

# Dumani Mail

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## Cabinet approves 2% DA and DR hike for central govt employees, pensioners

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet today gave approval for the creation of a domestic insurance pool, named Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool, with a sovereign guarantee of 12,980 crore rupees to facilitate continuous maritime insurance coverage. Briefing media in New Delhi after the Cabinet meeting, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the pool ensures that Indian trade continues to have access to affordable insurance for vessels carrying cargo from any international origin to Indian ports and vice versa,

even when transiting volatile maritime corridors. He said the pool will cover all maritime risks like Hull and Machinery, Cargo, Protection and Indemnity, and War risk. The Minister said the pool will help to manage liability insurance locally, tailored to Indian shipping conditions and regulatory requirements, and develop specialised marine underwriting, claims management and legal expertise within India. A Governing Body constituted for this pool would oversee the formation and functioning of the pool. Mr Vaishnaw said the

rationale for providing a sovereign guarantee to the proposed domestic insurance entity is rooted in the objectives of strengthening self-reliance, sanctions resilience and ensuring greater sovereign control.

The Cabinet also approved the release of an additional instalment of Dearness Allowance to Central Government employees and Dearness Relief to pensioners with effect from 1st January this year, representing an increase of two per cent over the existing rate of 58 per cent of the basic pay or

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pension, to compensate over 68 lakh pensioners. The Minister said the Cabinet has also given its approval for the continuation of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY-III) beyond March 2025 up to March 2028. He said it involves consolidation of through routes and major rural links

connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), higher secondary schools and hospitals. He added that the revised outlay for the scheme will be 83,977 crore rupees. The Cabinet also approved the extension of the timeline till March 2028

for the completion of roads and bridges in plain areas and roads in hilly areas, and the extension of the timeline till March 2029 for the completion of bridges in hilly areas. Mr Vaishnaw said the extension of the timeline of PMGSY-III will enable the full realisation of its intended socio-economic benefits by ensuring completion of the targeted upgradation of rural roads. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) today approved two railway projects with total cost of 24,815 crore rupees. The Minister informed that

these projects are the Ghaziabad-Sitapur 3rd and 4th Line and the Rajahmundry (Nidadavolu)-Visakhapatnam (Duvvada) 3rd and 4th Line. He said they cover 15 districts across Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Mr Vaishnaw said the increased line capacity will significantly enhance mobility, resulting in improved operational efficiency and service reliability for Indian Railways. He said these multi-tracking proposals are poised to streamline operations and alleviate congestion.

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### Delhi CM Gupta wears black armband, slams Opposition over Women's Reservation Bill



New Delhi: Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta on Saturday protested the non-passage of the Mahila Shakti Amendment Bill in Parliament by wearing a black armband at a summit here.

Terming it a "painful" development, Gupta slammed the Opposition parties for blocking the passage of the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

Every woman in their constituencies will question the "anti-women" stance taken by the Opposition parties, she said at a women's entrepreneurs summit organised by the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT). She, also, led the sloganeering in support of women's rights at the summit.

### VP Radhakrishnan to undertake 2-day visit to Sri Lanka from April 19 to 20

New Delhi: Vice President C. P. Radhakrishnan will be on a two-day visit to Sri Lanka from tomorrow. This will be his first bilateral visit to the neighbouring country. He will call on the Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka. Mr Radhakrishnan will meet the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, along with other dignitaries.

The Vice President will interact with leaders of the Indian-origin Tamil Community and Tamil Leaders from the Northern and Eastern regions of Sri Lanka. He will address the Indian diaspora at a community event in Colombo, where he will virtually hand over houses to beneficiaries from Tamil communities, built with assistance from the Government of India as part of the third phase of the Indian Housing Project.

This visit follows recent high-level engagements between the two countries and is expected to further strengthen the millennia-old civilizational and people-to-people ties between both nations.

### Allahabad High Court directs FIR against Rahul Gandhi in dual citizenship case

New Delhi: The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court in Uttar Pradesh has directed the registration of a First Information Report (FIR) against Congress MP from Rae Bareilly and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, in a dual citizenship case. A single bench of Justice Subhash Vidyarthi observed yesterday that the allegations against Rahul Gandhi required examination and directed the Uttar Pradesh government to either conduct an investigation itself or refer the matter to a central agency.

The direction came on a petition filed by BJP worker S Vignesh Shishir, who challenged a 28 January order of a special MP/MLA court in Lucknow. The lower court had rejected his plea seeking registration of an FIR against the Congress MP, stating that it was not competent to decide issues related to citizenship. The complaint was initially filed before a special MP/MLA court in Rae Bareilly. On 17 December last year, the High Court transferred the matter to Lucknow. Following the dismissal of his plea by the Lucknow court, the petitioner approached the High Court.

### Offline registration for Char Dham Yatra begins, 2,713 pilgrims register on day one

New Delhi: Offline registration for the Char Dham Yatra commenced yesterday, with 2,713 pilgrims physically registering for the pilgrimage on the first day. The manual registration process began ahead of the yatra, scheduled to start on Sunday. According to official data, 683 pilgrims registered for Yamunotri, 690 for Gangotri, 667 for Kedarnath, and 673 for Badrinath at the offline enrolment counters. Teams are also visiting various

transit points to facilitate on-site registration for devotees.

Meanwhile, the online registration window that opened on March 6 remains active, with nearly 18.23 lakh devotees having signed up digitally so far. The combined figure for both online and offline registrations currently stands at 18.25 lakh. The pilgrimage will officially begin on April 19 on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya.

### Centre clears large-scale potato, chana and tur procurement to stabilise prices, support farmers

New Delhi: The Centre has approved a series of procurement measures across key crops and states, aiming to shield farmers from price distress and ensure remunerative returns. Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan cleared the procurement of 20 lakh metric tonnes of potatoes in Uttar Pradesh, enhanced the chana procurement ceiling in Andhra Pradesh, and extended the tur procurement window in Karnataka.

The decisions were taken following

consultations with state governments and are aligned with the Centre's broader push to stabilise agricultural markets.

In Uttar Pradesh, potato procurement of 20 lakh metric tonnes has been approved under the Market Intervention Scheme for the 2025-26 season, with a fixed intervention price of Rs 6,500.9 per metric tonne. The Centre's financial outlay for the initiative is estimated at Rs 203.15 crore. The move is expected to prevent distress sales and ensure stable returns for farmers amid volatile market

conditions.

For Andhra Pradesh, the government has raised the procurement limit for chana (Bengal gram) under the Price Support Scheme from 94,500 metric tonnes to 1,13,250 metric tonnes for the Rabi Marketing Season 2025-26. The increase comes in response to the state's request and is aimed at supporting farmers by guaranteeing procurement at assured prices.

In Karnataka, the Centre has extended the procurement period for tur (arhar) by 30 days, allowing farmers to sell their produce

at the Minimum Support Price until May 15, 2026. The extension is expected to provide additional time for farmers to access MSP operations and avoid selling at lower market rates.

The Centre said the decisions reflect its commitment under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to protect farmers' interests and ensure they are not forced into distress sales. The measures, officials said, will help strengthen price stability and provide greater income security to farmers across the three states.

### Defeated delimitation bill in Parliament to defend idea of India: Cong leader Rahul Gandhi

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said the opposition parties defeated the delimitation bill in the Parliament on Friday to defend the "idea of India." Addressing a poll

rally at Ponneri here, he said the BJP-led government at the Centre brought a new bill on April 16, and said they were trying to pass the women's bill, which he said was passed in 2023.

"In the so-called Women's Bill, delimitation was hidden. The idea was to reduce Tamil Nadu's representation in the Union of India... the delimitation move by BJP was to weaken the strength of

southern states, small states, north eastern states," he alleged. "We defeated in Parliament, a bill in which delimitation was hidden; we defeated it to defend the idea of India."

### India invited to join UK-France maritime initiative for Strait of Hormuz security

New Delhi: India has officially confirmed that it has been invited to take part in a maritime initiative led by the United Kingdom and France to protect transit through the Strait of Hormuz, widely regarded as a critical global chokepoint.

During a weekly media briefing in the capital, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal confirmed the invitation. This invitation arrives as the international community intensifies efforts to ensure the security of one of the world's most vital energy corridors, which facilitates nearly twenty per cent of the global oil trade. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi has been asked to contribute to a collaborative plan aimed at maintaining "uninterrupted navigation" through the strategic passage.

In a related diplomatic push, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron held talks at the Élysée Palace. The two leaders are preparing to host a virtual summit with approximately 40 countries to address the situation in the Strait of Hormuz. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is also slated to attend and has suggested that he wants US President Donald Trump to be included in the process.

## Parliament adjourned sine die after Budget Session; nine bills passed, productivity remains high

New Delhi: Both Houses of Parliament of India were adjourned sine die on Saturday, bringing the Budget Session 2026 to a close after 81 days and 31 sittings. The session, which began on January 28, saw a total of 13 sittings in its first phase, followed by 15 in the second and three in the final phase.

Despite disruptions during key debates, the session recorded strong productivity, with the Lok

Sabha achieving around 93 per cent productivity and the Rajya Sabha exceeding 100 per cent at approximately 110 per cent.

The session commenced with the President's Address under Article 87(1) of the Constitution, followed by discussions on the Union Budget 2026-27, which was presented on February 1.

While the debate on the Motion of Thanks in the Lok Sabha was curtailed due to disruptions, the Rajya



Sabha saw extensive participation.

During the course of the session, a resolution seeking the removal of the Lok Sabha Speaker was discussed but ultimately negated after a two-day debate.

On the legislative front, a total of nine bills were passed by both Houses. These included key measures such as the Finance Bill, 2026, the Appropriation Bills, and amendments to laws governing industrial relations,

insolvency, and transgender rights.

In all, 12 bills were introduced in the Lok Sabha and one in the Rajya Sabha, while one bill was withdrawn.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026, which sought to provide reservation for women through delimitation, could not secure the required majority and did not proceed further, along with related

legislation. The session also witnessed the passage of supplementary demands for grants, discussions on the functioning of key ministries, and statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the West Asia conflict.

The government said the session facilitated key legislative and financial business, while reinforcing parliamentary oversight and debate, concluding a crucial phase of policymaking for the financial year.



## Biju Patnaik's 29th Death Anniversary celebrated in Paradip

Paradip - The 29th death anniversary of former Odisha Chief Minister Biju Patnaik was observed on April 17, 2026, across Odisha, with the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) celebrating it as 'Prabada Purusha Divas' (Legendary Leader Day). Tributes were paid to the statesman for his role in India's freedom struggle and his development, with events including blood donation camps and seminars. On this occasion, in honor of Biju Babu, various programs were organized by the Paradip Biju Memorial Trust and BJD in Paradip throughout the day. Hundreds of workers, led by Paradip Municipal Chairperson Basant Biswal and BJD Paradip City President Kumarbar Nayak, participated and distributed fruits

to the sick at the government hospital in Atharabanki. After this, a tilatarpan was performed in the name of Biju Babu at the Mahanadi conference, food distribution was organized in Jarashram, etc. In the evening, a memorial meeting was held at the Biju Memorial Trust. In this, the BJD President Kumarabhar Nayak, Municipality Chairman Basant Biswal, along with BJD leaders Sabita Mohapatra, Parvati Nayak, Chapala Swain, Nalini Sahoo, BJD leaders Shankar Rout, Alok Mohapatra, Chinmay Ranjan Parida, Chitta Ranjan Routraya, union leader Bibhuti Moharana, various ward councilors, trust members and party activists, were present to remember Biju Babu.

## Town Congress Committee lodge complaint against Khordha MLA at Cyber Police Station.



Khordha -17/4- Town congress committee has lodge a written complaint against khordha, MLA, Prasanta Kumar Jagdev at the Cyber Police Station, khordha. A few days ago Mr. Jagdev made derogatory remarks about the character of women congress leader and PCC, spokesperson, Sonali Sahu in some electronic media, in protest against this, a delegation led by khordha town ongress committee President Ranajit Mahapatra has lodge a written complaint against, MLA, Prasanta Jagdev at Khordha Cyber ??Police Station. MLA,

**A few days ago Mr. Jagdev made derogatory remarks about the character of women congress leader and PCC, spokesperson, Sonali Sahu in some electronic media, in protest against this,**

Jagdev is creating unrest in a khordha city. The MLA is deliberately trying to create riots between Muslims and Hindus in Khordha. If he does not admit his mistake, the congress party will be forced to adopt a reactive approach in the coming days. The Congress has warned.

