate appointments was successfully implemented, providing

timely support to affected families. These measures significantly enhanced accountability and trust within the administrative system. In line with capacity-building efforts, all officers and employees were registered on the Central Government's iGOT Karmayogi portal and encouraged to complete skill development courses. Each employee completed at least five training modules, resulting in improved efficiency and service orientation. The administration also focused on updating and digitizing primary and secondary service

books of all employees, making service records more accurate and accessible, thereby simplifying future administrative decision-making. Speaking on the occasion, CEO Vivek Gaikwad emphasized that the honour reflects the collective efforts of the entire Zilla Parishad team rather than an individual achievement. He credited the success to effective planning, inter-departmental coordination, disciplined time management, and a results-oriented approach. He further noted that the

contribution of officers, staff, and coordinated teamwork at all levels played a crucial role in achieving this milestone. Reaffirming commitment for the future, he stated that the administration will continue to deliver transparent, efficient, and citizen-centric services. This state-level recognition is expected to provide fresh direction and motivation to Zilla Parishad Hingoli, setting a benchmark of administrative excellence for other districts to follow.

Four mothers party for sexual pleasure, denial leads to death, cover story, actor Ashiram arrested

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News Network

Palghar: A 37-year-old married woman was stabbed to death in a building in Silver Park on Mira Road on Wednesday night. She was murdered in the third-floor flat where she was doing housework. TV actor Ashish Meshram is accused of murdering the woman. The accused, who fled after the murder, was arrested by Mira Road police from Visakhapatnam on Friday. Preliminary

investigation has revealed that Ashish took her life after she rejected his demand for sexual pleasure. Suman Kamble, a resident of Kashimira, had been doing housework in the 'Chandresh Arcade' building in Silver Park for the past few months. On Wednesday evening, she had gone to work as usual. At this time, a woman living next door saw her seriously injured at the door of the house where she was doing housework. She

called other citizens and admitted them to a nearby private hospital for treatment. However, Suman had already died before that. She was alone in the house when the attack took place. She was stabbed repeatedly on her neck, chest and stomach. According to Mira Road police, the accused was seen entering the society and leaving the society at a high speed. This indicates that the crime was a "premeditated conspiracy". The



accused, who is currently on transit remand, will be brought to the city by the end of this week and only then will the exact sequence of events become clear, the officials said. The

police also confirmed the news that the accused had earlier demanded sexual pleasure from the deceased woman, but she repeatedly rejected it. The flat where the murder

took place was previously inhabited by only Ashish's elder brother; but Ashish also started living there about a year and a half ago. According to the FIR, in January,

Ashish had called Suman's second son. He threatened to kill her if Suman stopped working for him or refused his sexual demands. At the same time, the son asked his mother about this. Finally, Suman openly told about the serious incident that had happened to him. She said that she had stopped working at his house because Ashish was demanding sexual pleasure from her. Hearing this, her son got angry. He went to his flat in search of Ashish;

but he did not find Ashish there. A few days later, when the boy saw Ashish in the Mira Road area, he beat Ashish severely and warned him to stay away from his mother. Ashish's elder brother then assured Suman that his brother was no longer living with him and so she should return to work in that house. On Wednesday night, when Suman went to their flat for work, Ashish entered the house and allegedly killed her.

Ashok Kharat's new scandal exposed, woman files complaint

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Nashik: Two more cases have been registered against Bhondubaba Ashok Kharat in Nashik, and a total of 10 cases have been registered against Kharat so far, eight of torture and two of fraud. Due to this, Kharat's foot is getting deeper day by day and the police investigation has gained momentum. A cloth shopkeeper has alleged that Ashok Kharat cheated him by promising him topaz and diamonds loaded with mantras to increase his business. The fraud is alleged to have been committed between December 2022 and March 19, 2026. The complainant gave Kharat a total of 3 gold rings (weighing 20 grams), 2 of his own and 1 of his wife, to Kharat. Kharat took a total of 2,62,000 in cash under the name of pebbles and rings. After reading the news of Kharat's arrest, when the complainant checked the rings, it was found that they were not made of gold but of yellow metal (copper) and after it was found that the pebbles in them were fake, he rushed to the police. It is coming to light in the



'SIT' investigation that Kharat has made shocking claims. 'I did not listen to my inner self. This led to this. It was part of a worship ritual. I did not go to any woman myself,' Kharat is understood to have claimed. Meanwhile, police sources have also clarified that Kharat's 'HIV' report is negative; also, Kharat's regular medical examination on Friday did not reveal any disease. Therefore, sources said that he has been sent to police custody again. While the 'SIT' suspected that Kharat, who committed sexual assault, committed murder or human sacrifice along with atrocities, there was also a fraud behind his foreign tour. He had made a tour by claiming to directly take a family abroad to worship. A forensic report in this regard will come out. It is likely that revelations will be made in the Nashik District Court tomorrow. Along with this, where did

Kharat get the black and white musk of deer from, he was giving the victim grass to eat and salty, bitter water to drink. After drinking this, the victim would feel dizzy and nauseous. The suspect then sexually assaulted the victim. The SIT is also likely to clarify its position on what exactly these plants and water were, where he was getting them from, and what he was mixing in them. A victim has recently filed a rape complaint against Ashok Kharat. The woman is accused of being raped by Kharat between August 2024 and December 2024. "In August 2024, he called me to the office and made my husband wait outside. After that, Kharat made me drink water mixed with a narcotic substance. After that, he raped me four times against my will, pretending that 'I am an incarnation of Mahadev'," the victim has alleged.

Construction worker killed while hunting, mystery of Sushant Dalvi death case solved; Assassination by a close relative

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News Network

Sindhudurg: The atmosphere has heated up after a construction worker was shot dead in Kankavli in Sindhudurg district. The name of this construction worker is Sushant Janardan Dalvi (native of Kalsuli taluka Kankavli). Dalvi's body was found at Mure Dongri near Kankavli around Friday morning. As soon as the news of this incident was received, police officers including Additional Superintendent of Police Nayomi Satam,

Police Sub-Divisional Officer Ghanshyam Adhav and other police officers as well as teams of investigation agencies reached the spot. After investigating the murder case in just a few hours, the police have revealed that Dalvi's adversary Amar Satywan Kadam committed the murder. Amar Kadam, who is from Kudal Oras area, has been arrested. Police informed that the suspected accused Amar confessed to the murder by shooting him. Both Sushant Dalvi and Amar Kadam had gone hunting. Dalvi was fond of



hunting. After this incident, Amar's body has been arrested by the police. However, for what purpose was this murder committed? It is not yet understood. Kankavli police are investigating this. Kankavli police inspector Tejas

Nalawde, crime investigation branch sub-inspector Anil Hadal, forensic lab team, crime investigation team, district crime investigation branch team etc. investigation teams had reached the spot.

Dalvi's body was sent to Kolhapur yesterday afternoon for further action. A case of murder has been registered in this case and is there anyone else behind this case? Kankavli police are investigating all this further. Meanwhile, after arresting the suspected accused Amar Kadam, former MLA Vaibhav Naik along with his colleagues reached Kankavli police station late on Friday evening. He has demanded that the police investigate this case.

