



Shah Describes Bengal’s Political Transition as Unprecedented Since Independence

Home Minister highlights political transformation, dairy expansion and security reforms during three-day Bengal visit

Kolkata, July 19: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday described the recent political transition in West Bengal as one of the most significant changes witnessed in any Indian state since Independence, while addressing an event in Kolkata during his first extensive visit to the state after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formed the government following the assembly elections.

Speaking at the foundation stone ceremony of the ₹700-crore Amul Bengal Dairy Project, Shah said the change in political leadership represented a historic shift in the state’s governance landscape after the end of the Trinamool Congress’s 15-year rule. He said the new administration marked the beginning of a different phase focused on development, economic expansion and restoring West Bengal’s position as a major centre of education, culture

and industry.

Criticising previous governments, Shah targeted both the Left Front and the Trinamool Congress, alleging that the state had experienced ideological and administrative setbacks under earlier regimes. He described the Left Front’s 34-year tenure as being influenced by an ideology disconnected from Bengal’s traditional identity and accused the subsequent TMC government of allowing corruption and weakening institutional systems.

The Home Minister said the political change reflected the people’s desire for a new direction in governance.

The remarks came during the launch event of the Amul Bengal Dairy Project, a major cooperative sector initiative aimed at expanding dairy processing infrastructure in eastern India. The project, being developed with an investment of around ₹700 crore, is expected to process nearly 30



lakh litres of milk daily and produce approximately 10 lakh kg of curd and other cultured dairy products every day.

The facility is projected to provide a major boost to dairy farmers by strengthening procurement, processing and marketing networks. More than 1.25 lakh milk producers in West Ben-

gal, including over 30,000 women dairy farmers, are expected to benefit from the expansion of the cooperative network.

The Home Minister’s three-day visit to West Bengal also focused heavily on security, governance and administrative reviews. During his tour, Shah inspected border security

arrangements in the strategically important Siliguri Corridor and reviewed the deployment of advanced surveillance systems and infrastructure aimed at strengthening security along sensitive border sectors.

The Siliguri Corridor, often referred to as the “Chicken’s Neck”, remains a key strategic area as it connects mainland India with the northeastern states. Security officials briefed Shah on measures to improve border management, prevent illegal crossings and enhance coordination between central forces and state agencies.

Apart from security discussions, Shah also reviewed administrative issues including the implementation of the three new criminal laws, modernization of birth and death registration systems and improvements in law-and-order coordination. Meetings with senior officials focused on strengthening institutional efficiency and ensuring smoother implementation of central initiatives in the state.

The visit combined political messaging with development announcements, with the Centre highlighting infrastructure, cooperative growth and security reforms as key areas of focus for West Bengal’s future trajectory.

The Amul dairy project was presented as part of a broader effort to expand investment and create new economic opportunities in the state.

“Since Independence, no state has witnessed such a major political change. This transformation marks the beginning of a new era focused on development, progress and restoring Bengal’s historic position.” — Amit Shah, Union Home Minister.

Preserving India’s Linguistic Heritage

Amit Shah Inaugurates Country’s First Immersive Language Museum in Kolkata



Kolkata, July 19: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday inaugurated the Museum of Word (Shabdlok) at the National Library in Kolkata, describing the institution as a landmark initiative to preserve India’s linguistic heritage and reaffirming that West Bengal has the potential to once again emerge as a global centre of Indian culture, literature and intellectual thought.

Addressing a gathering of scholars, students, officials and cultural personalities, Shah said language is not merely a means of communication but a repository of a civilisation’s history, traditions, values and collective memory. He observed that India’s cultural strength lies in its extraordinary linguistic diversity and stressed that preserving every Indian language is essential to safeguarding the country’s civilisational identity. The Home Minister said West Bengal has historically played a defining role in shaping modern India through its contributions to

literature, philosophy, education, social reform and the freedom movement. He expressed confidence that the state would continue to inspire the country by preserving and promoting its rich linguistic and cultural traditions.

Shah revealed that he had written to West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari outlining his vision for the promotion of the Bengali language and the protection of the state’s cultural heritage. He said he was confident that the state government would take meaningful steps to strengthen institutions dedicated to language, literature and education.