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## Nuapada Schools Closed for Three Days Amid Heatwave

NUAPADA/KHARIAR ROAD, April 18 : Nuapada district administration announced a three-day closure of all schools due to the severe heatwave sweeping across western Odisha. District Collector Madhusudan Das issued an official order directing all government, aided, and private schools—including Odisha Adarsha Vidyalayas, Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, and Eklavya Model Residential Schools—to remain closed from April 20 to April 22. The decision followed a Red Warning issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Authorities confirmed that supplementary examinations for

Classes V and VIII will continue from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. Schools must provide fruits, juice, and ORS to students and ensure proper safety arrangements during exams.

The Collector instructed all school heads to strictly follow the directive. Teachers and non-teaching staff will remain present to carry out census work, admission processes, uniform distribution, and record updates.

The administration emphasised that the closure aims to protect students from heat-related illnesses as temperatures in Nuapada touched 44°C. Officials urged schools to maintain hydration facilities and adopt preventive measures against heatstroke.

## After assuming office, the Vice-Chancellor of Odia University, Professor Satyanarayan Acharya, paid a courtesy visit to the Governor



Puri: After taking charge as the Vice-Chancellor of Odia University, Professor Satyanarayan Acharya today paid his first courtesy call on the Hon'ble Governor (Chancellor), Hari Babu Kambhampati, at Lok Bhavan.

On this occasion, Registrar Rashmirekha Das and Finance Controller Sanjeev Jena were also present. The meeting concluded with the offering of a bouquet, a ceremonial stole, and Mahaprasad of Lord Jagannath. During the meeting, detailed

discussions were reportedly held with the Chancellor regarding advancing various developmental initiatives at Odia University for the promotion of the Odia language and literature, according to reliable sources.

## Illegal Mining Crackdown:- 2 stone Laden trucks seized.

Khordha -18/4-Tightening the noose around the stone mafia's the district administration has seized 2 laterite stone laden trucks after conducting a raid in Bhogapur(Hadapada) and Motta, Jankia under khordha Tahasil in Jankia police station limits in Khordha district. Acting upon a tip-off on the illegal stone transportation, khordha tahasil squad led by Additional Tahasildar, Khordha, D.Gopal Reddy conducted raid and seized one TATA-912 truck and one TATA,Hyva truck which were engaged in illegally transporting laterite stone without having valid documents. During the search of the trucks a laterite stone consignments worth lakhs were found and seized. The local residents have been suffering as quarrying was creating serious pollution in the area and they have been demanding the district administration to take stringent action against the stone mafia's. The seized vehicle's OD02-DC-3731 and OD02AD-3011 were handed over to the Mining Officer, Khordha. The authorities are now investigating the matter to identify those involved in the illicit mining activities.



## Women's Empowerment Run in Puri

Puri: Every woman possesses immense talent. She is powerful and benevolent. "Empowered women create an empowered India," said Puri Municipal Corporation Commissioner Arugula Sneha.

With the objective of giving due respect to women, a run was organized this morning by the district administration and the sports office. The run started from Talabania Sports Complex and concluded at Shree Jagannath Cricket Stadium.

On this occasion, Commissioner Ms. Sneha, who attended as the chief guest, stated that women are equal to men and can achieve everything—

sometimes even more than men. She advised women to set clear goals and strive with dedication and determination to achieve them.

Additional District Magistrate (Administration) Sarat Chandra Behera remarked that the development of women's talent contributes to the development of the nation. In today's time, women have demonstrated their strength and capability in various fields. He emphasized that such programs are helpful in further strengthening this progress and raising awareness about women's rights, duties, power, and potential.



During the event, Tina Rath from Puri district, who secured first position in the CBSE Class

10 examination, was felicitated. District Sports Officer Chandan Kumar Sahu presided over the

program.

Among others present were Deputy Director of Information and Public Relations Santosh Kumar Sethi, Chief National Kho Kho Coach Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, Vice President of the All India Kho Kho Association Pradyumna Mishra, Treasurer of the Odisha Olympic Association Ravi Shankar Pratihari, Kho Kho Coach Partha Sarathi Mahapatra, and Tina Rath's parents. They all spoke about women's strength, talent, and upliftment.

A signature campaign was also conducted on this occasion to promote awareness, with participants actively taking part.

## District-Level Job Fair Held in Puri

Puri: A mega job fair was organized this morning at the Talabania ITI ground by the District Skill Development and Employment Office. The event was inaugurated by Additional District Magistrate (Protocol) Nilamadhab Bhoi. He stated that such job fairs not only provide employment opportunities to unemployed youth but also support skill development training.

He emphasized that the government's goal is for youth to become self-reliant according to their qualifications. At present, many opportunities are available for young people. They can secure jobs in various sectors or become successful entrepreneurs through training and provide employment to others.

Among others present were Additional Chief Development Officer of the Zilla Parishad Rajib Kumar Behera, Deputy

Director of Information and Public Relations Santosh Kumar Sethi, Principal of Government ITI Puri Pramod Kumar Samal, Principal of Government ITI Krushnaprasad Chandra Sekhar Sundaray, and Principal of Government ITI Rua Deepti Mishra. They highlighted that such job fairs are a good opportunity for youth and advised them to participate and showcase their skills and qualifications.

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District Skill Development and Employment Officer Dharmananda Behera presided over the event, while Prabhakar Kumar Basti conducted the program. Section Officer Pushpalata Pradhan and other staff members assisted in organizing the job fair.

A total of 39 private companies and 10 PIAs (Project Implementing Agencies) participated in the job fair. Out of 1,862 registered candidates, 1,189 were shortlisted by various companies. Among them, 101 candidates were given appointment letters on the spot, and 547 candidates were selected by PIAs for skill development training.

## Shyam Metalics Reopened with Conditions

Sambalpur-(DMS) : The Shyam Metalics and Energy Limited plant located at Pandloi in Sambalpur district, which had been completely shut down over allegations of pollution norm violations, has been reopened within just 10 days.

The reopening has been allowed on the condition that the company complies with directives issued by the Central Pollution Control Board within three months. This was communicated through a letter by the Member Secretary of the State Pollution Control Board.

According to officials, several previously sealed units have now been reopened, including multiple DRI units, the steel melting shop (SMS), pellet plants, power plant sections, and ferro alloy units. However, restrictions remain on certain units such as SMS Unit-2 and 3, Pellet Plant Unit-2, and some DRI kilns.

The reopening took place in the presence of local administrative and regulatory officials, including the sub-collector, SDPO, pollution control authorities, and company representatives. Earlier, on March 30, the Central Pollution Control Board had ordered the plant's closure citing serious violations of environmental laws related to air and water pollution. The inspection report highlighted 26 major lapses, including:

Improper monitoring of emissions from chimneys Unauthorized ash disposal and accumulation Violations in wastewater discharge norms These were considered severe breaches of environmental regulations. Despite the strict closure order—one of the toughest issued so far—the plant has now been allowed to resume operations with strict conditions. These include:

## Mining affected Protest for Deveopment

Keonjhar : People in the old town area who claim to be directly affected of OMC's Gandhamardan iron ore mining, held a protest rally today against the failure of OMC, Suakati under Banspal to provide any facilities to their area. They started a rally from Kali Padia and went in a procession to the office of the District Collector and staged protest. Later they submitted a memorandum to the Chief

Minister of Odisha through the District Collector.

Naba Kishor Sahu, a senior citizen of the old town said " Most of the areas of Keonjhar's old town, located less than ten km away, are affected by Gandhamardan Iron Ore mining, owned by OMC. Especially the residents of Wards 1, 2 and 3 are being affected, but the residents have not been provided with the facilities as per the criteria set

by the government.

On November 03, 2025, the affected residents submitted a joint complaint letter to the District Collector. But no action has been taken so far. Hence, they staged the protest today and gave a memorandum to the CM through the collector."

" The Collector had directed the Executive Officer of Keonjhar Municipality to take immediate action on their grievance. But unfortunately, the

Executive Officer did not prioritize this matter or take any action", they alleged.

In the collective interest of the old town's residents, they have demanded that the Chief Minister should interfere in their demands and take appropriate steps to include the Wards 1, 2 and 3 of Keonjhar municipality as Gandhamardan mine-affected areas and provide the same facilities as those provided by

OMC Mines and the government provide to other mine affected people.

Aditya Bej, another protester who led the protest said that "neither the mining company nor the administration has under take development of our areas like other affected areas. If our genuine demands are not met, then we will intensify our protest in the future until we get justice". (EOM)

# Odisha Govt to Set Up 'SITI Odisha' as Strategic Policy Think Tank

Bhubaneswar, 18 April (H.S.): The Odisha government has announced plans to establish the State Institute for Transformative Initiatives (SITI Odisha), which will function as the apex policy research and strategic advisory body of the state.

According to a resolution issued by the Planning and Convergence Department, SITI Odisha will act as a think tank to support the government's long-term development vision aligned with "Samrudha Odisha 2036" and "Viksit Bharat 2047."

The move comes after the dissolution of the State Planning Board on July 18, 2024, as the government shifts away from conventional planning mechanisms. The new institute is expected to adopt a forward-looking approach based on strategic policy thinking, innovation, cooperative federalism, and measurable outcomes.

SITI Odisha will provide guidance across key thematic areas, including economy and finance, rural economy and livelihoods, employment and urban development, ideation and innovation, energy



transition, and environment, forests, mining, and natural resources—reflecting the state's core development priorities.

The institute will be governed by a Governing Council headed by the Chief

Minister as Chairperson. The council will also include a Vice-Chairperson, four full-time members, nine ex-officio members, and two special invitees. It will meet at least once a year to review and guide the functioning of the

body.

As per the proposed structure, the Vice-Chairperson will hold the rank of a Cabinet Minister, while the full-time members—experts in priority sectors—will be appointed with the rank of Ministers of State. The Development Commissioner-cum-Additional Chief Secretary will serve as Member Secretary. A Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in the rank of Principal Secretary or Commissioner-cum-Secretary (IAS), will also be appointed for a fixed tenure.

The institute will be supported by a Programme Director, a multidisciplinary Project Implementation Unit (PIU), and an administrative wing. Additionally, a State Monitoring and Evaluation Office (SMEO) will function under SITI Odisha as the nodal body for evidence-based governance.

SITI Odisha will operate under the administrative control of the Planning and Convergence Department and is expected to play a key role in shaping the state's policy framework and development trajectory.

## Odisha Governor Reviews Security Arrangements at Lok Bhavan

Bhubaneswar, 18 April (H.S.): S. Dev Datta Singh, Commissioner of Police, called on Governor Haribabu Kambhampati at Lok Bhavan on Saturday to review the existing security and protocol arrangements.

During the meeting, discussions focused on assessing the current security framework and the need for necessary upgrades. The Governor emphasized the importance of strengthening security measures at Lok Bhavan Estate through the adoption of modern technology and ensuring adequate manpower.

He also highlighted the need for seamless management of official programmes and protocol, stressing that enhanced coordination and updated systems are essential for effective administration.

The meeting underscored the state's commitment to maintaining high standards of security and efficient protocol management at key government establishments.



## Boudh Administration Orders 5-Day Closure of Educational Institutions Amid Severe Heatwave



Bhubaneswar, 18 April (H.S.): In view of the prevailing heatwave conditions and a Red Warning issued by the India Meteorological Department, the district administration in Boudh district has ordered the closure of all educational institutions for five days.

As per the directive issued by the Office of the Collector and District Magistrate, all Anganwadi Centres, schools, colleges, degree colleges, Kendriya Vidyalayas, Odisha Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, and technical institutions in the district will remain closed from now until April 22, or until further orders.

However, examinations scheduled during this period will be conducted as planned. Authorities have advised institutions to consider rescheduling exams to morning hours to avoid peak heat conditions. Heads of institutions have also been instructed to ensure adequate drinking water facilities and implement necessary heatwave safety measures for students and staff.

The decision comes amid rising temperatures across western and interior Odisha, with several areas, including Boudh, recording maximum temperatures above 40°C. The move is part of precautionary measures to protect students from heat-related illnesses.

## Former Irrigation Department Staffer Convicted in Vigilance Corruption Case in Odisha

Bhubaneswar, 18 April (H.S.): In a major anti-corruption action, Odisha Vigilance has secured the conviction of Gourahari Patra, a retired Dealing Assistant-cum-Despatch Clerk from the office of the Superintending Engineer (SE), Irrigation Circle, Baripada, in Mayurbhanj district.