The traffic jam on Andheri-Ghatkopar Link Road will be resolved; Four-lane flyover will make travel easier; It will connect Kurla to Ghatkopar

Coffee Table
News Network

Mumbai: There is a huge traffic jam on the Lal Bahadur Shastri line while travelling from Kurla to Ghatkopar. This is one of the most congested routes in East Mumbai. As an alternative to this route, the Municipal Corporation has taken up the work of a 4.25 km long flyover between Kurla and Ghatkopar. The construction of this bridge is currently underway by the BMC. Currently, there are many 'bottlenecks' on the LBS line. There is a huge traffic jam during the morning

and evening peak hours. At this junction, a choke point is created as passengers coming from Andheri Ghatkopar Link Road, Ghatkopar Railway Station and Sant Narsi Mehta Road travel. Due to this, passengers on all these routes are suffering. As soon as this new flyover is built, passengers will get an alternative route instead of going through these choke points and junctions. Also, this alternative elevated route will be available for passengers on the Andheri-Ghatkopar Link Road. With the Kurla to Ghatkopar



flyover, the travel time will be reduced to just 10 minutes. Although the distance is 3-4 km, it takes half an hour to travel from Kurla to Ghatkopar during rush hour. The new flyover will save time for passengers. This new flyover is 4.25 km long and its main part will be 3.91 km long. Moreover,

there will be a 146-meter ramp towards Kurla and a 180-meter ramp towards Ghatkopar. This flyover will be four-lane and will be of great benefit to Mumbaiers. The cost of construction of this flyover is expected to be Rs 3,156 crore. Since the Municipal Corporation has given

a deadline of 2029 for this bridge, Mumbaiers will have to wait for this flyover for a few more years. If there are any obstacles, this date is likely to be extended further. Mumbai Municipal Corporation Commissioner Abhijit Bangar gave information about this project. "This will be an important alternative route connecting the east-west in the most congested area of Mumbai. This flyover will divert the load on the Andheri-Ghatkopar Link Road. This will help in breaking the congestion on local routes."

Pune woman raped in lodge by claiming to be an incarnation of Mahadev; Self-proclaimed religious leader finally arrested

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Pune: Hrishikesh Vaidya, a self-proclaimed religious leader from Vasai, who raped a woman by claiming to be an incarnation of Mahadev, has finally been arrested. After the exploits of the impostor Ashok Kharat from Nashik were exposed, the woman, who was a victim of the atrocities committed by accused Hrishikesh Vaidya, showed courage and rushed to the police. She filed a complaint at Manikpur police station in Vasai. Since the crime took place in Pune, the Vasai police had transferred it to Manjari police for investigation. Pune police had formed four teams to search for the accused Hrishikesh Vaidya in this case. Finally, the police are understood to have arrested him today from Pimpri city near Pune. The



detailed information regarding this is that a 35-year-old married woman from Pune had recently filed a complaint against Hrishikesh Vaidya, a self-proclaimed religious leader from Vasai and who runs a social organization called 'Aamchi Vasai'. This case was transferred to Manjari police station in Pune. After that, we have formed four teams to search for the accused and they are searching for him in various districts, more sections will be added to the crimes against him,' Pune City Deputy Commissioner

of Police Nikhil Pingle had informed the media. After receiving information that Vaidya was going to his relatives, the police arrested him from Pimpri and he will be produced in Shivajinagar court this afternoon. While the incidents of Ashok Kharat, a conman from Nashik, sexually exploiting women in the name of worship have created a stir in the state, an incident of a conman from Vasai, pretending to be an incarnation of God, has come to light. The name of this conman is Hrishikesh Vaidya. A 35-year-old

woman has filed a complaint against him. The victim is originally from Pune. In October 2023, she was introduced to Hrishikesh Vaidya from Vasai through social media. The victim is religious and observes fasts. The accused lured her into the trap. He pretended that he was possessed by divine powers and would teach her the techniques of worshipping God. Gradually, he gained the woman's trust. Later, he invited her to meet him on the pretext of teaching her spirituality. After that, the accused came to Pune in 2023. He took the woman to a lodge in the jungle, gave her a sedative and raped her. At that time, he took some photographs and started threatening her. The victim's complaint states that the accused called her to Vasai and raped her there too.

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Pune: She went to watch the Ram Navami procession and lost her life. Ranjana Jadhav, a resident of Sasane Nagar in Pune, went to watch the Ram Navami procession with joy. There was joy and excitement everywhere. However, the DJ's voice was so terrible that it is being said that Ranjana Jadhav had a heart attack. Suddenly, she lost consciousness and collapsed on the spot. She died in this. This shocking incident is causing a stir everywhere. However, Ranjana Jadhav's family has alleged that the attack was caused by the DJ's loud noise. Ranjana Ravindra Jadhav's family is literally shaken by this incident. The victim's family has now alleged that Ranjana Jadhav, who had gone from home to watch the



procession with joy and enthusiasm, had a heart attack due to the loud noise of the DJ. Ranjana Jadhav had gone to watch the procession in Awaran Sasane Nagar around 8 pm. However, her children have alleged that the DJ's noise was terrible even though the police were there. There was excitement and joy everywhere to watch the Ram Navami procession. Ranjana Jadhav became engrossed in watching the procession. However, within a short time, Ranjana Jadhav started feeling pain in her chest. Due

to this, Ranjana Jadhav collapsed within a short time. The intensity of the DJ's noise was so loud that no one even noticed that Ranjana Jadhav had fallen down for some time. After some time, the women there noticed her. At that time, she was immediately rushed to the hospital. Due to the crowd in the procession, it was not possible to reach the hospital quickly. Upon reaching the hospital, the doctors declared her dead some time ago. According to the police, Ranjana Jadhav did not have a

heart attack due to the DJ's voice. However, Ranjana Jadhav had undergone bypass surgery and had to undergo dialysis once a week. We did not give permission to the DJ and the DJ stopped at nine o'clock, but the police have denied these allegations, saying that the woman died after that. Even today, the sound of drums and tasha can be heard in processions at many places in the cultural city of Pune. However, it is a serious matter that a woman has lost her life due to the DJ's voice. The police administration often imposes restrictions on the voice of DJs. However, the level of DJ's voice is increased due to jealousy between each other's circles. It remains to be seen what care the administration will take on this.

Orange Gate-Marine Drive Twin Tunnel: Work Speeds Up on Historic Route Under Rail & Metro

Coffee Table
News Network

Mumbai: Work on the Orange Gate to Marine Drive subway has started in Mumbai a few months ago. The excavation of this project was started in the presence of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in December. Work has been going on at a rapid pace for the last three months and the excavation of the main tunnel has started. The excavation is being done by a tunnel

boring machine and 70 meters of excavation has been done in a few days. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority is digging the twin tunnels between Orange Gate and Marine Drive. The slurry shield tunnel boring machine is being used for this technically most complex tunnel. It is the largest machine among the machines used for digging tunnels in the country. This

machine was lowered into the shaft created at Marine Drive on March 26 for the excavation of the main tunnel. After that, 70 meters of excavation out of 3,720 has been completed in a few days. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority is working on the excavation of the twin underground tunnels between Orange Gate and Marine Drive. The slurry shield tunnel boring machine is being



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main tunnel. After that, 70 meters of excavation out of 3,720 have been completed in a few days. This will significantly reduce the travel time in South Mumbai and will also save fuel. It will also help in reducing pollution levels. After the launch of the TBM in December, all the units were connected in January. After that, the Initial Drive was started and a temporary ring was erected. This initial drive was

completed in January and the main drive began in February. While excavation was started in December, it was informed that the work would be completed in 54 months. Therefore, we will have to wait for the next few years for this project. This is the first time that a subway is being built under such a densely populated road in this city.

Editorial...