Emphasising the importance of mother tongues, Shah urged parents and educational institutions to encourage children to remain connected to their native languages. He said that while learning global languages is valuable in an increasingly interconnected world, abandoning one’s mother tongue would mean losing an important part of one’s cultural identity.

“We may have forgotten our traditional attire, but we must never forget our mother tongue,” Shah said, adding that language remains the strongest link between generations and serves as the foundation of a nation’s cultural continuity.

He also advocated multilingual education, saying every student should strive to learn at least one additional Indian language apart from their mother tongue. According to Shah, greater interaction among India’s linguistic communities would deepen mutual understanding, strengthen national integration and help preserve the country’s diverse literary traditions.

Highlighting India’s long-standing tradition of intellectual openness, the Home Minister said Indian civilisation has always welcomed different schools of thought without attempting to suppress opposing ideologies. He remarked that respect for diversity, dialogue and cultural exchange has remained one of the defining characteristics of Indian society for centuries.

Shah credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi with conceptualising the project and said the museum reflects the government’s broader commitment to preserving India’s cultural and linguistic heritage. He described the initiative as an important step towards introducing younger generations to the evolution of language and its role in shaping civilisation while also promoting greater awareness of India’s multilingual identity.

Developed jointly by the National Library and the National Council of Science Museums, Shabdlok is India’s first fully

immersive language museum. The state-of-the-art facility combines modern technology with historical documentation to provide visitors with an interactive journey through the evolution of language, communication and literature.

The museum features nine specialised galleries equipped with immersive digital displays, interactive exhibits, RFID-enabled visitor guidance systems, multimedia presentations and acoustic installations that showcase India’s vast range of languages, dialects, scripts and oral storytelling traditions. Visitors can explore how languages have evolved over centuries, understand their scientific foundations and examine their contribution to the country’s cultural and intellectual development.

Officials said the museum has been designed as both an educational resource and a research platform, offering students, scholars and language enthusiasts an opportunity to study India’s linguistic diversity through innovative technology. The institution is also expected to promote awareness about the importance of preserving endangered languages and documenting regional dialects for future generations.

The inauguration of Shabdlok marks another addition to the National Library’s expanding cultural infrastructure and reflects a broader effort to combine technology with heritage conservation. Authorities believe the museum will become a major destination for researchers, educators and visitors while strengthening appreciation for India’s multilingual traditions and the enduring role of language in shaping the nation’s identity.

Eastern India Emerges as Key Growth Hub for City Gas Distribution Network

Kolkata, July 19: Eastern India is set to play a pivotal role in the next phase of the country’s City Gas Distribution (CGD) expansion, with policymakers and industry leaders identifying the region as a major driver of India’s transition towards a cleaner, gas-based economy. The outlook was highlighted during the 14th City Gas Distribution Conference-cum-Exhibition held in Kolkata, where stakeholders discussed strategies to accelerate natural gas infrastructure across West Bengal and the Northeastern states.

Speaking at the conference, Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) Member Jayant Narayan Das said the regulator’s DPNG Drive 2.0 has recorded encouraging progress, facilitating more than 12 lakh new household Piped Natural Gas (PNG) connections across the country within just three months. He said the initiative reflects the growing acceptance of piped natural gas as a safe, reliable and environmentally friendly cooking fuel.

Das noted that expanding PNG connectivity would

gradually reduce dependence on conventional LPG cylinders while supporting the Centre’s long-term objective of increasing the share of natural gas in India’s overall energy basket. He added that wider adoption of city gas infrastructure would improve energy accessibility, strengthen supply security and contribute to reducing carbon emissions.

Experts also highlighted the importance of strengthening pipeline connectivity, improving distribution infrastructure and encouraging greater consumer

awareness to accelerate PNG adoption. Officials added that the continued expansion of the City Gas Distribution network is expected to generate employment, attract fresh investments and support industrial development while offering households a continuous, safer and more efficient fuel supply. With eastern India witnessing rapid infrastructure development, industry leaders expressed confidence that the region would become one of the fastest-growing markets for city gas distribution in the coming years.