Patra, who was chargesheeted under provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, along with relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code, was found guilty of misappropriating government funds. The case involved embezzlement of money meant for deposit in banks towards fresh and renewal license fees of contractors by allegedly preparing forged official records.

The Special Judge Vigilance Baripada on Friday convicted Patra and sentenced him to three years of rigorous imprisonment along with a monetary fine. Following the conviction, Odisha Vigilance officials stated that they will move the competent authority to initiate proceedings for the stoppage of pension benefits of the retired official.

the Minister stated that the SOP aims to ensure coordinated action among various departments while empowering district administrations to take timely decisions based on local temperature conditions and ground realities.

Under the new guidelines, district collectors have been authorized to implement

## 12-Hour Bandh in Mayurbhanj Over Student's Death; BJD Stages Protest

Bhubaneswar, 18 April (H.S.): The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has called for a 12-hour bandh in Mayurbhanj district to protest the death of a girl student, allegedly due to food poisoning at an Ashram school.

The dawn-to-dusk shutdown, which began at 6 am and will continue till 6 pm, has significantly disrupted normal life across the district. BJD supporters staged demonstrations at multiple locations, blocking

key roads, including national and state highways, and burning tyres as part of the protest.

The bandh was called in response to the death of Rupali Beshra, a Class V student of Rasagobindpur Ashram School. She reportedly died after consuming contaminated or stale food served at the school hostel. Following the same meal, more than 146 students fell ill, complaining of vomiting and diarrhoea.



BJD leaders have condemned the incident, calling it a case of gross

negligence by the school authorities and questioning the role of the state

government. The party has demanded justice for the deceased student and strict action against those responsible.

The protest is being led by district president Sudam Marandi, with participation from members of the party's youth and student wings, as well as other affiliated groups.

The impact of the bandh is being felt across all four subdivisions of the

district—Baripada, Kaptipada, Bamanghati, and Panchpir. Protesters also briefly halted the Bangiriposi-Puri Superfast train near Betnoti station.

However, essential services have been exempted. Ambulances and emergency vehicles are operating normally, and essential shops remain open. No major untoward incidents have been reported so far, and the protest is continuing peacefully.

## Illegal LPG Refilling Unit Busted in Bhubaneswar, 70 Cylinders Seized

Bhubaneswar, 18 April (H.S.): In a major crackdown on illegal fuel operations, officials of the Supply Department on Saturday busted an unauthorised LPG refilling unit in the Pathargadia area of Bhubaneswar and seized around 70 gas cylinders.

According to officials, the accused were illegally transferring LPG from commercial cylinders into domestic cylinders in violation of safety norms and government regulations. The practice not only results in revenue loss to the

government but also poses serious risks to public safety due to improper handling and storage of highly inflammable gas.

The raid was conducted based on specific intelligence inputs, during which officials caught the illegal operation in progress, indicating an organised setup operating in the area.

Authorities also recovered filling equipment, including refilling motors, from the site. Officials said the documents produced by those involved were found to be invalid and linked to

another location. A detailed investigation has been launched to identify all individuals associated with the racket. Officials stated that strict legal action will be taken against the offenders as per the law. An FIR will be registered, and the accused will be forwarded to court after completion of necessary formalities.

A Supply Department official confirmed that the refilling activity was being carried out illegally and assured that further details would emerge after recording statements of those detained.

## Odisha to Host Groundbreaking of India's First Advanced 3D Chip Packaging Unit on April 19

Bhubaneswar, 18 April (H.S.): Odisha is set to mark a major milestone in India's semiconductor journey with the groundbreaking ceremony of the country's first Advanced Glass Semiconductor Packaging Unit, to be held in Bhubaneswar on April 19, 2026.

The project, titled Heterogeneous Integration Packaging Solutions (3D Glass Solutions), represents India's first advanced 3D chip packaging facility and is expected to position Odisha as a key hub in global semiconductor packaging technology.

The ceremony will be attended by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Union Minister for Electronics & IT

Ashwini Vaishnaw, and Odisha Electronics & IT Minister Mukesh Mahaling, along with senior officials, global industry leaders, investors, and academic representatives.

The project is being described as a significant step toward establishing India's presence in next-generation semiconductor manufacturing. It introduces cutting-edge 3D heterogeneous integration technology and advanced glass substrate-based packaging for the first time in the country.

According to officials, the project has an estimated investment of ₹1,943 crore and is expected to generate around 2,500 direct and indirect employment opportunities. It will have an annual production capacity of approximately 50

million assembled units.

The chips produced at the facility are expected to cater to critical sectors such as aerospace, defence, artificial intelligence, 5G communications, and data centres.

This initiative further strengthens Odisha's growing semiconductor ecosystem, making it the first state in India to host both a compound semiconductor fabrication unit and an advanced 3D chip packaging facility based on glass substrates.

Officials said the project reflects the state government's focus on attracting high-tech investments, building a strong innovation ecosystem, and aligning with the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

## Naveen Patnaik Pays Tribute to Biju Patnaik on His Death Anniversary

Bhubaneswar, 17 April (H.S.): Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik paid heartfelt tributes to legendary leader and former Chief Minister Biju Patnaik on his death anniversary.

In a message shared on social media, Naveen Patnaik described Biju Patnaik as a towering figure and the pride of Odisha, recalling his

significant contribution to India's freedom struggle. He highlighted that Biju Patnaik played a crucial role in empowering people and strengthening the Panchayati Raj system in the state. Patnaik further noted that Biju Patnaik's contributions were unparalleled in promoting women's reservation in politics.

**OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
**MINOR IRRIGATION DIVISION, CUTTACK**  
Letter No. 2286 / Dt. 17.04.2026  
**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA e-Procurement Notice**  
Bid Identification No. on line SECMD-01 /2026-27  
[emidcuttack@yahoo.co.in](mailto:emidcuttack@yahoo.co.in)

1. Name of work	:- Improvement of MIPs under Improvement to Diversion weir scheme in MI Sub-Division Athagarh.
2. Total Number of work	:- 02 (Two) nos.
3. Estimated cost	:- Varies from Rs. 43.51 to Rs. 47.76 lakh.
4. Tender paper Cost(Online)	:- Rs.6,000/-
5. Bid Security (Online)	:- As per DTCN
6. Period of Completion	:- As per DTCN
7. Availability of Bid Document	:- From 21.04.2026, 10.00 AM to 30.04.2026, 5.00 PM in website ( <a href="http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in">www.tendersorissa.gov.in</a> )
8. Last date & Time of receipt	:- 30.04.2026 at 5.00 PM through online Bid.
9. Date of opening of Technical Bid documents	:- 02.05.2026 at 11.00 A.M in the office of the SE, M.I. Division, Cuttack.
10. Date of Lottery, if required	:- 08.05.2026 at 12.00 Noon in the office of the SE, M.I. Division, Cuttack
11. Name and address of the OIT	:- Superintending Engineer, M.I. Division, Cuttack. P.O :- Nayabazar, Cuttack. Phone :- 0671-2443622 PINCODE :- 753004

Further details can be seen from the Government of Odisha Web-Site [www.tendersorissa.gov.in](http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in)

**Notes:- Corrigendum / Addendum / Modification / Additions if any, can be seen through On-line only.**

**32001-77-2627** **Superintending Engineer**  
M.I. Division, Cuttack

# Odisha Issues SOP to Strengthen Heatwave Preparedness Across State

Bhubaneswar, 18 April (H.S.): The Odisha government has issued a comprehensive Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to enhance preparedness and response to heatwave conditions across the state, Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari said on Saturday.

Addressing the media,

necessary measures, with flexibility to respond swiftly depending on the severity of heatwave conditions. Such decisions will be subject to subsequent ratification by the state government.

As part of the proposed measures, the government is considering restrictions on vehicular movement during peak heat hours between 11 am and 3 pm

in severely affected areas. Plans are also in place to establish roadside shelters for drivers and ensure the availability of drinking water and ORS packets to prevent heat-related illnesses.

The Minister further informed that dedicated heatwave shelters will be set up in vulnerable locations, modeled on



existing cyclone and flood shelters in the state. Emergency services, including ambulances and fire services, have been directed to respond to distress calls within 20 minutes. Additionally, central and state public sector undertakings (PSUs), along with industries located along national highways, have agreed

to provide drinking water and ORS to commuters during the heatwave period.

The government is working in coordination with multiple departments, including Panchayati Raj & Drinking Water, Housing & Urban Development, and district administrations, to

ensure effective implementation of the measures.

"All districts have submitted their preparedness reports, and we are fully equipped to handle the situation. Compared to previous years, Odisha is in a stronger position to manage heatwave conditions without major impact," Pujari said.

## Rediscovering one's Innate Capacity

BhaskarParichha

Life rarely unfolds in a straight, predictable line. It is, as DrNeenaVerma evocatively suggests, "a mosaic of misery and meaningfulness," where rainstorms and rainbows coexist. In *RISE - The Deep Resilience Way*, Verma offers a thoughtful and deeply reflective exploration of resilience-not as a mere ability to "bounce back," but as a profound, evolving capacity to grow, transform, and find meaning even in the face of adversity.

At its core, the book challenges popular, somewhat superficial notions of resilience. Instead of treating it as a quick recovery mechanism, Verma expands the concept into something far richer and more nuanced. She introduces two key constructs-"Resilience Mindset" and "Deep Resilience"-both grounded in her extensive professional experience, interdisciplinary scholarship, and lived wisdom. These ideas form the backbone of the book and provide readers with a framework to understand and cultivate resilience in a holistic manner.

Structured into three parts, the book carefully guides the reader through a layered journey. The first section, *Strength in Storm*, establishes the inevitability of life's challenges and underscores resilience as an inherent human capacity. Verma's "Resilience Mindset," explained through a seven-aspect framework, encourages readers to reframe adversity not as an interruption but as an integral part of life's rhythm.

The second and most substantial part of the book delves into the concept of "Deep Resilience," a four-aspect, three-phase model that represents the heart of Verma's contribution. Across multiple chapters, she explores this model in depth, weaving together theory, research, and practice. What stands out here is the author's ability to make complex

psychological and philosophical ideas accessible without oversimplifying them. Each chapter invites readers into a deeper engagement with their inner landscape, encouraging reflection and self-awareness.

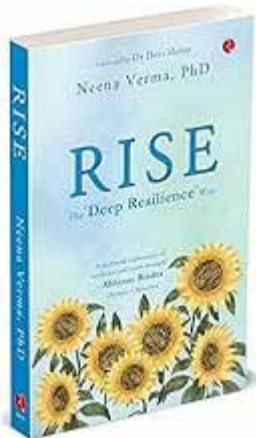
The final section translates theory into practice, offering everyday tools and exercises to help readers embody resilience in their daily lives. These practices are not presented as quick fixes but as ongoing, mindful engagements-small yet significant steps toward nurturing one's inner strength.

The greatest strengths lies in its narrative style.

With extensive quotes, Verma combines conceptual clarity with emotional resonance, drawing on real-life stories, reflective exercises, and insights from her work in leadership, grief psychology, and therapeutic writing. This blend of the analytical and the experiential ensures that the book speaks both to the intellect and the heart. However, readers looking for a fast-paced, prescriptive self-help guide may find the book's reflective and layered approach demanding. *RISE* asks for patience, introspection, and a willingness to engage deeply with one's own experiences. But for those willing to undertake this journey, the rewards are substantial.

In a world increasingly marked by uncertainty, stress, and emotional upheaval, *RISE - The Deep Resilience Way* emerges as a timely and meaningful contribution. It reminds us that resilience is not something we acquire externally but something we awaken within. Verma's work-with broad endorsements - serves as both a guide and a companion-inviting readers to rediscover their innate capacity for strength, healing, and growth.

**RISE - The Deep Resilience Way**  
DrNeenaVerma  
Rupa Publications  
New Delhi



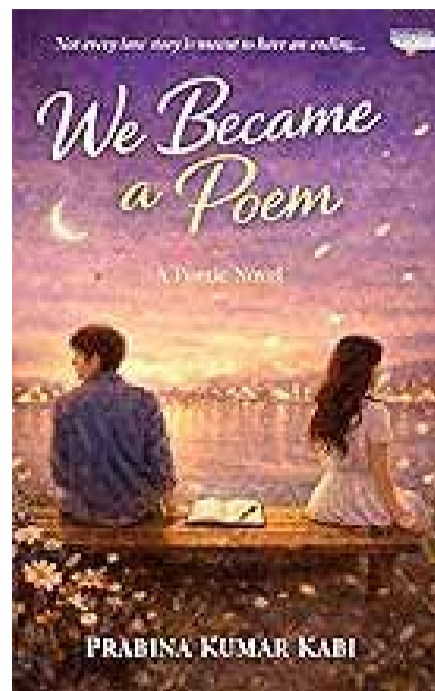
## When Life Turns into a Poem

Krishna Kumar Mohanty

At first glance, 'We Became a Poem' appears to be a collection of verses. In truth, it is a novel that moves with the rhythm and sensitivity of poetry. Its narrative unfolds gently, allowing everyday experiences to acquire a quiet lyrical depth, where the ordinary begins to glow with meaning.