LPG substitute

India's renewed push to explore ethanol as a substitute for LPG in household cooking is as much a response to geopolitical anxiety as it is an energy policy experiment. The recent disruptions in West Asian supply chains exacerbated by tensions linked to Strait of Hormuz and the ongoing Iran conflict have once again exposed the fragility of India's dependence on fossil fuels. Against this backdrop, the government's interest in ethanol-based cooking solutions signals an attempt to turn crisis into opportunity. Ethanol, long promoted as a blending agent in petrol under India's ambitious biofuel programme, now finds itself at the centre of a broader conversation on energy security. The logic is compelling: Domestically produced, agriculturally linked and potentially cleaner-burning, ethanol offers a pathway to reduce reliance on volatile global LPG markets. If scaled effectively, it could cushion Indian households from the price shocks and supply uncertainties that accompany the geopolitical upheavals. However, the transition from concept to kitchen is fraught with challenges. Unlike LPG, which benefits from an established distribution network and decades of consumer familiarity, ethanol-based cooking remains experimental. Questions of safety, storage, flame control and affordability must be addressed before any large-scale rollout. The government's own acknowledgment of 'rudimentary' stove

models underscores the distance to be travelled. There is also the issue of feedstock. Ethanol production in India is closely tied to sugarcane and, increasingly, surplus grains. Expanding its use for cooking could intensify the already delicate balance between food security and fuel generation. Diverting agricultural produce towards energy needs risks inflating food prices or straining water resources, particularly in states where sugarcane cultivation is already taxing. Yet, the strategic rationale cannot be dismissed. The vulnerability of supply routes such as the Strait of Hormuz is not a transient concern but a structural one. Any escalation in West Asia has immediate repercussions for India's energy basket. In this sense, ethanol is less a perfect alternative and more a hedge, a diversification tool in an uncertain world. The policy question, therefore, is not whether ethanol can replace LPG entirely, but whether it can complement it. Pilot projects, targeted deployment in rural or semi-urban areas and integration with existing biofuel initiatives could offer a pragmatic pathway forward. Simultaneously, investment in safety standards and consumer awareness will be critical to building trust. Ultimately, the ethanol proposition reflects a broader shift in India's energy thinking -- from dependence to resilience

Coffee Table
News Network

Lost in the recent market mayhem caused by the US-Israel attack on Iran was an event that was enough to cause a cataclysm by itself. It was the cryptic resignation of Atanu Chakraborty, the non-executive chairman of country's largest private sector lender HDFC Bank. His exit caught everybody by surprise. But what caused the country's financial tectonic plates to start sliding was the reason he gave for it. Chakraborty wrote in his resignation letter that there were things happening at HDFC Bank that were at variance with his personal values. He did not give any details. Not to the public, not to regulators like RBI or SEBI, not even to his own board. The board seemed just as perplexed as the customers. What further mud died the water was the exit of three senior executives over what was called mis-selling of Credit Suisse AT-I bonds in Dubai a few years back. Financial commenters are coming up with several other issues that might have caused Chakraborty to say goodbye. But all that is conjecture. The investors were understandably spooked. HDFC

Bank stock tanked over 15%. The shares of other banks, private as well as public, also fell owing to global selloff among geopolitical troubles and consistent withdrawal from Indian markets by foreign investors. But none so badly as HDFC Bank. Thankfully, the panic among investors has not been transferred to customers, at least not yet. If that were to happen, it would have had repercussions far beyond the Bank itself. That is because HDFC Bank is no ordinary bank. It is a colossus in the Indian financial sector. It may not seem very big globally but within the country it is among a handful of financial institutions that are too big to fail. And it is not just the size. Over the years the bank has built for itself a reputation of doing everything by the book. The ethos has been painstakingly built over three decades by titans like Deepak Parekh and CEO Aditya Puri. The bank was having a difficult time dealing with pangs of the merger with its parent company HDFC Ltd for the last couple of years. But never had there been even a hint of any wrongdoing. There had been trouble at other big private sector banks,



notably the ICICI Bank and Yes Bank. While the former had to get rid of its celebrated MD Chanda Kochhar, the latter suffered RBI restrictions over dubious loans given by its founder. Even public sector banks have frequently come under scrutiny over suspicious lending that created the non-performing asset (NPA) crises leading to large government bailouts. Hence, governance issues casting their long shadow on HDFC Bank was disconcerting. Not the least because of the lack of transparency that appears to be accompanying the whole process. It has been several days since Chakraborty's bombshell, but nothing is forthcoming from either the bank management or the regulator. One can understand that everybody is circumspect so as not to cause panic, but the silence is

now causing suspicion. The first principle of crisis communication is giving out correct and credible information. What exactly are the issues that Chakraborty was uncomfortable with? How long have they been going on? Are they big enough to affect the health of the bank? Did he ever raise them with senior management and if so, how were they dealt with? Was the RBI made aware of them and was any action taken to rectify them? These are important questions and one that customers of the bank deserve to know the answers to. Clearly, they are big enough that the chairman of the bank, no less, could no longer live with. The bank has now invited an outside and independent inquiry, but the bank customers, both depositors and debtors, remain in the dark. Mishandling is writ large on the episode. It was

irresponsible, to put it mildly, of Chakraborty to exit in the manner that he did. If the issues that troubled his conscience are relatively minor, there was always the option of privately alerting the management even as he made his exit. If they are big enough then a public explanation is owed including whether the regulator was told of them well in time. He has a fiduciary responsibility of protecting the depositors' money in the bank. To insinuate wrongdoing but not give out details is unacceptable, especially from the chief of a bank. It is now for others in the bank to make it right as quickly as they can. Also, sooner rather than later, the RBI too will have to clear the air about how much it knew and since when. The rectification process also needs to be transparent and time bound. We have repeatedly

seen that as far as banking is concerned, the biggest stakeholders, the customers of the bank, are last to be told about things going wrong. In fact, they become aware of it only when the RBI announces restrictions on withdrawals. This has happened in case of small banks as well as not-so-small ones. Most customers are ordinary people who can least afford to be denied access to their own money even for short periods. They suffer the biggest hardships. Their day-to-day life is disrupted. They cannot pay medical bills or even buy groceries. When people put their money in a bank, they do so with an assurance that bank management and regulators will keep it safe. It is like boarding a flight. We assume every-one from the plane maker to maintenance people to pilots to air traffic controllers to regulators will follow rules and do their job well. If even one of them slips up it can result in tragic loss of lives. When that happens in banks, it often results in loss of life's savings for many people. We need assurance from all concerned that HDFC Bank is flying safe

Doctrinal clarity

The latest ruling by the Supreme Court of India, affirming that conversion to Christianity results in the immediate loss of Scheduled Caste status, reopens a complex constitutional and moral debate that India has long deferred rather than resolved. By reiterating that protections under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act are unavailable to those who no longer profess Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism, the court has chosen doctrinal clarity over social nuance. At the heart of the judgment lies Article 341 of the Indian Constitution, which empowers the state to specify Scheduled Castes and has historically restricted this identity to certain religions. The court's reasoning is consistent with the letter of the law: Caste, as a system of social stratification, is seen as intrinsically linked to Hindu social order and its

offshoots. Conversion, therefore, is interpreted as an exit from that structure. Yet this legal neatness collides with lived reality. Caste discrimination, as numerous sociological studies have shown, does not dissolve at the point of conversion. Dalit Christians, in particular, often continue to face entrenched prejudice socially, economically and even within religious communities. By denying them legal recourse under the SC/ST Act, the judgment risks creating a protection vacuum where vulnerability persists but recognition does not. The case of Chinthada Anand, whose plea triggered this ruling, underscores the dilemma. If caste-based abuse is experienced irrespective of religious identity, should legal protection hinge solely on formal affiliation? The court has answered in the affirmative, but the ethical question remains unsettled.

Remnants of a colonial tradition!