Calcutta High Court Intervenes via Special Sunday Sitting to Pause Bulldozer Action

Kolkata, July 19: The Calcutta High Court on Sunday ordered a status quo on the demolition of a multi-storey building in Amtala, South 24 Parganas, which houses the constituency office of Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader and Diamond Harbour MP Abhishek Banerjee. The order was passed during a special holiday sitting convened to hear an urgent petition filed by the company that owns the property.

Justice Raja Basu Chowdhury directed the West Bengal administration to stop any further demolition activity and maintain the existing condition, character and possession of the structure until the end of July. The court’s intervention came after Leaps and Bounds Private Limited, the registered owner of the property, approached the court challenging the demolition proceedings initiated by the district administration.

During the hearing, the court raised questions over whether the property owners had been provided adequate opportunity to re-



spond before the demolition order was executed. The bench observed that authorities must ensure proper notice is served to the legal owner of the land before taking coercive action against a structure.

While the court did not order the restoration of portions of the building that had already been demolished during Saturday’s operation, it restrained the South 24 Parganas Zilla Parishad and local authorities from carrying out any further action until the matter is examined by a regular bench along with the complete records submitted by the state administration.

The demolition drive had begun on Saturday under

heavy security deployment, with state police and Central Armed Police Force personnel stationed around the site. District authorities defended the action, stating that the building was constructed without necessary approvals and violated existing building regulations.

Officials claimed that notices had been issued to the concerned parties seeking sanctioned building plans and other statutory documents. According to the administration, demolition proceedings were initiated after the required approvals were allegedly not produced during scheduled hearings.

The action triggered a sharp political confrontation, with the TMC accus-

ing the administration of targeting Abhishek Banerjee for political reasons. The Diamond Harbour MP criticised the demolition through social media, describing it as a politically motivated move and alleging that officials acted beyond their authority.

Banerjee also alleged that office equipment, including laptops, documents, printers and other materials, were removed during the operation, calling the action an abuse of power. He maintained that the property was privately owned and that legal documents supporting its status had already been submitted before the authorities.

The state administration, however, maintained that the demolition was part of a regulatory enforcement process against unauthorised construction and not connected to political considerations.

The court’s interim order has temporarily paused the dispute, with further proceedings expected after examination of the legal documents and responses from both sides.

Wangchuk’s Wife to Lead Parliament March After Court Declines Immediate Relief



New Delhi, July 19: Gitanjali J. Angmo, wife of climate activist and educationist Sonam Wangchuk, has announced that she will lead the planned “Chalo Sansad” march to Parliament on Monday, following the Delhi High Court’s refusal to grant immediate relief over Wangchuk’s continued hospitalization. The demonstration, organised by student and parent groups, is aimed at pressing demands for an investigation into alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination and seeking accountability from the Union Education Ministry.

Angmo said Wangchuk, who was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital after his health condition deteriorated during an indefinite hunger strike, remains determined to continue his protest despite being removed from the demonstration site. She said the movement would continue

peacefully, with students, parents and supporters participating in the scheduled march.

The announcement came after an urgent hearing before the Delhi High Court, where a bench declined to order Wangchuk’s immediate discharge from the hospital or his transfer to another medical facility. The court accepted the Centre’s argument that the decision to shift him from Jantar Mantar was based on medical concerns and not an arbitrary administrative action.

Government representatives informed the court that Wangchuk’s health indicators, including potassium, sodium and blood sugar levels, had shown signs of concern, requiring medical supervision. The court directed Safdarjung Hospital authorities to submit a detailed medical report within three days and scheduled the next hearing

for July 24.

Speaking outside the court, Angmo criticised the government’s explanation for the police intervention, alleging that concerns over Wangchuk’s health were being used as a justification to prevent his participation in the protest. She claimed that Wangchuk’s condition was stable before he was shifted and questioned the level of transparency surrounding his medical treatment and access to health records.

Angmo also appealed to participants of the proposed Parliament march to maintain discipline and ensure that the demonstration remained peaceful. She said supporters should avoid any provocation and remain alert against individuals who may attempt to disrupt the protest.