What distinguishes this work is its remarkable restraint. There are no dramatic twists, no overt conflicts demanding attention. Instead, the story evolves through memory, silence, and introspection. The author relies on emotional stillness rather than narrative urgency. The language remains simple yet evocative, offering a space where the reader can pause, reflect, and enter the inner lives of the characters without distraction.

At the centre of the novel are Samas and Lagna. Their relationship forms its emotional core, yet they are not presented as conventional characters bound by plot. Samas is introspective, often observing life from a thoughtful distance, questioning its meanings and patterns. Lagna, in contrast, represents a quiet emotional strength. She expresses herself not through dramatic gestures, but through calm presence and understanding. Their relationship grows in pauses and unspoken emotions.



It is shaped not by declarations, but by what remains unsaid. A reflective passage captures this essence: "We walked through many ordinary days, never naming what lived between us. Then one evening we realised- somewhere along the way we had become a poem."

This moment reflects the novel's central idea that life, when shared deeply, slowly transforms into something poetic. Memory plays a defining role in the narrative. Much of the story unfolds through recollection,

where seemingly insignificant moments gather meaning over time.

The past is not merely revisited; it is reinterpreted. The novel suggests that what remains with us is not the event itself, but the silence that follows it. That silence, over the years, begins to speak and reveal deeper truths.

The prose frequently approaches the cadence of poetry. Descriptions are brief yet suggestive, allowing emotional resonance to emerge naturally. Nature and surroundings are not passive backdrops; they reflect inner states of mind. A quiet evening, a passing season, or an unfinished conversation becomes part of the emotional landscape.

As the narrative progresses, Samas and Lagna transcend their individuality. They begin to represent universal human experiences-hesitation, longing, missed opportunities, and the tenderness of memory. The reader does not remain a distant observer but recognises echoes of personal experience within their

journey.

The pacing of the novel is deliberate and unhurried. For some, it may feel slow, but this slowness is essential. It allows the narrative to breathe and creates room for contemplation. The language avoids excess, yet carries a subtle lyricism that sustains both clarity and depth.

The title itself works as a metaphor for life. It suggests that experiences, when lived and remembered, gradually transform into meaning. Samas and Lagna do not consciously create poetry, yet their lives, shaped by love, distance, and reflection, acquire a poetic dimension. In a time when many narratives rely on spectacle and immediacy, this novel offers a quiet alternative. It reminds us that depth often resides in stillness and that the most enduring stories emerge from subtle transformations.

The book is a reflective and deeply sensitive novel that gently dissolves the boundary between prose and poetry. Its impact lies not in dramatic intensity, but in its quiet, lingering resonance.

**We Became a Poem**  
Prabhina Kumar Kabi  
Shubhappallaba  
Publication  
Balasore

(Mohanty is a poet, essayist and critic)

## Understanding Hinduism

BhaskarParichha

In *DO YOU KNOW YOUR HINDUISM?* Notes for Modern-Day Hindus, Rajmohan Gandhi brings the weight of a seasoned historian and the sensitivity of a public intellectual to one of the world's oldest and most complex religious traditions. Known for his earlier works such as *India after 1947: Reflections & Recollections* and *Modern South India: A History from the 17th Century*, Gandhi approaches Hinduism not as a fixed doctrine but as a living, evolving civilizational experience.

The central strength of this book lies in its refusal to simplify. Hinduism, Gandhi argues, cannot be reduced to a singular creed, text, or authority. Instead, it is a vast and dynamic constellation

of beliefs, practices, philosophies, and cultural expressions that have developed over millennia. From the intimate spaces of personal devotion to the broader arenas of social organization and political mobilization, Hinduism operates across multiple layers-each shaping and reshaping the other.

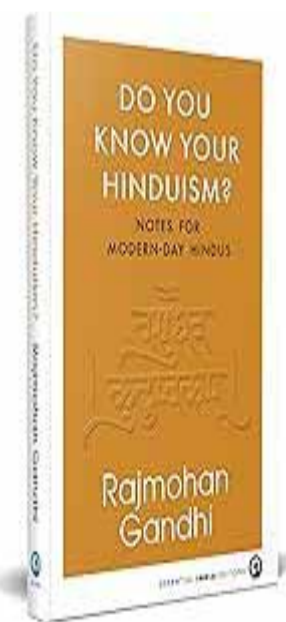
Gandhi's exploration is both historical and reflective. He draws on a wide range of sources-scriptures, philosophical traditions, historical events, and contemporary realities-to trace how Hindu thought has evolved. Importantly, he highlights the internal plurality of the tradition. There is no single "Hindu voice," but rather a continuous dialogue marked by debate, dissent, and reinterpretation. This emphasis

on plurality is one of the book's most compelling contributions, especially in a time when reductive narratives often dominate public discourse. What sets this work apart is its moral clarity. Gandhi does not merely describe Hinduism; he interrogates it. He asks difficult questions about caste, exclusion, and the use of religion in politics, while also acknowledging the tradition's profound ethical resources. This balanced approach-neither apologetic nor dismissive-gives the book its intellectual integrity.

The writing is lucid and accessible without sacrificing depth. Gandhi avoids jargon and instead opts for a conversational yet authoritative tone, making complex ideas approachable for a wide readership. His reflections are often interwoven with historical anecdotes and philosophical insights, creating a narrative that is as engaging as it is informative. A particularly reverberating theme in the book is the idea of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*-the world as one family. Gandhi presents this not as a mere slogan, but as an ethical vision deeply embedded in Hindu thought. In today's polarized and fractured world, this principle acquires renewed urgency. By foregrounding it, Gandhi reminds readers of Hinduism's capacity for inclusivity, compassion, and self-critique.

At a time when religion is frequently invoked for narrow or divisive ends, *Understanding Hinduism* offers a necessary corrective. It restores attention to the tradition's intellectual richness and its long-standing engagement with questions of ethics, coexistence, and human dignity. This is a thoughtful, balanced, and deeply relevant book. Rajmohan Gandhi succeeds in presenting Hinduism in all its complexity-neither romanticized nor reduced-while reaffirming its enduring moral and philosophical significance. It is an essential read for anyone seeking to understand not just Hinduism, but the broader cultural and ethical fabric of India.

**DO YOU KNOW YOUR HINDUISM**  
Rajmohan Gandhi  
Aleph Books  
New Delhi



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## Rich and Evocatively Curated

Dharma Raj

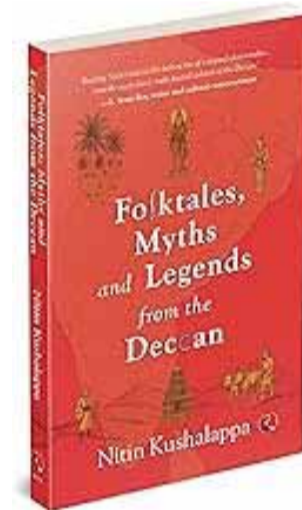
Folktales, Myths and Legends from the Deccan by NitinKushalappa is a compelling literary effort that brings the oral traditions of the Deccan plateau into the written realm with remarkable sensitivity and depth. Rooted in a landscape that spans rugged plateaus, lush coasts, forested interiors, and misty highlands, the book captures the essence of a region where storytelling has long served as a vessel of memory, identity, and belief.

The Deccan's oral traditions are among the richest in the Indian subcontinent, shaped by a mosaic of languages, communities, and cultural practices. Kushalappa's collection of ten narratives reflects this diversity, drawing from distinct regions such as Bayaluseeme, Kodagu, Tulun?d, Chhattisgarh, and Kerala. Each story retains the flavour of its local origins while speaking to universal human concerns-love, sacrifice, heroism, loss, and

transcendence. Kushalappa, the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Bal Sahitya Puraskar, has produced the book commendably.

Among the most striking tales is that of Junjappa, a humble herdsman from the dry plains of Bayaluseeme who transcends death to become a folk deity. His story reflects the deep-rooted tradition of hero worship in rural India, where the line between the human and the divine is often porous. Equally fascinating is the legend of KalyatPonnappa from Kodagu, a warrior-sorcerer whose mastery of magic is intertwined with his duty to protect his people. These narratives are not merely tales of adventure; they reveal how communities imagine power, justice, and survival.

The story of Koti and Chennaya, the divine twins from the coastal region of Tulun?d, stands out for its emotional intensity and moral complexity. Their journey, marked by courage and



sacrifice, resonates as a powerful reflection on kinship and destiny. In contrast, the ballad of Lorik and Chandaini from Chhattisgarh offers a poignant exploration of forbidden love, imbued with a haunting, lyrical quality that lingers long after the story ends. The myth of the twelve abandoned children from Kerala, meanwhile, provides a fascinating glimpse into how collective identities and origin stories are shaped through

folklore. What elevates this collection beyond a simple retelling of folktales is Kushalappa's narrative approach. He writes with a lyrical grace that preserves the cadence of oral storytelling while making it accessible to contemporary readers. His prose neither exoticizes nor dilutes the source material; instead, it respects the integrity of the traditions from which these stories emerge. The inclusion of an ethnographic account of the seven mother-goddesses further enriches the book, offering a rare insight into ritual practices and belief systems that continue to hold significance in the Deccan.

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Folktales, Myths and Legends from the Deccan is an important contribution to the preservation and reinterpretation of India's oral heritage. It is a book that invites readers not only to engage with stories but also to appreciate the living traditions that sustain them. Rich, evocative, and thoughtfully curated, it stands as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling in shaping cultural landscapes.

**FOLKTALES, MYTHS AND LEGENDS FROM THE DECCAN**  
NitinKushalappa  
Rupa Publications  
New Delhi

## What do Indian Cities Eat?

BhaskarParichha

'First Bite: Breakfast Stories from Urban India' by Priyadarshini Chatterjee is an moving and deeply observant exploration of India's cities through the seemingly ordinary act of breakfast. Moving across ten urban landscapes-Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kochi, Amritsar, Varanasi, Shillong, Bengaluru, and Ahmedabad-Chatterjee transforms the morning meal into a powerful lens for understanding how cities breathe, function, and sustain themselves.

The book is not about food in the conventional sense. It neither serves as a cookbook nor as a curated list of iconic eateries. Instead, it asks a deceptively simple question: what do cities eat when they wake up, and what does that reveal about the lives within them? The answers unfold through richly textured narratives that weave together history, sociology, and lived experience. Breakfast here becomes a marker of labour and livelihood-of who rises early,

who cooks, who eats on the move, and who has the privilege of leisure.

What makes the book interesting is its attention to the intersections of food with caste, class, migration, and faith. In tracing the evolution of breakfast practices, Chatterjee reveals how deeply food habits are shaped by structures of power and inequality. Temple offerings, for instance, are not merely ritualistic but are embedded in systems of access and exclusion. Similarly, roadside stalls and small eateries emerge not just as culinary spaces but as sites of economic survival and social interaction, often run by migrants and catering to the working class.

Chatterjee's method is both archival and immersive. Drawing on ancient texts, literary references, and historical records, she situates contemporary food habits within a long continuum. At the same time, her on-the-ground reporting lends immediacy and authenticity to the narrative. Whether she is navigating the bustling streets of



Mumbai at dawn or observing the quieter rhythms of Shillong, her writing captures the sensory and emotional texture of each place. The reader can almost hear the clatter of utensils, smell the first wafts of cooking, and sense the gradual stirring of urban life. The book is compelling in

how it treats breakfast as an indicator of urban change. The rise of public eateries, the influence of colonial histories, and the pressures of modern capitalism all find expression in what people eat in the morning. In cities like Bengaluru and Delhi, the shift towards convenience and speed reflects changing work cultures, while in places like Varanasi or Amritsar, older traditions continue to hold ground, albeit in evolving forms. Chatterjee writes with clarity, warmth, and a quiet authority. Her prose is accessible yet layered, allowing readers to engage with complex ideas without feeling

overwhelmed. There is a journalist's precision in her observations, but also a storyteller's sensitivity in how she frames them. In little more than 350 pages, *First Bite* is a thoughtful and original contribution to food writing in India. It elevates the everyday act of eating into a meaningful inquiry into culture, history, and urban life. It reminds one that even the most routine meals carry within them stories of resilience, adaptation, and identity.