Coffee Table
News Network

In many films, we have seen judges wearing white wigs on their heads. During the British era, magistrates used to wear long red robes decorated with golden embroidery. In present-day Indian courts, judges wearing wigs are rarely seen. However, in the Calcutta High Court, the Chief Justice still wears a ceremonial red robe and a long white wig on certain occasions. This colonial tradition came into discussion once again on January 16, 2026, when Justice Sujoy Paul took oath as the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court. On that occasion, he appeared wearing the traditional scarlet ceremonial robe and the classic white curled judicial wig. The tradition again attracted attention in March 2026, when Chief Justice Paul administered the oath of office to RN Ravi as the governor of West Bengal. At that ceremony too, he was seen wearing the red robe and wig. Although most courts in India discontinued this practice many years ago, it is still followed at the Calcutta High Court



during certain ceremonial events. Origin of tradition in England The tradition of judges wearing wigs began in England in the 17th century. During the reign of Charles II of England, wigs became fashionable across Europe. Members of the royal family, aristocrats, officials and professionals started wearing them. During this period, judges and lawyers also adopted wigs as part of their formal court attire. By around 1685, wigs had become a permanent feature of courtroom dress in England. Even after the fashion faded in society, the legal system retained it as a symbol of tradition and authority. How are wigs made Traditional judicial wigs are usually

made from white or grey horsehair. The hair is carefully woven into fine strands and hand-stitched onto a cloth or mesh base. It is then shaped into the distinctive curled style associated with courtroom wigs. Some modern wigs are made from synthetic fibres, but for formal court ceremonies the traditional horsehair wigs are still considered more prestigious. Making these wigs requires great craftsmanship and today only a few skilled artisans in Britain continue this specialised craft. Why were wigs used There were both practical and symbolic reasons behind the use of wigs. First, they represented the authority and dignity of the judiciary. The robe and wig

emphasised the institutional role of the judge rather than the individual personality. Second, they promoted uniformity and formal ity. Since judges and lawyers wore similar attire, it helped maintain a formal and disciplined atmosphere in the courtroom. The practice continues to spark debate. Some believe it is an unnecessary colonial relic that has no place in modern India. Others argue that it represents the historical continuity and traditions of the judiciary. Nevertheless, the sight of a wig during ceremonies at the Calcutta High Court serves as a reminder of the deep influence that British rule once had on India's judicial system. Some

historians also believe that in earlier times, when maintaining personal hygiene and grooming hair was difficult, wigs served as a practical solution. How did this tradition come to India The roots of this practice in India go back to the British colonial period. Under the High Courts Act 1861, Queen Victoria was empowered to issue Letters Patent establishing high courts in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. These three "chartered" high courts were successors to the British-era Supreme Courts and Sadar Adalats. They were created Nashik Main Page No. 6 Mar 25, 2026 Powered by: erelego.com not by Indian legislation but through a Royal Charter of the British Crown. As a result, their ceremonial traditions and dress codes closely followed those of the English high courts. British judges working in India wore wigs and robes and later Indian judges continued the same tradition. Over time, the wig became part of courtroom custom. Where is this tradition followed today After independence, the practice of wearing

wigs in Indian courts gradually disappeared. Today, judges and lawyers in India usually wear only the black robe with a white neck band as part of their professional dress. However, at the Calcutta High Court, the tradition of wearing a wig continues during certain ceremonial occasions such as the Chief Justice's oath ceremony, Legal Remembrancer's Day and other formal events. The practice has been preserved as part of the court's historical heritage. Outside India, wigs are still used in some courts, especially in criminal courts in England and Wales, and in a few other Commonwealth countries. Tradition or colonial legacy! The practice continues to spark debate. Some believe it is an unnecessary colonial relic that has no place in modern India. Others argue that it represents the historical continuity and traditions of the judiciary. Nevertheless, the sight of a wig during ceremonies at the Calcutta High Court serves as a reminder of the deep influence that British rule once had on India's judicial system

'Controversies were avoidable' Dharmendra Pradhan on UGC rules and NCERT textbook

Coffee Table
News Network

NEW DELHI: Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan called the recent controversies over the UGC equity rules and an NCERT textbook carrying a chapter on judicial corruption "avoidable."
"I accept that they (controversies) were avoidable, especially the way they were presented. The discussion in society on the UGC matter is sub judice and under the Supreme Court's cognisance, so I cannot comment publicly. But I would like to assure citizens that we do not endorse victimisation against anyone," Pradhan said at the Times Now Summit on Friday. He stressed that the government has a constitutional responsibility to ensure that no form of discrimination occurs. "This (UGC matter) is under the court's cognisance; as the court frames it,



the government will implement the system in line with the Constitution," he added. The UGC guidelines, issued in January, triggered protests in some quarters, including within the ruling BJP, which claimed the norms were discriminatory. The Supreme Court later granted an interim stay, observing that they appeared prima facie "vague" and could be misused. Drafted with the stated aim to curb discrimination against SC, ST, and OBC students, mandated equal opportunity

cells, 24/7 helplines, and strict complaint redressal timelines, but faced controversy for allegedly being vague and unfair to general category students, leading to calls for redrafting. Regarding the NCERT issue, the minister noted that the top court has given some guidance on the matter. "It has been said that a well-monitored chapter will be added under its supervision, and we are engaged in that work. A committee has also been formed—a three-member committee under the leadership

of Justice Indu Malhotra. The court had also asked for the inclusion of Bhopal Law Academy. All this work is ongoing, and the chapter is being prepared. It will be placed before the court and added accordingly," Pradhan stated. Earlier this month, the NCERT issued a public apology for including a chapter on judicial corruption in a textbook that had drawn criticism from the Supreme Court, and announced that the entire textbook would be withdrawn. The Class 8 social science textbook stated that corruption, a massive backlog of cases, and a shortage of judges are among the challenges faced by the judicial system. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had expressed unhappiness over the chapter on judicial corruption and asked for "accountability to be fixed."

'Why was a businessman present?': Congress questions PM Modi over Elon Musk's presence in Trump call

Coffee Table
News Network

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Saturday launched a sharp attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his recent phone conversation with US President Donald Trump, after reports claimed that Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk was also present during the call. Raising questions over transparency and protocol, the opposition party alleged that the PM Modi's government had not disclosed key details about the interaction, particularly the reported participation of a private businessman during a high-level diplomatic exchange. The controversy stems from a report by The New York Times, which stated that Musk was part of the conversation between the two leaders. The call reportedly focused on the evolving West Asia crisis and the need to ensure stability in the region. Reacting to the report, Congress questioned the appropriateness of a private individual being present in a discussion between two heads of state, especially during a sensitive geopolitical situation. In a post on X, the party raised a



series of pointed questions, asking: "Why was a businessman present when two national leaders were discussing a global crisis? What role did Elon Musk play in this conversation? Was this truly about the West Asia crisis, or was there another 'BUSINESS' agenda?" The party also questioned why Musk's presence was not officially disclosed by the Indian government. "Why did the Modi government not disclose Musk's presence? Why are we learning about this from another country instead of our own government?" the Congress said. "Trump spoke to leaders of different countries during the war, but no businessman was on any of those calls. Why did this happen only with Modi?" the party added. The Congress further referred to the

White House describing the conversation as "productive," questioning the nature of the outcome. "The White House described the talks as productive. But productive for whom?" the party asked. Calling for clarity, the opposition said that the country "deserves clear answers," particularly given the seriousness of the situation in West Asia. It also framed the issue as one of diplomatic propriety, stating that the call came at a time when tensions involving the US, Israel and Iran required "diplomatic seriousness, not corporate presence." According to The New York Times, Elon Musk's participation in the call was confirmed by US officials, making it an unusual instance of a private citizen

being part of a high-level diplomatic discussion. The report highlighted that the conversation between PM Modi and President Trump took place on March 24 and focused on the West Asia crisis, particularly the need to ensure that the Strait of Hormuz remains open and secure. In his official statement following the call, PM Modi reiterated India's position in favour of de-escalation and dialogue. He highlighted that ensuring safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz is vital for global economic stability and energy security. India has also been actively engaging with key stakeholders, including Iran and the United States, to safeguard its strategic and economic interests in the region.

Choice between fear and trust : Amit Shah releases 'chargesheet' against TMC-led Bengal govt's 15-year 'misrule'

Coffee Table
News Network

NEW DELHI: Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday released the BJP's "charge sheet" against the Trinamool Congress (TMC)-led West Bengal government ahead of assembly polls in the state. Speaking at a press conference in Kolkata, Shah emphasised that the upcoming elections would be a choice between "fear and trust." He was joined by BJP state president and Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya and Suwendu Adhikari, the leader of opposition in the West Bengal assembly. He criticised chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, accusing her of fostering a "politics of lies, violence, and corruption over the past 15 years." "Bengal has to choose between fear and trust. For the last 15 years, politics of fear and corruption have been going on. Mamata Banerjee has



created a new way of politics by using lies and violence to move her politics forward. The basis of TMC coming to power is lies, fear, and violence. But since 2011, BJP has been fighting against this, and I believe that this time BJP will form the government," Shah told reporters. He continued, "In today's press conference, we have come with a chargesheet against the 15 years of rule by the TMC government. This chargesheet is filed against the Mamata Banerjee government on behalf of the people of Bengal, which the BJP is voicing. In a way, the people of Bengal have to decide in the

coming elections whether to choose fear or to choose trust." The senior BJP leader also lauded Suwendu Adhikari for his extensive tour of the state to address key issues. "Elections have been announced. All BJP workers, under the leadership of our state president, have stepped into Bengal with the resolve to form a BJP government. This election in Bengal is also very important for national security. The security of the entire eastern region is connected to Bengal. After the BJP government was formed in Assam, infiltration has almost ended. Now, only one route remains from

where infiltrators enter the entire country, and that is Bengal," he explained. Shah added, "Our opposition leader, Shri Suwendu Adhikari ji, has also toured the entire Bengal before the elections, taking the issues of disorder, anarchy, economic distress, and especially infiltration prevalent in Bengal to every individual." He further criticised the TMC for failing to deliver on its promise of a "Sonar Bangla," turning the state into a hub for criminal syndicates and stifling industrial growth, which he described as a "graveyard for industry." "The state will conduct elections in two phases, on April 23 and April 29, with counting of votes or both phases scheduled for May 4. In the first phase, elections will be held across 152 constituencies, while the remaining 142 seats will go to the polls in the second phase."

Congress slams PM Modi for silence on Israel's actions in West Bank

Coffee Table
News Network

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Saturday claimed that Israel is advancing its vision of a "Greater Israel" under the cover of the West Asia war, effectively ending any hope for a Palestinian state, and criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not raising his voice against its actions in the West Bank. Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, noted that it has been 28 days since the US-Israel aerial bombings of Iran and Iran's counter-offensive began. "In the past four weeks, while the world's attention has been on the Strait of Hormuz and energy infrastructure in the Gulf countries, Israel



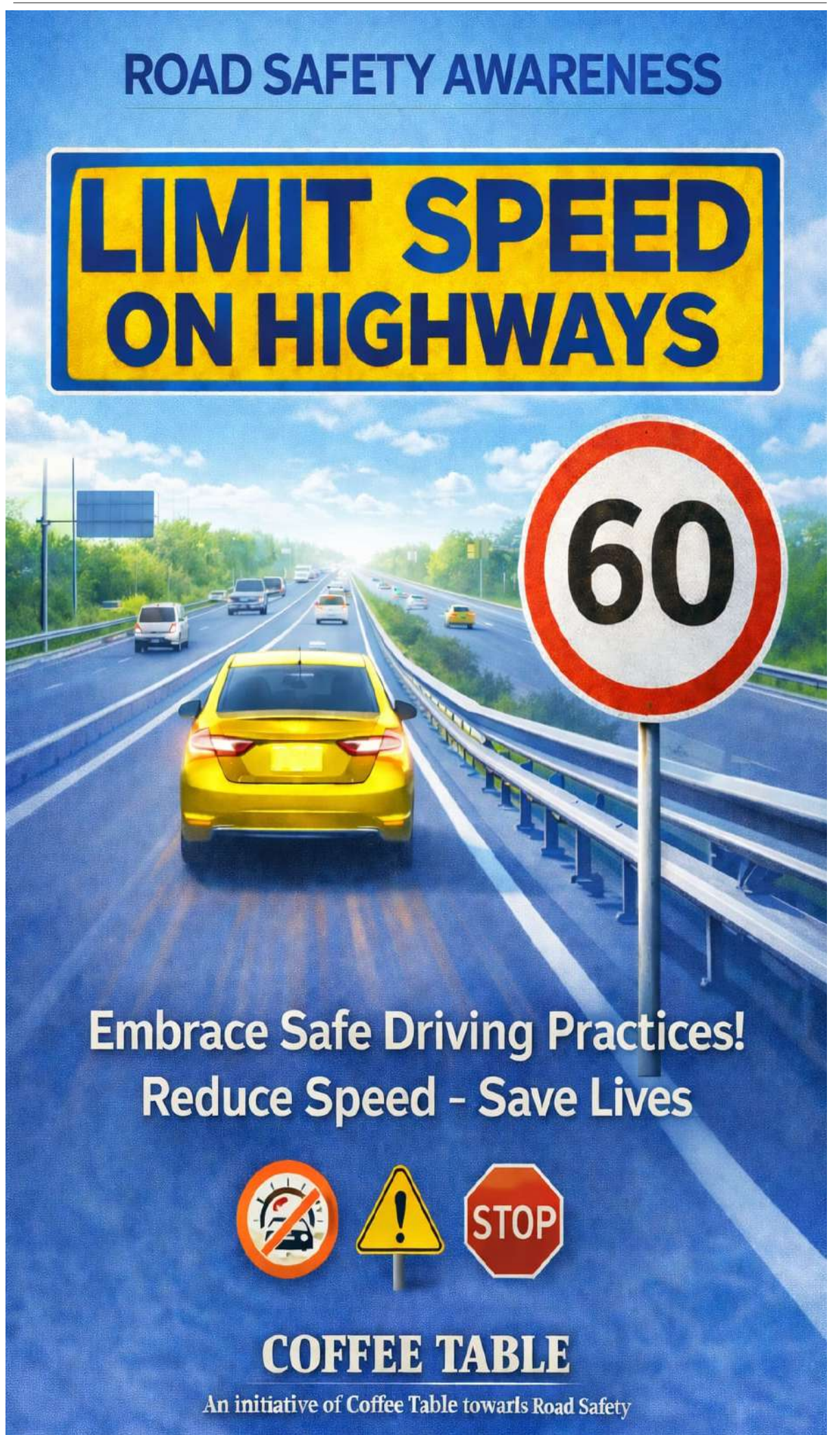
has continued its brutalities against the people of Gaza, begun operations to create a large buffer zone in southern Lebanon, and taken decisive steps to convert its annexation of the West Bank into firm occupation," Ramesh said on X. He added that the current West Asia war is providing cover for Israel to pursue its vision of Greater Israel while extinguishing any hope for a Palestinian state. "The US-Israel bombardment of Iran

began just two days after Mr Modi left Israel. What is not realised is that just a few days before he arrived, the Israeli cabinet had approved land registration in roughly half of the occupied West Bank for the first time since 1967," he said. "This would lead to the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Yet Mr Modi does not have the courage to raise his voice and speak truth to his good

friend Benjamin Netanyahu," the Congress leader added. The Congress had strongly criticised Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel last month, despite the country continuing attacks on civilians in Gaza. The opposition party said the Modi government has made cynical and hypocritical statements regarding its commitment to the Palestinian cause, while in reality, it has abandoned them. Israel's dispossession and displacement of thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank has intensified and drawn worldwide condemnation, Ramesh had said last month. Israel's attacks on civilians in Gaza, he noted, continue mercilessly.