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**First Bite**  
Priyadarshini Chatterjee  
Speaking Tiger  
New Delhi

## Om Birla, Gadkari, and Shekhawat Lead Tribute on World Heritage Day, Stress Collective Duty to Protect India's Cultural Legacy

New Delhi, 18 /4 (H.S.): On the occasion of World Heritage Day, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, and Union Culture and Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, along with several other leaders, extended warm greetings to the people of India and underscored the need to safeguard the nation's rich cultural and historical heritage. In a social-media post on X, Om Birla conveyed heartfelt wishes to all citizens, especially people of Rajasthan, on World Heritage Day. He observed that heritage sites are living emblems of India's profound culture and ancient civilizations, and preserving and cherishing them is a shared responsibility of every citizen. He highlighted that Rajasthan, with its grand forts, palaces, and distinctive cultural legacy, occupies a special place among India's heritage landscapes, and called for sustained efforts to conserve, revitalize, and transmit the value of these sites to future generations so that the country's cultural identity remains secure and vibrant. Nitin Gadkari emphasized that the protection,



safety, and preservation of these invaluable sites must continue for the benefit of future generations, so that history, heritage, and national identity remain alive for years to come. He framed heritage conservation as both a civic duty and a long-term investment in the nation's memory and character. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat drew attention to the tangible and intangible elements of India's heritage, saying that

temple walls, the intricate carvings of ancient forts, and multigenerational folk songs collectively form the country's true identity. He urged citizens to resolve, on this World Heritage Day, that whenever they visit a historical site, they will keep it clean, safe, and protected, and treat it with due respect—because such heritage belongs not only to the present but also to generations yet unborn. Union

Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh recalled iconic sites such as the Mahabodhi Temple and the remains of Nalanda, saying these monuments constantly remind the nation of its glorious past and civilizational achievements. He stressed that these landmarks are not merely structures of stone but living symbols of India's intellectual and spiritual legacy. Union Minister of State for Law and Justice (Independent Charge) Arjun Ram Meghwal stated that the country's heritage is what binds citizens to their illustrious history and culture. He called upon people to resolve on this occasion to become active partners in the protection and promotion of India's heritage sites. Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Prahlad Joshi noted that from ancient temples to enduring traditions, India's heritage is a vivid testament to its rich history and living culture. He added that the nation is home to several UNESCO-recognized sites which embody the spirit, diversity, and grandeur of India, and urged people to celebrate this extraordinary legacy as a source of pride and unity.

## Dhankhar Hails Harivansh's Stellar Re-Election as Rajya Sabha's Stalwart Deputy Chairman

New Delhi, 18 /4 (H.S.): In a heartfelt endorsement of steadfast leadership, former Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar extended warm congratulations to Harivansh on his unanimous election as Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha for an unprecedented third consecutive term—a rare distinction for a nominated member. Dhankhar, who served as the Upper House's ex-officio Chairman until resigning last July due to health concerns, penned a letter praising the milestone as "a befitting tribute to your integrity and commitment to public



service." He underscored it as a hard-earned recognition of the trust and confidence Harivansh commands across the political spectrum. This re-election not

only cements Harivansh's legacy in fostering parliamentary decorum but also signals enduring bipartisanship in India's deliberative democracy.

## Budget Session Ends as Lok Sabha Adjourns Sine Die Amid Women's Quota Setback

New Delhi, 18 /4 (H.S.): The Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die on Saturday, formally closing the Budget session that commenced in January and marked by intense political debate over finance, governance, and a high-stakes constitutional initiative. The gavel fell at 11 a.m., when Speaker Om Birla delivered his concluding remarks and brought the session to an indefinite close. The final day of the House coincided with the aftermath of a dramatic legislative setback: a Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026—seeking to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies by 2029 through an increase in the Lower House's strength from 543 to 816 seats—was defeated by a division of votes. The failure of the bill, which required a two-thirds majority, cast a long shadow over the



closing hours of the session, turning what was billed as a milestone for gender representation into a focal point of political recrimination. In his valedictory address, Speaker Birla lauded the session's productivity, citing the passage of key financial and welfare measures, while also acknowledging the sharp polarisation

that accompanied the women's reservation debate. With the House now adjourned sine die, attention shifts to the next parliamentary session, where the fate of the stalled women's quota proposal and broader legislative priorities will likely remain at the centre of political contestation.

## 4-member panel with retired judge, ex-IPS officer to probe Nashik TCS case

New Delhi, 18/4 (H.S.): The Fact Finding Committee has begun its inquiry into the alleged religious conversion and sexual harassment case linked to the TCS office in Nashik, advocate Monika Arora said on Saturday.

While speaking to ANI, Arora said, "We have come for an inquiry into the episode of TCS. And we are going to talk to all the stakeholders." She further stated that the panel would speak to all parties first before sharing any preliminary details. "It's not possible for us to say anything right now because we will meet all the stakeholders and talk to them, and whatever truth comes out, based on that, we are going to make a recommendation and a report," she said.

Arora said the committee comprises four members. "The committee has a retired judge, a retired IPS officer, and an advocate and a coordinator from NCW. There are four people," she added. The panel's visit comes amid protests by Bajrang Dal members outside the District Collector's Office demanding action over the allegations. On Friday, the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) took custody of two accused, Safi Shaikh and Raza Memon, in the alleged forced conversion case linked to Nashik Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). The ATS is currently interrogating the accused in connection with the alleged forced conversion case linked to Nashik TCS. Earlier, K. Krithivasan, CEO and MD, TCS said that the company has engaged the services of expert teams from Deloitte and a prominent law firm Trilegal as independent counsel to the internal investigation led by Aarthi Subramanian, President and COO, TCS. The TCS CEO said an committee chaired by Keki Mistry, Independent Director has also been constituted.

TCS said its unit in Nashik continues to operate and serve our clients. The company said that while detailed reviews are still underway, a preliminary review of the systems and records pertaining to the Nashik unit indicates that they had not received any complaints of the nature that are being alleged on either its ethics or POSH channels.

## Rajya Sabha Adjourns Sine Die, Marking End of Budget Session



New Delhi, 18/4 (H.S.): The Rajya Sabha was adjourned sine die on Saturday, formally bringing to a close the Budget session that commenced on January 28 and spanned over nearly three months of sittings. The House concluded its proceedings with Chairman C. P. Radhakrishnan presiding over the final day, during which he reflected on the session's legislative output and overall functioning. Radhakrishnan noted

that the Upper House remained in session for 157 hours and 40 minutes, recording a productivity of approximately 110 per cent against the scheduled time. He described the session as one of the more substantive in recent years, highlighting the passage of key financial and policy-related bills while also acknowledging the disruptions that occasionally marked parliamentary debates. He further informed the House that

during the special three-day sitting held from April 16 to 18, members unanimously re-elected Harivansh as Deputy Chairman, underscoring cross-party confidence in his conduct and impartiality. With the adjournment sine die, the Rajya Sabha now stands prorogued until the next session, leaving the stage set for fresh legislative priorities and renewed scrutiny of the government's agenda.

## Priyanka Gandhi demands immediate implementation of 2023 Women's Reservation bill

New Delhi, 18/4 (H.S.): Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday demanded that the Centre immediately reintroduce the 2023 Women's Reservation Bill, calling the failure of the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026, in the Lok Sabha "Black Day" for the NDA government. Addressing a press conference here, Priyanka Gandhi urged the government to act without delay. "If you want to do something concrete, bring back the bill that was passed unanimously in 2023, supported by all parties. If you need to make a few small amendments to it so it can be implemented now, do it and implement it now. Give women their rights, right now," she said. Sharpening her attack, she added, "It's a Black Day for them (centre) because they've felt a shock for the first time, which they deserved. The problems of women today are growing exponentially. Women aren't fools. They see everything. That PR and media hype won't work anymore." Priyanka Gandhi reiterated that the opposition's stand was not against women's reservation but against linking it to delimitation and census processes. "Don't try to mislead them by twisting it around and attaching it to other things. Do it now. We're all ready," she asserted. "What happened yesterday was a huge victory for democracy. The government's conspiracy to alter the federal structure and weaken democracy was defeated and stopped. This was a victory for the Constitution, a victory for the country, and a victory for the unity of the opposition," she said. "The way they have brought this bill, the things they have attached to it, the delimitation, the 2011 census, it's very clear that they knew this bill was not going to be able to be passed. They just wanted the political credit," she added. Priyanka Gandhi further accused the Centre of using women to permanently stay in power stating, "I think it's a conspiracy that somehow they need to stay in power... So, to achieve this, they're planning how to permanently stay in power using women... They thought that if it was passed, they'd win."

## Govt approves Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool with sovereign guarantee of Rs 12,980 crore

New Delhi, 18/4 (H.S.): The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday approved the proposal for creation of a domestic insurance pool, namely 'Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool' (BMI pool) with a sovereign guarantee of Rs 12,980 crores to facilitate continuous maritime insurance coverages. The pool ensures that Indian trade continues to have access to affordable insurance for vessels carrying cargo from any international origin to Indian ports and vice-versa, even when transiting volatile maritime corridors. With increased global volatility and geopolitical instability, maritime trade has been impacted with increased risk of losses for cargo and vessels resulting in increased insurance costs and uncertainty in continuous availability of insurance. Further, there is high dependence of Indian vessels on International Group of Protection and Indemnity (IGP&I) Club for P&I insurance covering third-



party liabilities like Oil pollution liability, Wreck removal, Cargo damage, Crew injury and repatriation. Collision liabilities and so on. Accordingly, there was a need for a domestic maritime risk covering pool to maintain sovereignty and continuity of trade in face of withdrawal of coverage due to sanctions or due to geopolitical tensions. In the above backdrop, the Government has approved formation of 'Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool'

(BMI pool) for Indian flagged or controlled vessels or vessels destined to or starting from India, backed by a sovereign guarantee. The pool would cover all maritime risks like Hull and Machinery, Cargo, P&I and War risk. The policies will be issued by insurers that are Pool members, using the combined underwriting capacity of the Pool, which would be around Rs 950 crore. The Pool will help to manage liability insurance locally, tailored to Indian Shipping

conditions and regulatory requirements, develop specialized Marine underwriting, claims management and legal expertise within India. Further, a Governing Body Constituted for this pool would oversee the formation and functioning of the pool. The rationale for providing a sovereign guarantee to the proposed domestic insurance entity is rooted in the objectives of strengthening self-reliance, sanctions resilience and ensuring greater sovereign control.

## Union Cabinet approves 2% DA increase for central government employees

New Delhi, 18/4 (H.S.) The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved release of an additional instalment of Dearness Allowance (DA) to Central Government employees and Dearness Relief (DR) to pensioners from January 1, 2026. It represents an increase of two per cent over the existing rate of 58 per cent of the Basic Pay/Pension, to compensate against price rise. Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said the decision will benefit over 50 lakh Central Government employees and over 68 lakh pensioners. "Another very

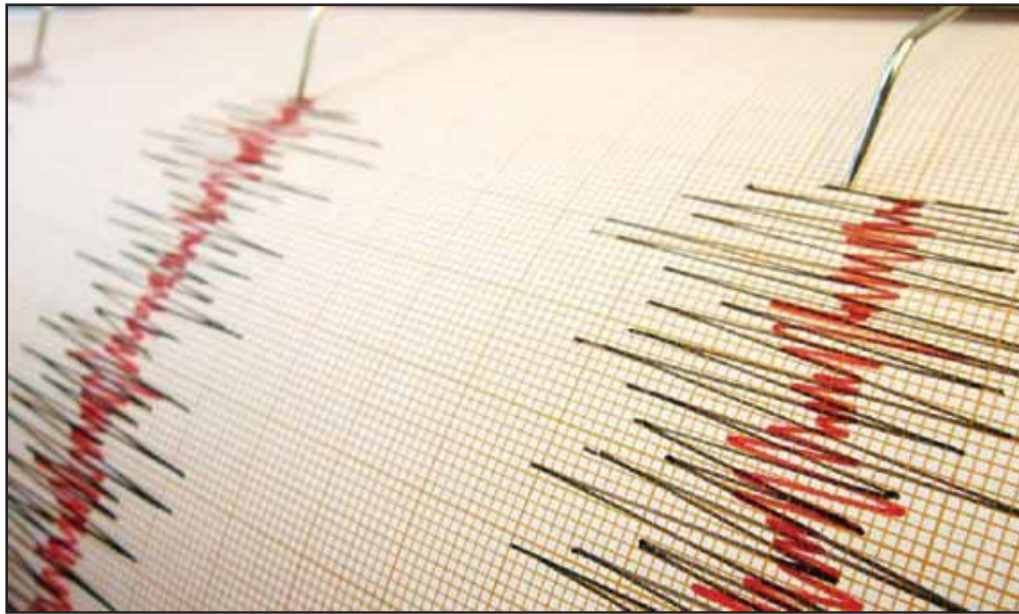


big decision was taken today. I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations. DA and DR have been increased for all our central government employees and pensioners, which will cost the Government of India a total of Rs. 6,791 crore. Basically, DA and DR will become 60% of the basic pay from January 1, 2026. It has been increased by 2%, from 58% to

60%. It will become 60% of the basic pay. There are a total of about 50 lakh employees and 68 lakh pensioners of the Government of India. This will be a huge benefit for all of them," he said. This increase is in accordance with the accepted formula, which is based on the recommendations of the 7th Central Pay Commission, an official release said.