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Sabarimala Reference | Courts Should Not Determine Essential Religious Practices : All India Muslim Personal Law Board Tells

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News Network

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has told the Supreme Court that courts should refrain from determining what constitutes an "essential religious practice", cautioning that such judicial scrutiny may amount to encroachment upon the freedom of religion guaranteed under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. In its written submissions filed in the Sabarimala reference case, the Board argued that identification of the "core" of a religion is inherently subjective and dependent on the beliefs of followers, and therefore unsuitable for judicial determination. The reference arises out of the review petitions filed against the 2018 verdict, which allowed the entry of women of all age groups to the Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple. In November 2019, the Supreme Court, while hearing the review pleas, had referred certain questions related to religious freedom and Articles 25 and 26 to a larger bench. The nine-judge bench will commence the hearing from April 7. The Board submitted that the doctrine of Essential Religious Practices (ERP) places an unfair burden on believers to prove that a particular practice is essential to their faith. Instead, it said, the focus should be on whether State restrictions satisfy the constitutional limitations of public order, morality, and health. It contended that determining the essentials of a religion involves complex questions of faith, doctrine, and interpretation, which are better left to religious scholars and denominations rather than courts. The submissions state that judicial determination of essential practices could lead to interference in religious autonomy and dilute the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. "While dealing with Article 25, to interpret what is religious practice or for that matter, core of the religion within the



meaning of essential religious practices, these matters must be left for those who are scholars in religion or the religious denominations and/or the belief of the followers of that particular religion. Certain practices change with circumstances, like in Hajj manner of Namaz and many other acts commonly done by the followers of Islam get altered completely. The Namaz which is offered at the time of burial of a follower of Islam is completely different from what is offered normally." The AIPMLB stated that instead of an ERP test, the effort could be to find a method to lay-down principle to understand the meaning and scope of 'public order' and 'secular activity' when it comes to matters of religion. In this process, the court shall be dealing with the issue which is secular in nature and not 'matters of religioz'. On the issue of limitations under Article 25, the Board urged the Court to adopt a balanced approach while interpreting "public order" and "morality". It argued that morality in the context of religious freedom should not be understood solely as constitutional morality but must also take into account the moral principles of the concerned religion, unless those principles are directly opposed to constitutional values. "As far as 'morality' is concerned, for the rights under Article 25, this term should be understood by creating a balance between the moral principle of the

religion concerned and the pure constitutional values unless the moral principles of the religion are not 180-degree opposite of the constitutional values, the same should not be touched." The Board also warned that the State should not invoke public order or secular regulation as a pretext to interfere in religious matters without clear legal justification. "As far as the meaning of morality under Article 25 is concerned, the concept of morality must not be understood as being divorced from religious rights. This Hon'ble Court, on many instances, has interpreted 'morality' as 'constitutional morality'. It is submitted that any interpretation of 'morality', whether constitutional morality or some other terminology, must be to uphold rights and not curtail them." Gender and Religion Cannot Be Treated as Opposing Identities Addressing gender equality concerns raised in the Sabarimala litigation, the Board submitted that gender and religion are not mutually exclusive identities. It stated that a woman may simultaneously assert autonomy and choose to express her faith through religious practices, and that constitutional adjudication should recognise this coexistence rather than presume conflict between gender rights and religious freedom. Equality in Religious Freedom Must Account for Diversity The Board further argued that formally neutral policies may produce unequal

outcomes across religions because different faiths have distinct practices. The submissions stated that in a multi-religious society, equality cannot be understood merely as treating all religions identically. Instead, the constitutional guarantee requires recognition that different religions have distinct practices and obligations, and therefore equal protection must be assessed in relation to the specific practices of each faith. The Board argued that facial neutrality may conceal unequal effects, particularly where policies or judicial doctrines are structured around assumptions derived from the practices of a majority religion. In such cases, minority practices that do not conform to the same patterns may be placed at a structural disadvantage, even though the rule itself is framed in neutral terms. To explain its position, the Board cited the example of the "sunrise to sunset" regulation governing access to protected monuments. The Board submitted that while the rule is neutral in wording, it may restrict religious observances such as Namaz in mosques located within protected sites, whereas similar restrictions may not affect religious practices of other faiths in the same manner. The written submissions were prepared by Senior Advocate MR Shamshad and Advocate Fuzail Ahmed Ayyubi.

"Abuse Of Process": Bombay High Court While Dismissing Plea Against Adani Green Energy In 'Bribery' Case

Coffee Table
News Network

In a major respite for Adani Group's—Adani Green Energy Ltd., the Bombay High Court on Friday (March 27) dismissed a plea which sought a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the allegations made against the company for allegedly paying crores of bribes to secure solar power contracts across several States in India. A division bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Suman Shyam noted that the petitioner Jitendra Maru, heavily relied on the documents, which are part of a proceedings pending in the Eastern District Court in New York. "This writ petition is clearly an abuse of the process of the Court. The petitioner who states that his right to put the criminal justice system in motion is recognised in law has failed to provide any justification for not approaching the Court in the last about one decade when someone had allegedly tried to indulge in some unethical practices. This writ petition has been filed on the



basis of the newspaper report which published the order passed by the US Court," the bench said in the order. The bench opined that Maru, a social activist by profession, failed to establish his bona fides. "The petitioner has no locus to file this writ petition and he has not approached the Court with clean hands. This writ petition does not serve any public purpose. Rather, a petition like the present one causes serious harms and is likely to cause harm to the reputation and business prospects of any Corporate group," the 5-page order authored by Chief Justice Chandrashekhar, reads. According to the petitioner, the Ministry of Renewable Energy had formed a body in the name of Solar Energy Corporation of India to explore the possibility of increasing use of

renewable energy in India and different State Governments entered into power purchase agreements for distribution of electricity to the consumers. He claimed that in 2020, Adani Green Energy entered into a conspiracy with Azure Global Ltd. which also claimed to generate solar power to procure contracts by using 'unlawful means.' Maru contended that these Corporate groups created a Multi Million Dollar Pension Funds for the purpose of 'bribing' several unknown government officials. The scheme allegedly involved an agreement to pay over Rs 2,000 crore in bribes to officials of the State Power Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh Further, Maru claimed that

the payments' made were documented and the said 'electronic evidence' was maintained by the Adani Green Energy, which was subsequently, seized by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and reproduced in proceedings before US courts. In his plea, Maru also referred to an order passed by the United States District Court, Eastern Court of New York and stated that the Adani Green Energy proposed to pay incentives which was nothing but 'bribe.' Maru heavily relied on a November 24, 2024 order for Jury Trial, by which a notice was proposed to be given to the defendants who are the Chairman, Executive Director, Managing Director etc. of the Adani Green Energy. He relied on certified copies of a US Department of Justice indictment and also on a parallel Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) civil enforcement complaint. However, the judges noted that Maru failed to provide further information provided as to the continuance of any proceedings in the US Court.

Former Calcutta High Court Judge Included In West Bengal SIR Supplementary List After Initial Omission

Coffee Table
News Network

Former Calcutta High Court judge Sahidullah Munshi and his family member's names have recently been included in the supplementary list for the West Bengal Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise being conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI) ahead of the West Bengal State Assembly Polls to be held in April-May. This comes days after the former judge had flagged his and his family's non-inclusion from the initial SIR list, even after participating in



the scrutiny process and presenting all the requisite documents, according to several reports. In the supplementary list dated 27th March 2026, accessed exclusively by Live Law, Justice Munshi and his family's names have been

reflected as part of the electoral roll, as an amendment to the initial list published on 28th February 2026, which had omitted their names. Justice Munshi, who was appointed as a judge of the Calcutta High Court in 2013, served on the bench for 7 years,

before retiring in September 2020, and is currently serving as the Chairman of the Board of Auqaf in West Bengal. Notably, the Supreme Court had earlier directed that Appellate Tribunals comprising former High Court Chief Justices and former High Court Judges be constituted to hear appeals against exclusions in the West Bengal Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process, after concerns were raised about the absence of an independent appellate mechanism.