## Deep-Focus Tremor: 5.0-Magnitude Earthquake Jolts Afghanistan, Echoes Felt Across Kashmir

Kabul/New Delhi/Srinagar, 18 / 4(H.S.): A moderate earthquake of magnitude 5.0 on the Richter scale struck the mountainous Badakhshan region of Afghanistan on Saturday morning, sending low-frequency tremors across parts of northern India, including the Kashmir Valley. The quake, which occurred at 8:24 am Indian Standard Time, was centred near the village of Zaybak in Afghanistan's remote Hindu Kush corridor, at coordinates 36.5536°N and 70.9259°E, and originated at a depth of approximately 190 kilometres beneath the Earth's surface. Seismic data from the European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) and regional monitoring agencies confirm that the event was an intraplate, deep-focus earthquake within the broader Hindu Kush-Pamir seismic belt, a zone notorious for frequent moderate-to-strong quakes due to the collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates. At such depth, much of the seismic energy is absorbed by the overlying rock, which explains why, despite the release of energy equivalent to roughly 477 tons of TNT, the shaking felt at the surface in Afghanistan was relatively



subdued. In the immediate vicinity of the epicentre—Badakhshan's rugged, sparsely populated terrain—reports so far indicate only mild swaying of buildings and no confirmed deaths or major structural damage. Local authorities in the region have, however, urged residents to remain alert for potential aftershocks and to inspect older mud-brick or stone-masonry structures, which are especially vulnerable even to moderate shaking. Afghan officials

and international disaster-monitoring bodies are reviewing early-warning protocols and building-code compliance in light of the cumulative seismic activity recorded in the Hindu Kush belt over the past weeks. In India, the tremors were felt primarily in the higher-altitude districts of the Kashmir Valley, where residents reported brief but discernible shaking lasting several seconds. India's National Centre for Seismology has emphasised that

the depth and distance of the Afghan source attenuated the waveforms before they reached Indian territory, limiting the impact to light ground motion. The April 18 tremor comes on the heels of a series of moderate-magnitude events in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush region, including a 5.8-magnitude quake on April 3 that struck south of Jorm and caused at least a dozen fatalities and multiple injuries in Badakhshan.

## Iran declares Strait of Hormuz open for commercial vessels during Lebanon ceasefire

Tehran, 18/4(H.S.): Tehran has announced that the Strait of Hormuz will remain "completely open" for the duration of the current cessation of hostilities in Lebanon. In a statement shared on social media platform X, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi confirmed the move, linking maritime access directly to the ongoing truce. "In line with the ceasefire in Lebanon, the passage for all commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz is declared completely open for the remaining period of the ceasefire," Araghchi wrote. Despite the reopening of the vital waterway, the Foreign Minister clarified that certain maritime restrictions remain in place, noting that vessels are required to sail "on the coordinated route as already announced" by Iranian authorities. The significance of this reopening was further validated by US President Donald Trump, who confirmed via social media that the Strait of Hormuz is "fully open."

## France and Britain Spearhead Naval Vanguard for Hormuz Amid Fragile Ceasefire

Paris, 18 /4(H.S.): France and Britain have unveiled a bold multinational maritime coalition to safeguard navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint artery for one-fifth of global oil trade disrupted by escalating U.S.-Iran tensions. On Friday, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron co-chaired a landmark virtual summit in Paris, uniting 49 European and Asian nations including dozens of heads of state to forge this "strictly defensive" force, deployable only post-regional peace accord. The initiative crystallized amid Iran's April 16 declaration reopening the strait for commercial vessels during an interim ceasefire, a respite from its February 28 blockade that ignited global inflation alarms and fuel scarcity fears. Starmer underscored the mission's neutrality, aimed at reassuring shipping lanes and aiding mine-sweeping, with over a dozen countries pledging assets; Macron hailed it as pivotal to cementing Tehran's overture into enduring



stability, decoupled from belligerents like the U.S. and Iran, who boycotted proceedings. Italy's Giorgia Meloni and Germany's Friedrich Merz voiced readiness to join, contingent on hostilities' cessation, while military chiefs convene next week at Britain's Northwood headquarters to refine operations. This Franco-British leadership marks Europe's resurgence in Gulf diplomacy, sidestepping U.S. dominance after President Trump's curt rebuff of NATO aid, insisting his

blockade persists until a full Iran deal materializes. Starmer invoked economic salvation "the world needs Hormuz fully open to tame prices and halt global damage" as oil plunged from \$120 to \$90 per Brent barrel on reopening news, buoying markets yet underscoring volatility. French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu and UK counterparts emphasized patrols, surveillance, and deterrence against tanker threats, fortifying a corridor vital to international commerce.

## Trump's Bold Excavator Diplomacy: US-Iran Uranium Deal Edges Closer Amid Hormuz Tensions

Washington, 18 /4(H.S.): President Donald Trump has outlined a striking plan for a potential peace deal with Iran, envisioning joint operations to excavate and repatriate Tehran's enriched uranium stockpile to American soil. Speaking at a Turning Point USA event in Phoenix, Arizona, on Friday, Trump emphasized collaborative action using "the biggest excavators you can imagine" to extract what he termed "nuclear dust" from Iranian nuclear sites. Trump's upbeat assessment signals no major obstacles remain, with a comprehensive agreement "very close" after weeks of high-stakes negotiations. He clarified that while the Strait of Hormuz stands "completely open" for global commerce—following Iran's recent declaration—the U.S. naval blockade targeting Iranian vessels persists "in full force" until the uranium transfer concludes. Iranian officials, however, have contradicted this,



insisting their enriched uranium stockpile will not leave the country, highlighting a key friction point in the talks. he Hormuz developments form a pivotal backdrop to Trump's uranium proposal. Iran announced the strait—vital for 20% of global oil shipments—fully accessible to commercial traffic amid a fragile 10-day ceasefire with Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Yet Trump

swiftly countered that American forces would maintain their blockade on Iranian ports and ships exclusively, ensuring compliance until "our transaction with Iran is 100% complete." He anticipates a swift resolution, noting most terms are already settled, potentially including unfreezing \$20 billion in Iranian assets. This strategy reflects Trump's broader Middle East

doctrine: wielding military pressure to extract concessions. The blockade, initiated after failed Pakistan talks earlier this month, has compelled Iran to clear mines from the strait in U.S.-assisted efforts, paving the way for today's excavation vision. Critics warn of overextension, with U.S. troop levels in the region swelling to 50,000 since Trump's return to office, amid new security pacts with Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Trump's excavator imagery not only dramatizes the deal but also reassures allies of unwavering resolve against Iranian nuclear ambitions. By framing the operation as a joint venture, he positions the U.S. as a partner rather than solely an enforcer, potentially easing domestic opposition to prolonged naval commitments. Oil prices have stabilized post-Hormuz reopening, but markets remain volatile pending final ratification.

## Zelenskyy Positions Ukraine as Maritime Guardian: Black Sea Expertise to Secure Hormuz Navigation

Kyiv, 18 /4(H.S.): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy offered Ukraine's battle-hardened naval proficiency on Friday, to a 50-nation video conference co-chaired by France and Britain, advocating collaborative demining and escort operations in the Strait of Hormuz. Addressing the virtual summit on navigation freedom, he asserted that Kyiv's four-year Black Sea odyssey repelling Russia's blockade through merchant escorts, drone defenses, and coordinated interdictions—equips it uniquely to forestall global chokepoint vulnerabilities. Zelenskyy cautioned that Hormuz resolutions would calibrate aggressors' calculus across straits worldwide, urging "specific and clear" mandates to evade Gaza's protracted quagmire: "Decisions made regarding Hormuz now will determine how other aggressive actors perceive the possibility of creating problems in other straits and on other fronts." He spotlighted Ukraine's dispatch of



drone-defense specialists to Middle Eastern allies like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE—now extending to Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain—positioning his nation as a pivotal contributor to multinational mine clearance and aerial threat mitigation. This overture dovetails with Zelenskyy's concurrent Telegram missive decrying Russian infrastructure buildup near Belarus, signaling Moscow's ploy to

rekindle northern incursions via artillery entrenchments and roadworks, per intelligence from commander Oleksandr Syrskyi. By proffering Hormuz aid, Zelenskyy not only burnishes Ukraine's indispensable global role amid its own attritional war grappling over 700 recent Russian missiles and drones but also leverages wartime acumen to court security pacts, fortifying Kyiv's diplomatic flank as Trump pivots to Iran negotiations.

## Iran's Strategic Reopening: Strait of Hormuz Welcomes Commercial Vessels Amid Ceasefire

Tehran, 18/4(H.S.): Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi announced on Friday, that the Strait of Hormuz stands "completely open" to all commercial vessels for the duration of the ongoing two-week U.S.-Iran truce, a pivotal concession synchronized with the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire in Lebanon. This declaration mandates adherence to coordinated routes delineated by Iran's Ports and Maritime Organisation, facilitating the transit of roughly 20% of global oil and substantial LNG cargoes previously ensnared by Tehran's blockade since February 28. Ceasefire-Linked Access and Operational Protocols Araghchi's X post explicitly tied the reopening to Lebanon's truce, stipulating that civilian shipping must secure permissions from the Revolutionary Guards Navy while barring military vessels outright, thereby preserving Iran's tactical leverage. Three sanctioned Iranian oil tankers—the Deep Sea,



Sonia I, and Diona marked the inaugural post-blockade exodus on Wednesday, laden with five million barrels from Kharg Island, as tracked by Kpler, signaling nascent commercial revival. London insurers, led by Beazley via Lloyd's, swiftly unveiled a \$1 billion war-risk consortium to underwrite transits, mitigating premiums inflated by conflict uncertainties. The overture precipitated a vertiginous oil plunge—Brent crude cascading over 10% to approximately \$90 per barrel—propelling Wall Street to records and alleviating recession specters,

though U.S. President Donald Trump insisted his port blockade endures "in full force" pending a comprehensive nuclear pact. France and Britain's multinational mission, encompassing mine clearance pledges from Belgium and the Netherlands, awaits deployment "as conditions allow," underscoring international stakes in Hormuz's sustained viability. Yet, parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf's Saturday retort—that closure looms sans blockade lift—tempers optimism, with Iran's Guards enforcing stringent oversight.

## Iran's Ghalibaf Issues Ultimatum: Strait of Hormuz Faces Closure Amid U.S. Blockade Escalation

Tehran, 18 /4 (H.S.): Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf delivered a stark warning on Saturday, declaring that the Strait of Hormuz would not remain open should the United States persist with its naval blockade of Iranian ports. In a post on X, he emphasized that passage through this vital waterway—through which nearly 20% of global oil flows—would henceforth require explicit authorization from Tehran, underscoring Iran's resolve to reclaim sovereignty over its territorial waters. Blockade Origins and Trump's Unyielding Stance The U.S. naval blockade commenced on April 13, 2026, at 10 a.m. ET, targeting vessels entering or departing Iranian waters as directed by President Donald Trump and executed under U.S. Central Command. Trump has maintained that the blockade remains "in full force" until a comprehensive peace deal is "100% complete and fully signed," despite Iran's recent declarations of reopening the strait during a fragile ceasefire. This follows Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's announcement on April 16, 2026, affirming the strait as "completely open" for



commercial vessels, a move that briefly eased oil prices from \$120 to \$90.38 per barrel for Brent crude. Ghalibaf's statement arrives amid optimistic yet contentious U.S.-Iran negotiations, with Trump telling AFP on April 17 that no "sticking points" remain and a deal is "very close," including joint efforts to remove enriched uranium from Iranian sites—claims Tehran has firmly rebutted. Concurrently, a 10-day ceasefire in the Israel-Hezbollah conflict holds tenuously, marred by reports of an Israeli strike in Lebanon killing one civilian and broader casualties exceeding 2,300 since March. France and the UK have pledged a multinational

mission to secure navigation in the strait once conditions permit, signaling international apprehension over escalation. The blockade inflicts daily losses of \$400 million on Iran, fueling threats of retaliation while Wall Street surged on Hormuz reopening news. Boeing's defense sector benefits from heightened demand, including tripled PAC-3 missile production, as geopolitical strife bolsters U.S. military contracts. Ghalibaf's April 18 ultimatum thus amplifies fears of renewed conflict, with Iran's Guards imposing fresh conditions on transit amid Trump's insistence on total capitulation.

## Taking Healthcare to the Last Mile: How Vedanta Aluminium Is Strengthening Rural Health in Jharsuguda

Bhubaneswar, 18/4(DMS): In the interior villages surrounding the town of Jharsuguda, access to suitable healthcare can sometimes be a challenge. Distance from urban centres, limited diagnostic facilities and gaps in health awareness are factors that delay timely treatment. It is this reality that Vedanta Aluminium is working to change. Through sustained community engagement and strategic partnerships with public health authorities, the company has been steadily strengthening healthcare access in the region, bringing essential services closer to those who need them most. A recent week-long community health outreach program reflected the intent of this effort. Conducted across 28 villages in collaboration with the District Health Department, the initiative reached over 2,000 people, with a focused emphasis on tuberculosis awareness, preventive healthcare, early diagnosis and familiarizing communities with available public health support systems. Designed as an ongoing engagement rather than a one-time intervention, these initiatives are integrated into the company's broader healthcare ecosystem that combines awareness, access and affordability, particularly in rural



regions. Vedanta's Mobile Health Unit (MHU) initiative is a key aspect of this effort, delivering primary healthcare directly to the doorsteps of rural homes. In FY25, the company's MHUs provided free primary healthcare services to over 20,000 beneficiaries. Beyond consultations and medicines, the MHUs are also a platform for sustained health education. During the same period, health awareness activities under the MHU program reached over 1.14 lakh people, covering a

wide range of topics including hygiene and sanitation, prevention of communicable and non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, nutrition, dengue-malaria prevention, de-worming and overall wellness. Together, these sessions have played a key role in improving health literacy and encouraging proactive health-seeking behaviour within communities. Explaining the company's approach to community welfare, C Chandru, CEO, Vedanta Jharsuguda,

said, "Our community development initiatives are rooted in the belief that accessible and preventive healthcare is fundamental to building stronger communities. From doorstep healthcare through our Mobile Health Units to advanced diagnostics and health awareness programmes, we are committed to enabling early intervention and improving health outcomes in rural areas." Complementing its grassroots outreach, the company has also made significant

investments in strengthening diagnostic infrastructure in the region. Its state-of-the-art diagnostic center in Jharsuguda offers advanced facilities such as MRI, CT scan, X-ray and ultrasound, along with comprehensive pathology services, medical consultations and preventive health screenings. In FY25, the centre served over 57,000 patients from across Jharsuguda district and beyond. Dr. Mohan Raj Singharia, a member of the company's Mobile Health Unit (MHU) team, highlighted the importance of sustained community engagement, saying, "Community awareness plays a vital role in addressing medical challenges effectively. When people are better informed, it leads to improved health outcomes. Continued collaboration between industry and the public health system can make a meaningful difference at the grassroots level." Through targeted outreach, robust healthcare infrastructure and consistent partnerships, Vedanta Aluminium continues to play an active role in improving healthcare awareness and access, ensuring that quality medical care reaches the last mile, where it matters most.

## Meta To Lay Off 10% Of Workforce In May, More Cuts To Follow Later: Report

NEW DELHI, 18/4(H.S) : Meta is planning to begin its first round of planned layoffs this year on May 20 with more following later, reported Reuters, citing three sources familiar with the plans. The initial round is likely to cut about 10% of its global workforce or about 8,000 employees, the report said, adding that further layoffs are planned in the second half of the year. However, the details of those layoffs have not been known yet, as per the report. The plans may depend on the developments in artificial intelligence capabilities, added the report. The development comes after Reuters reported last month that the tech giant had planned to lay off 20% or more of its total workforce.

## India accounts for 49% of global real-time digital payments as UPI turns 10

New Delhi 18/4(H.S): As India's Unified Payments Interface marks its 10th anniversary on Saturday, the government informed that the country now accounts for 49 per cent of global real-time payment transactions. The instant payments system processed 21.70 billion transactions in January 2026 alone, with Rs 28.33 lakh crore in value. UPI accounted for 81 per cent of all retail digital transactions in India. The International Monetary Fund has called UPI the world's largest real-time payment system by volume, and it was built in under 10 years, an official statement said. UPI has grown 12,000-fold in volume and over 4,000 times in value since launch. The government said UPI's real transformation is beyond the volume of transactions, but its reach spans domestic informal markets from autorickshaw drivers to village mandis and street vendors. "A domestic worker can send money across states in seconds using a basic smartphone. In this system, the divide between urban and rural, formal and informal, steadily disappears—marking a decisive shift towards financial inclusion," the statement said. Mobile Payments & Digital Wallets India's digital payments ecosystem has also emerged as a reference model globally. Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have acknowledged its scale, efficiency, and inclusiveness. Its operations expanded to the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, France, Mauritius and Qatar, facilitating cross-border transactions.

## Cabinet okays continuation of PMGSY-III till March 2028 with Rs 83,977 crore outlay

New Delhi, 18/4(H.S): The Cabinet on Saturday approved the continuation of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-III (PMGSY-III) beyond March 2025 up to March 2028. The revised outlay of the scheme will be Rs 83,977 crore. The scheme involves consolidation of through routes and major rural links, connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), higher secondary schools and hospitals. The extension of the timeline of PMGSY-III will enable the full realisation of its intended socio-economic benefits by ensuring completion of targeted upgradation of rural roads. "It will significantly boost the rural economy and trade by enhancing market access for agricultural and non-farm products, reducing transportation time and costs, and thereby improving rural incomes," said an official statement. Improved connectivity will facilitate better access to education and healthcare institutions, ensuring timely delivery of essential services, particularly in remote and underserved areas, it



added. The Cabinet also approved the extension of timeline, till March 2028, for completion of roads and bridges in plain areas and roads in hilly areas; extension of timeline till March 2029 for completion of bridges in hilly areas; and works sanctioned before 31.03.2025 but un-awarded till now may be taken up for tender/award. The Cabinet okayed Long Span Bridges (LSBs) (total 161 with an estimated cost of Rs 961 crore) pending for sanction but lying on the alignment of already sanctioned roads may be sanctioned and tendered/

awarded, along with revision of outlay to Rs 83,977 crore from original outlay of Rs 80,250 crore. The official statement said that the continued implementation will also generate substantial employment opportunities, both directly through construction activities and indirectly by promoting rural enterprises and services. "Overall, the extension will contribute to inclusive and sustainable development by bridging the rural-urban divide and advancing the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047," it added.

## KHURDHA ROAD DIVISION INTER DEPARTMENTAL DAY & NIGHT CRICKET TOURNAMENT-2026 CONCLUDED

NEW DELHI, 18/4(H.S): The "Inter Departmental Day & Night Cricket Tournament-2026," organized by the East Coast Railway Sports Association (ECORSA), Khurda Road, concluded successfully. The final match was played between the RPF and Operating Departments, in which the Security/RPF Department emerged as the Champion of the tournament. The tournament was inaugurated on 02.04.2026 at the Railway Stadium, Khurda Road. A total of twelve departments from the Khurda Road Division participated in the tournament. Overall, 30 league matches and two semifinal matches were conducted. The final match between the RPF and Operating Departments witnessed an exciting contest, in which the Security/RPF Department won the match by 3 wickets. Shri D. Sunil, Divisional Railway Manager and President of the East Coast Railway Sports Association, Khurda Road, presented the trophies to the winning and runner-up teams. On this occasion, various individual



awards were also presented to outstanding players. The "Man of the Series" trophy was won by Shri P. Ravi Kiran from the Commercial Department, while the "Man of the Match" (Final) trophy was awarded to Shri P. K. Sahoo of the Security/RPF Department. Shri Jyoti Ranjan Sethi of the Operating Department won the "Best Bowler" trophy. Shri S. K. Barik

of the Electrical (G/TRD) Department was adjudged the "Best Fielder," and Shri Ashok Mohanty of the Engineering Department received the "Best Batsman" trophy. Shri P. K. Behra, Additional Divisional Railway Manager (OP), Shri Rajdhari Yadav, Additional Divisional Railway Manager (Infra), along with other branch officers, were present during the final match to

encourage the players. The Inter Departmental Day & Night Cricket Tournament was organized under the guidance of Shri Anil Kumar S., Sports Officer and Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Khurda Road. All matches were coordinated by Md. Zakiruddin, General Secretary, along with Assistant General Secretary Shri J. S. Patra and their team

## Ministry of Coal launches 15th Round of Commercial Coal mine Auction

Delhi, April 18/4(H.S): The Ministry of Coal on Friday convened the Stakeholder Consultation on 'Atmanirbhar Bharat: Coal for Energy Security', alongside the launch of the 15th round of Commercial Coal Mine Auctions, marking another significant milestone in strengthening India's energy security and advancing self-reliance in the coal sector. The day-long consultation brought together policymakers, industry leaders, academia, experts, and stakeholders to deliberate on reforms, technological advancements, coal gasification, sustainability, and inclusive growth shaping the future of India's coal sector. Vikram Dev Dutt, Secretary, Ministry of Coal, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Ms. Rupinder Brar, Additional Secretary and Nominated Authority; Sajeesh Kumar N, Coal Controller; senior



officials of the Ministry; industry leaders; and key stakeholders from across the coal sector were present on the occasion. Vikram Dev Dutt, Secretary, Ministry of Coal launched the 15th Round of Commercial Coal Mine Auctions. A total of 11 coal blocks are being offered in the 15th

round, including 7 fully explored and 4 partially explored mines. Of these, 3 mines are being offered under the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 (CMSP) and 8 under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR).

## Centre allows 15 major banks to import gold, silver up to March 2029

New Delhi, 18/4(H.S): The Union Government on Friday allowed 15 major banks, including State Bank of India. The move is part of the government's ongoing effort to streamline bullion imports and ensure they are routed through regulated and traceable channels. By restricting imports to authorised banks, authorities aim to improve transparency, monitor inflows more effectively, and curb irregularities in the gold and silver trade. Banks that have been authorised by the RBI to import both gold and silver include Axis Bank Ltd, Bank of India, Deutsche Bank, Federal Bank Ltd, HDFC Bank Ltd, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd, ICICI Bank Ltd, IndusInd Bank Ltd, Indian Overseas Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd, Karur Vysya Bank Ltd, Punjab National Bank, RBL Bank Ltd, State Bank of India, and Yes Bank Ltd. India's gold imports fell sharply in March 2026 to a 9-month low of \$3.1 bn. In volume



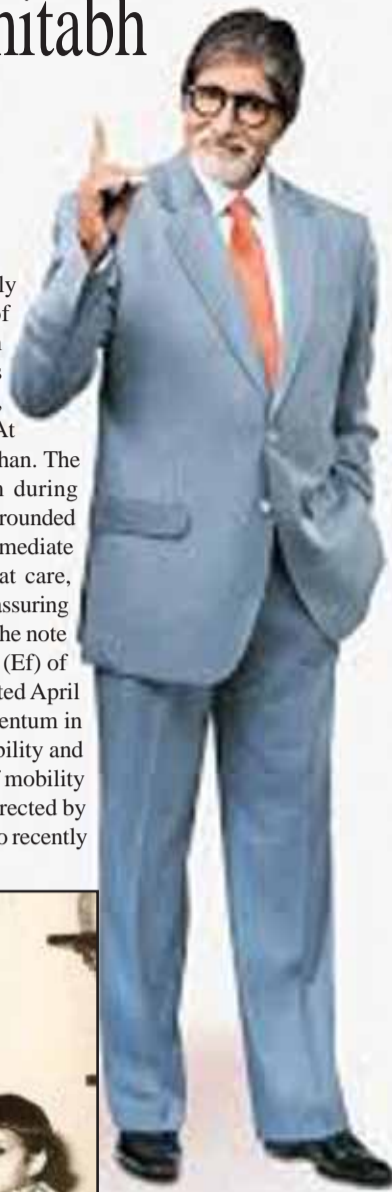
terms, imports are estimated to be 20-25 tonnes, well below the 12-month average of 62 tonnes. The decline reflects a combination of demand softness and supply disruptions stemming from flight disruptions out of the Middle East, a key transit hub for bullion flows into

India, according to a statement issued by the World Gold Council on Friday. Gold prices partially recovered in April following the sharp March decline, while import curbs and supply bottlenecks narrowed domestic discounts. Listed jewellers posted strong year-on-year growth

in Q1 2026, driven by wedding as well as discretionary spends, higher ticket sizes, and ongoing expansion, the statement said. Despite significant redemptions and in contrast with the trend of North American and European ETFs, Indian gold ETFs extended their inflow streak to the 11th consecutive month in March 2026, recording net inflows of Rs 22.7bn (US\$244mn) as per data from the Association of Mutual Funds of India (AMFI). The investor interest in gold ETFs has been sustained and continues to broaden, albeit at a slower pace, as reflected in the number of accounts or folios of gold ETFs, the statement said. The purchases of digital gold via the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) remained strong in February, albeit below January's record levels. Total purchases during the month totalled INR 30.3bn, equivalent to an estimated 1.9t in volume terms, the statement added.