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CM Naidu urges Centre to step in as maize prices dip

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VIJAYAWADA: Responding swiftly to the concerns raised by Agriculture Minister Kinjarapu Atchannaidu over the distress faced by maize farmers, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has written a detailed letter to the Centre seeking urgent intervention and financial support. The Minister brought to the Chief Minister's attention that during the Rabi 2025-26 season, maize cultivation expanded significantly across Andhra Pradesh, covering about 4.83 lakh hectares with an estimated production of 37.61 lakh metric tonnes. Despite the bumper output,

market prices have fallen below the Minimum Support Price (MSP), pushing farmers into severe financial stress. He noted that due to urgent financial requirements, many farmers are being forced into distress sales, selling their produce at prices far below remunerative levels. Highlighting the seriousness of the situation, Atchannaidu stressed the need for immediate Central intervention to stabilise prices and protect farmers' incomes. Taking prompt action, the Chief Minister, in his letter addressed to Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, explained that the surplus production



and subdued market demand have led to a decline in maize prices, which may worsen further during the peak arrival period extending up to June 2026. In his communication, the CM requested the Government of India to permit implementation of

the Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS) under the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) for maize through NAFED in coordination with AP Markfed. He specifically urged the Centre to treat Andhra Pradesh as a special case and bear 100% of the financial

burden under the scheme, instead of the existing 50:50 sharing pattern. He also sought expansion of the scheme's coverage from the current 25% to 100% of maize production, ensuring that all affected farmers benefit. Further, the Chief Minister requested

that the scheme be allowed to continue until June 2026 so as to cover the entire peak arrival season. He emphasised that the proposed intervention would ensure farmers receive compensation for the difference between MSP and prevailing market prices, thereby preventing distress sales. Reiterating his commitment to farmers' welfare, the CM urged the Union government to accord immediate approval to the proposal, stating that timely support would provide much-needed relief to lakhs of maize farmers across the state. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has felt that it is a proud that Andhra

Pradesh has emerged as a national benchmark in Mission Karmayogi, demonstrating how technology-driven learning can translate into real governance outcomes. Taking to 'X' on Friday, Chandrababu Naidu mentioned "Sadhana Saptah National Learning Week from 2nd to 8th April 2026 to strengthen governance capabilities among government employees. This is an opportunity for every employee to actively participate with purpose, while completing the mandatory AI course as part of our commitment to future-ready governance." Chief Minister N

Chandrababu Naidu on Friday hailed the decision of the Union government to cut excise duty on petrol and diesel. Taking to social media platform 'X', Naidu posted "The true strength of leadership is proven in testing times, and as I always say, India is fortunate to have Hon'ble PM @narendramodi Ji at the helm, providing stability amid challenging global conditions. The Union Government's decision today to cut excise duty on petrol and diesel is a strong, people-centric move. We in Andhra Pradesh warmly welcome this step, as it will help shield the common man from global price volatility."

JSW expedites Kadapa Steel Plant work in Andhra

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KADAPA: The long-awaited Kadapa Steel Plant, a dream of the people of Kadapa and the Rayalaseema region for nearly two decades, is finally moving forward with renewed momentum. After years of uncertainty and delays, concrete steps are now being taken towards establishing the plant under the name JSW Rayalaseema Steel Plant. The project, which was initially proposed under the YSR Steel Corporation during the previous government, saw foundation and preparatory ceremonies conducted earlier. It has now been taken over by JSW, which has entered into an agreement with the government to set up the plant with an investment of Rs



16,350 crore in two phases. With the company initiating key steps, hopes have once again risen among the people of the region. In a major development, 1,100 acres of land has been officially transferred from YSR Steel Corporation for the project. The Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) completed the sale agreement with JSW on Wednesday. The

company has paid Rs 55 crore to APIIC as part of the agreement, marking the completion of land acquisition for the plant. Additionally, environmental clearances obtained earlier under the YSR Steel Corporation are expected to be transferred to the new project entity. The steel plant will be established in Sunnapurallapalle and Peddadandluru areas of

Jammalamadugu mandal. JSW plans to invest a total of Rs 16,350 crore in two phases. In the first phase, Rs 4,500 crore will be invested to set up a plant with a capacity of 1 million tonnes, targeted for completion by April 2029. This phase is expected to generate employment for around 1,000 people. The second phase will involve an investment of Rs 11,850 crore to

expand capacity by an additional 2 million tonnes, with completion scheduled by April 2034. This phase is expected to provide jobs for about 1,500 people. The project also fulfils a promise made by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu during the State-level Mahanadu held in Kadapa last May, where he assured that work on the steel plant would commence soon. Although there was some delay, the project is now set to begin. The plant is expected to generate large-scale employment opportunities not only directly but also through ancillary industries. APIIC Zonal Chairman Srinivasa Murthy confirmed that the sale agreement has been finalised and JSW has paid Rs 55 crore for land acquisition.

Andhra ministers visit bus mishap survivors, assure them help

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ONGOLE: State Social Welfare Minister Dr Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanya Swamy and Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar visited survivors of the Markapuram bus accident at Ongole General Hospital (GGH) on Friday. Doctors reported that all injured passengers are stable and receiving treatment. The ministers met patients, assured them of government support, and conveyed condolences to the families of the 14 deceased. Dr Swamy described the incident as "very unfortunate," noting that 28 others were



seriously injured. He said Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu is monitoring relief efforts and has ordered a probe, promising strict action against those responsible. The state government announced Rs 5 lakh compensation for each deceased's family and Rs 2 lakh for the injured. The Union Government also declared Rs 2 lakh for the deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured. Local leaders, including Ongole MLA Damacharla

Janardhan Rao, SN Padu MLA BN Vijay Kumar, Kandukuru MLA Inturi Nageswara Rao, OUDA Chairman Shaik Riyaz, and district officials, accompanied the ministers. Meanwhile, post-mortems were completed at Markapuram GGH, with DNA samples sent for forensic analysis before handing over remains to families. Police registered a case under Section 304(A) against bus driver P Yuvaraju and travel agency owner Harikrishna. The investigation is ongoing.

I felt humiliated and sidelined': Pradyut Bordoloi on leaving congress for BJP

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GUWAHATI: Pradyut Bordoloi, a two-term MP from Assam who recently joined the BJP, has alleged that he felt neglected, isolated, and unwelcome in the Congress. A Congress member for more than five decades and chairman of the manifesto committee for the Assam Assembly polls, Bordoloi is contesting the state election on a BJP ticket from Dispur. In an interview with PTI, Bordoloi said a succession of grievances had built up, possibly starting during the Congress organisational election in 2022. He claimed he faced humiliation within the party and was sidelined after supporting Shashi Tharoor's candidature for the post of party president. "A few MPs, such as Shashi Tharoor, demanded organisational elections to strengthen democracy within the Congress. Initially, there was a move for a consensus candidate. When elections were

finally held, Shashi Tharoor wanted to contest. I was the proposer for his candidature and campaigned extensively," he said. Mallikarjun Kharge won the elections and became Congress president. "After that, I felt there was a systematic action against me, though Kharge was always magnanimous and accepted me. Sonia Gandhi, who has been a mother figure to me, also never discriminated against me," Bordoloi said. He alleged that it was the second-rung leadership in the Congress that "systematically kept him aside, and it was very palpable." "When I wanted to participate in debates in the Lok Sabha - which are decided within the party - I never got a chance. If at all they gave me a chance, my name would be at the bottom of the list, leaving only two minutes to speak," he said, claiming these were not isolated incidents but systematic. "I was



feeling useless. What is the use of being an MP if I could not participate meaningfully, especially in taking up the cudgel on behalf of my constituency in Assam or the northeast region?" Bordoloi added. He said the final straw came during the Panchayat elections in 2025, when hooded miscreants attacked his car and attempted to kill him with iron rods. Investigations later revealed the attack was orchestrated by a sitting Congress MLA from his constituency. Bordoloi claimed that despite alerting the state Congress president and senior leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi, the MLA was still allowed to travel

for the party's screening process. "I felt extremely humiliated and disappointed that the state unit chief failed to defend me, making me feel as if I had levelled false allegations to settle a score," he said. Commenting on his relationship with Gaurav Gogoi, Bordoloi said he had nothing personal against him but felt a trust deficit. "If I raise matters about my constituency and they are dismissed, while I am made to feel as if I am making irresponsible and fabricated claims, it becomes untenable," he added. Regarding his decision to join the BJP, Bordoloi said the party leadership approached him, and he insisted on being

accorded dignity and self-respect. He was subsequently offered the Dispur seat. Addressing concerns that his nomination faced internal opposition, Bordoloi said, "When the party leadership announced my candidature, there is bound to be some heartburn and grievances. I am sympathetic to that. The BJP has accepted me and is guiding and helping me." Pradyut Bordoloi's son, Prateek Bordoloi, decided not to contest the Assembly polls as a Congress nominee from the Margherita seat following his father's exit from the party. Bordoloi clarified that he did not influence his son's political decisions. Pradyut Bordoloi was inducted into the BJP in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other party leaders in Delhi on 18 March, weeks after former Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah joined the ruling party.

Raghunathganj violence: Mamata Banerjee says 'don't blame me' amid police transfers

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West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday urged the Opposition not to hold her responsible for the clashes that broke out in Raghunathganj during Ram Navami, pointing to the recent transfer of police officers ahead of the state elections. Speaking at a public rally in Paschim Bardhaman, Banerjee alleged that officers brought in after the Election Commission's reshuffle were responsible for provoking unrest. "Do not blame me. All my rights have been taken away. All officers have been transferred. People aligned with the BJP have been sent here. But they do not know that we will win," she said. She further condemned the violence in Raghunathganj,



questioning the authority behind acts of vandalism and unrest. "Shops were vandalised, and riots were instigated. Who gave them the right? All of this will be accounted for," she added. Violence reportedly broke out in Raghunathganj in Murshidabad district at multiple locations during a Ram Navami procession, involving clashes between two groups. The situation escalated into vandalism, looting, and arson, leaving several people injured. Security forces, including central personnel and local police, were deployed to bring the situation

under control. DIG Ajit Singh Yadav stated that authorities are working to identify those responsible using CCTV footage and assured strict action. "The situation is now under control, and normal traffic has resumed. We have deployed additional forces, and raid teams are conducting operations at multiple locations. No one involved will be spared," he said. Polling for the West Bengal Assembly elections is scheduled in two phases on April 23 and April 29, with vote counting set for May 4.

Iran says nuclear facilities have been targeted after Israel said attacks 'will escalate and expand'

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DUBAI: Iran state media says its nuclear facilities were attacked Friday, just hours after Israel threatened to "escalate and expand" its campaign against Tehran. A heavy-water plant and a yellowcake production plant were struck, IRNA reported. Yellowcake is a concentrated form of uranium after impurities are removed from the raw ore. Heavy water is used as a moderator in nuclear reactors. Iran's Atomic Energy Organization said the Shahid Khondab Heavy Water Complex in Arak and the Ardakan yellowcake production plant in Yazd Province were targeted, the agency said. The strikes did not cause any casualties and there was no risk of contamination, it said. Israel also attacked the Arak plant last June. Word of the attacks came after U.S. President Donald Trump claimed talks on ending the war were going well and gave Tehran more time to open the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has given no sign of backing down. With stock markets reeling and economic fallout from the war extending far beyond the Middle East, Trump is under growing pressure to end Iran's chokehold on the strait, a strategic waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil is usually shipped. The United States has offered Iran a 15-point proposal for a ceasefire that includes it relinquishing control of the strait, but at the same time has ordered thousands more troops to the region — possibly in preparation for a military attempt to wrest the waterway from Iran's tight grip. Trump has said if Iran doesn't reopen the strait to all traffic by April 6, he will order the destruction of Iran's energy plants. He said Thursday that talks on ending the conflict were going "very well." Iran maintains it is not engaged in any negotiations. Air raid sirens sounded in Israel and the military said it has been intercepting Iranian missiles on a daily basis. Defense Minister Israel Katz said Iran "will pay heavy, increasing prices for this war crime." "Despite the warnings, the firing continues," Katz said. "And therefore attacks in Iran will escalate and expand to additional targets

and areas that assist the regime in building and operating weapons against Israeli citizens. "Israel's military said its attacks Friday targeted sites "in the heart of Tehran" where ballistic missiles and other weapons are produced. It said it also hit missile launchers and storage sites in Western Iran. Smoke rose over Beirut after a pre-dawn strike, and Lebanon's Health Ministry later reported two people were killed. Iran launches missiles and drones at its Gulf Arab neighbors Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry said it shot down



missiles and drones targeting the capital, Riyadh. Kuwait said its Shuwaikh Port in Kuwait City and the Mubarak Al Kabeer Port to the north, which is under construction as part of China's "Belt and Road" initiative, sustained "material damage" in attacks. It appeared to be one of the first times a Chinese-affiliated project in the Gulf Arab states has come under assault in the war. China has continued to purchase Iranian crude. U.S. stocks fell on opening Friday, in a fifth straight losing week — Wall Street's longest such streak in nearly four years. The S&P 500 dropped 0.4% in early trading Friday. The Dow lost 0.6%, and the Nasdaq fell 0.6%, breaking the week's pattern of flip-flopping gains and losses as hopes for an end to the war vacillated. Asian shares also fell Friday over growing doubts about the chances of de-escalation. Oil prices rose again, the Brent crude, the international standard, at \$107 a barrel in morning trading, up more than 45% since Israel and the U.S. attacked Iran on Feb. 28 to start the war. US pushes diplomatic solution while sending more troops to the region. Iran's stranglehold on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz has increased concerns

of a global energy crisis, and appears part of a strategy to get the U.S. to back down by roiling the world economy. A Gulf Arab bloc said Thursday that Iran has been exacting tolls from ships to ensure safe passage. Trump envoy Steve Witkoff said Washington delivered a 15-point "action list" to Iran for a possible ceasefire, using Pakistan as an intermediary. It proposes restricting Iran's nuclear program and reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Iran rejected the U.S. offer and presented its own five-point proposal that included reparations and

because the meeting is not public. They said Russia requested the meeting and that the U.S. — which holds the Security Council presidency — scheduled it. Jan Egeland, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said its teams in Iran have reported "countless homes, hospitals and schools have been damaged or destroyed," and that nearly every neighborhood in Tehran has sustained damage. "Civilians are paying the highest price for this war — it must end" Egeland said in a statement. The U.N.'s International

Organization for Migration said Friday that 82,000 civilian buildings in Iran, including hospitals and the homes of 180,000 people, are damaged. "If this war continues, we risk a far wider humanitarian disaster," Egeland said. "Millions could be forced to flee across borders, placing immense pressure on an already overstretched region." Israel deployed the 162nd Division into southern Lebanon to support efforts to protect its northern border towns from Hezbollah attacks and uproot the militant group, the military said. Death toll climbs, primarily in Iran and Lebanon. Eighteen people have died in Israel, while four Israeli soldiers have been killed in Lebanon. Two Israeli soldiers were severely injured in Lebanon on Friday during an "operational accident," the military said. Authorities said more than 1,100 people have died in Lebanon and over 1,900 people have been killed in Iran. At least 13 American troops have been killed and four people in the occupied West Bank and 20 in Gulf Arab states have also died. In Iraq, where Iranian-supported militia groups have entered the conflict, 80 members of the security forces have died.

recognition of its sovereignty over the vital strait. Diplomats from several countries have tried to organize a direct meeting between U.S. and Iranian envoys, possibly in Pakistan. Egypt's Foreign Ministry said in a statement Friday that Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty spoke with his Turkish and Pakistani counterparts by phone as part of "intensive efforts" to organize the talks. Abdelatty said they hoped for "gradual de-escalation efforts that would ultimately lead to the end of the war." Turkey's Foreign Ministry confirmed those calls and said Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan also spoke with U.S. officials. Meeting in France, the G7 foreign ministers adopted a declaration calling for an immediate halt to attacks against populations and infrastructure. Mean while, U.S. ships drew closer to the region carrying some 2,500 Marines, and at least 1,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne — trained to land in hostile territory to secure key positions and airfields — have been ordered to the Middle East. The U.N. Security Council will engage in a closed consultation on Iran on Friday, according to two U.N. diplomats who spoke on condition of anonymity

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