## All Shall Be Well Beta...": Amitabh Bachchan shares childhood memory of maternal care

Veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan shared a deeply personal reflection in the early hours of Saturday, turning to memories of his mother and the quiet power of simplicity in his latest blog post. In the post, marked DAY 6634 and written from his Mumbai residence, Jalsa, Bachchan reflected on how life's persistent challenges often have surprisingly simple solutions. He questioned why people expend "time, energy, and strain" on issues that may require only minor adjustments for relief. At the heart of the entry was a nostalgic remembrance of his late mother, Teji Bachchan. The actor described what he called her "homemade ingenuity" in caring for him during childhood. Recalling a vivid moment, Bachchan wrote about how she would warm a rounded ball of her dupatta with her breath and place it gently over his eyes, bringing "immediate relief." "She is not with us now, but just thinking of those moments brings that care, confidence, and assurance again," he wrote. The actor highlighted that his mother's reassuring words, "all shall be well Beta", continue to guide him decades later. He concluded the note by extending blessings to mothers everywhere and urging his "Extended Family" (Ef) of readers to stay connected. This reflective entry follows another recent blog post dated April 16, where the 83-year-old actor spoke about staying active and maintaining momentum in life. Drawing from the writings of his father, he emphasised the importance of mobility and patience, noting, "Keep the body mobile, keep the mind mobile and the strength of mobility shall be evident." On the professional front, he was last seen in 'Kalki 2898 AD', directed by Nag Ashwin and co-starring Prabhas, Deepika Padukone, and Kamal Haasan. He also recently concluded hosting duties for the 17th season of 'Kaun Banega Crorepati.'



## Shah Rukh Khan 'Feels Like King Of The World' After Academy's Nod To Om Shanti Om

In a heartwarming full circle moment, Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan has offered a gracious response to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences celebrating his iconic film 'Om Shanti Om'. Taking to his Instagram story, SRK reshared the Academy's post and reacted with his signature wit and much gratitude. "Thank u @theacademy for sending me down memory lane with Om's speech. Now I truly feel like the King of the world. Ha ha." Prior to this, 'Om Shanti Om' director Farah Khan also reacted to the same and thanked the Academy. "I want to thank The Academy @theacademy @iamsrk @mayurpuri N all those who forwarded this post to me #pictureabhihaikihainmeredost." The Academy took to Instagram to post a scene featuring Khan's widely loved monologue from the film. Captioning the video, they wrote, "One thing about destiny... it doesn't miss. Film: OM SHANTI OM (2007). Directed by Farah Khan. Written by Farah Khan, Mushtaq Shiekh and Mayur Puri. Starring Shah Rukh Khan, Deepika Padukone, Arjun Rampal, Shreyas Talpade and Kirron Kher". Directed by Farah Khan, 'Om Shanti Om' remains one of the most celebrated commercial Hindi films of its time. Blending romance, reincarnation and self-aware humour, the film follows Om, a junior artist in the 1970s who is reborn decades later to avenge his tragic past and lost love. Shah Rukh Khan played a dual role, while the film also marked the Bollywood debut of Deepika Padukone. The film's ensemble cast included Arjun Rampal, Shreyas Talpade, and Kirron Kher in prominent roles. On the work front, SRK is gearing up for his upcoming film 'King', directed by Siddharth Anand, the film is slated for a theatrical release on December 24, 2026, positioning it as a major Christmas release. The makers recently unveiled fresh visuals from 'King', showing Shah Rukh Khan in a bold and intense avatar, hinting at a high-action narrative. The film also features Abhishek Bachchan, Deepika Padukone, Saurabh Shukla and Suhana Khan in key roles.



## SPORTS

### Sky Blues Soar Again: Coventry City Clinch Premier League Promotion in Thrilling Draw at Blackburn

Blackburn, 18 / 4(H.S.): Coventry City have scripted one of the most heartwarming revival stories in modern English football, securing promotion to the Premier League for the first time in 25 years with a 1-1 draw against Blackburn Rovers at Ewood Park. The Sky Blues, needing just a single point to make their top-flight return mathematically certain, weathered an early second-half setback and then struck in the dying moments to clinch the draw that confirmed their elevation from the Championship. Coventry entered the clash knowing that one point would suffice, yet they faced a Blackburn side battling to avoid relegation and unwilling to roll over. The hosts took the lead in the 54th minute through Ryoya Morishita, whose crisp finish threatened to delay the long-awaited promotion party. However, the Sky Blues refused to buckle; in the 84th minute, Bobby Thomas soared to meet a Victor Torp free-kick and guided a powerful header into the net, restoring parity and securing the crucial point. The moment sparked chaotic celebrations among roughly 7,000 travelling Coventry supporters, who had



made the journey from the West Midlands to witness history unfold. With the draw, Coventry now sit at the top of the Championship table on 86 points from 43 matches, 13 clear of third-placed Millwall, who can no longer catch them for an automatic promotion berth. Coventry's journey back to the Premier League is a tale of resilience, club-level rebuilding, and grassroots fidelity. The Sky Blues were relegated from the top flight at the end of the 2001-02 campaign, beginning a spiral that saw them drop into League One by 2012 and, ultimately, into League Two—the fourth tier of

English football—by 2017. For years, the club oscillated between financial instability and on-pitch struggle, with fans often bearing the emotional and economic brunt. The turning point came through a combination of off-pitch stabilisation—such as securing long-term control of the CBS Arena—and a methodical, patient climb back up the divisions. After narrowly missing promotion in the 2023 playoffs, Coventry finally achieved automatic ascent this season under manager Frank Lampard. or Lampard, the promotion marks a defining milestone in his managerial

career. Having led the side to the Championship summit with an emphatic early-season unbeaten run and a string of critical wins against rivals, the 1-1 result at Blackburn confirmed his first taste of promotion as a head coach. Speaking to Sky Sports, Lampard called it "an incredible moment" and emphasised that the achievement transcends his own ambitions. "We knew we were close, but to do it after 25 years, for this club and its supporters, is truly special," he said. "This is about the players, the staff, and the fans who have kept the faith when things were far from easy.

### Through the Gloom: Ajinkya Rahane Urges KKR to Embrace Tough Times as IPL 2026 Misery Continues

Ahmedabad, 18 / 4(H.S.): Kolkata Knight Riders' troubled start to IPL 2026 deepened further on Friday as they slumped to a fifth-straight loss, falling to Gujarat Titans by five wickets despite posting 180 on a benign surface at the Narendra Modi Stadium. The result leaves the three-time champions without a win in their first six fixtures, prompting captain Ajinkya Rahane to call for mental resilience, positivity, and a spirit of acceptance in the face of continuing adversity. Speaking after the match, Rahane acknowledged the growing weight of

consecutive defeats but struck a measured, introspective tone. "As players, you have to embrace even the tough days," he said. "Keep your head up, strive to give your best every single day, and walk onto the field with positive intent, playing without fear." The former India Test opener underlined that negativity is easy to slip into when results keep slipping away. "When you keep losing, it becomes easy to think negatively," he admitted. "But I am proud of this group. We need to focus on one match at a time, keep improving, and back ourselves

to turn the tide." Rahane explained that KKR had opted to bat first with the intention of posting a big total, envisaging 200 on the board as a challenging but attainable target on a flat Ahmedabad wicket. However, the innings stuttered in the middle overs, and the team managed only 180 for 8—a score that ultimately proved insufficient against a composed Titans chase. Amid the disappointments, Rahane reserved particular praise for Cameron Green, whose hard-fought, anchoring knock carried the team past the 180-run mark.

### Bipasha Basu's Swimsuit Special Cover Resurfaces, Internet Says, 'No One Can Be Her'

Bipasha Basu made her Hindi cinema debut in 2001 with Ajnabee, but even before that, she had already made a name for herself in the modelling world. She embodied the idea of the next-door girl and did not conform to the white-washed beauty norms that once dominated the Indian film industry. She confidently embraced her brown skin and how. But that wasn't all; the actor was also among the most sought-after stars of the early 2000s, celebrated not just for her talent but also for the undeniable aura she brought to the silver screen. Every girl, irrespective of the country she belonged to, wanted not just to look like but also to be Bipasha Basu. Her sharp features, sculpted body, and the sheer grace with which she rocked every outfit she wore attracted admirers across the world. In a world where there was no concept of social media (as we know it today) and virality, she was already a popular personality. In Gen Z lingo, she was a baddie. Recently, Diet Sabya, a fashion commentator, took to Instagram to share an old Elle Swimsuit Special cover featuring Bipasha Basu in a red bikini. Not only did it go viral, but the internet is also obsessed with the actor and is happy to rediscover her. Bipasha Basu's Swimsuit Special Cover Resurfaces, Internet Says, 'No One Can Be Her' Bipasha Basu graced a magazine cover in 1998, wearing a red bikini set. The image has resurfaced on the internet, and fans are swooning over her beauty. Bipasha Basu made her Hindi cinema debut in 2001 with Ajnabee, but even before that, she had already made a name for herself in the modelling world. She embodied the idea of the next-door girl and did not conform to the white-washed beauty norms that once dominated the Indian film industry.



### Shakti Mohan Says She Felt 'Uncomfortable' Kissing Raghav Juyal On Dance Plus: 'It Was Scripted, Remo D'Souza Encouraged It'

Shakti Mohan and Raghav Juyal became one of television's most loved on-screen couples during their time on the reality show Dance Plus. Years later, Shakti has offered a candid reality check on their relationship. The dancer revealed how the much-talked-about romantic angle was actually "scripted". Despite the audience's perception, she emphasised that their bond was always rooted in friendship and mutual respect. "We Would Fight Like Brother-Sister" In an interview with Siddharth Kannan on his YouTube channel, Shakti said, "Before the show, we were very normal friends - we would fight like brother and sister. Then suddenly, they started creating a

romantic angle. It was scripted that he would tease me. It was a very weird transition for us." The dancer also opened up about a particular stage incident that made her uncomfortable. "There was even a kiss moment created. Honestly, I didn't know about it. I was told something like, if this happens, Raghav will kiss you. I was like, why? Why is this happening?" she said. Shakti Mohan mentioned that even Remo D'Souza urged her to go along with it on stage. "I'm a very obedient person and at that time, I didn't stand my ground. My parents were watching. But I still did it and you can see how uncomfortable I was." Shakti Mohan Says She Felt 'Uncomfortable' Kissing Raghav

Juyal On Dance Plus: 'It Was Scripted, Remo D'Souza Encouraged It' Shakti Mohan revealed how the much-talked-about romantic angle was actually scripted. Shakti also shared that her family, particularly her father, wasn't pleased with how the relationship was depicted. "My father was upset. He even came to the show and questioned the makers, why are you showing this? I told him there's nothing like that, I can even tie him a rakhi. Relatives still ask my mother, 'When are they getting married?' We never thought it would go this far," she said. Reflecting on it now, Shakti said she has no hard feelings. "I don't think it was wrong. Makers will do whatever to make it entertaining.