“I am ready to represent Sonam Wangchuk, and I will definitely join the march tomorrow. To all the

students and parents coming to join, let us conduct this march in a completely peaceful manner and remain vigilant against elements who may try to create trouble,” Angmo said.

Meanwhile, medical officials at Safdarjung Hospital said Wangchuk continues to be monitored closely while undergoing treatment for weakness and dehydration caused by his prolonged fast.

Doctors said his vital parameters are under observation, though he has declined intravenous fluids and electrolyte supplements, continuing instead with salt water intake during the protest.

The agitation began at Jantar Mantar over allegations of irregularities in the NEET-UG examination process, including demands for a transparent probe into alleged paper leaks. Following Wangchuk’s removal from the protest site, organisers expanded their demands and announced plans to intensify the campaign through the Parliament march.

Ahead of the planned demonstration, Delhi Traffic Police issued an advisory warning commuters about restrictions around the Parliament area and key routes in central Delhi. Additional security arrangements have been put in place near the Parliament complex and major intersections to manage movement during the protest.

Husband Arrested for Wife’s Murder After Multi-State Escape Attempt

New Delhi, July 19: Delhi Police have arrested a 52-year-old man for allegedly murdering his 45-year-old wife with a pair of scissors at their residence in northeast Delhi’s Gautampuri area. The accused, identified as Saleem, was apprehended near Moradabad railway station in Uttar Pradesh after investigators tracked his movements across several cities following the crime. Following the discovery, police registered a murder case and began searching for the victim’s husband after finding that he had disappeared from the area. Investigators formed dedicated teams and examined CCTV footage, technical surveillance records and local intelligence inputs to trace his movements.

The probe revealed that Saleem had travelled through multiple locations in Uttar Pradesh, including Anand Vihar, Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur and Lucknow, in an attempt to evade arrest. Police eventually intercepted him near Moradabad railway station while he was reportedly trying to change his route.

According to investigators, another dispute broke out between the two on the day of the incident. In an alleged fit of anger, Saleem took a pair of tailoring scissors kept at the residence and attacked his wife, causing fatal injuries. Police said he later locked the house from outside and fled the city, believing that his wife had died.

The weapon allegedly used in the crime has been recovered, while further investigation is underway to establish the complete sequence of events. Police officials said the accused had no previous criminal record before the incident.

Teacher Deployment for Voter Roll Revision Disrupts School Education

Bengaluru, July 19: Teaching activities in thousands of government and aided schools across Karnataka have been severely disrupted after a large number of teachers were deployed for the Election Commission’s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. Educationists and school management committees have expressed concern over the impact on students, warning that prolonged staff shortages could affect the academic calendar.

In Bengaluru North, 1,304 of the 3,735 registered teachers across government and aided schools have

been assigned election duties, while Bengaluru South has seen 2,344 teachers deployed. Several schools have been left with only one or two teachers, forcing multiple classes to be combined and limiting regular classroom instruction.

School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC) members said routine teaching, lesson plans and continuous assessments have been disrupted, with many schools struggling to conduct normal academic activities.

The large-scale deployment follows the Election Commission’s schedule requiring Booth Level Of-

ficers (BLOs), many of whom are teachers, to carry out door-to-door voter verification from June 30 to August 8 after completing training in June. Teachers’ associations have protested the move, claiming that staff shortages in some areas are significantly higher than official estimates.

Education experts have urged the state government to take corrective measures, including revising the academic schedule or arranging alternative teaching support, to minimise learning losses and ensure students are not adversely affected during the ongoing academic session.

MACT Awards Rs 40 Lakh to Injured Teen, Rejects Insurer’s Objections

Mumbai, July 19 : The Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) in Mumbai has awarded ₹40 lakh in compensation to a teenager who suffered permanent neurological injuries in a 2019 road accident, holding both the vehicle owner—his mother—and Tata AIG General Insurance Company jointly and severally liable. The tribunal directed the insurer to deposit the entire compensation amount.

The case relates to an accident on March 23, 2019, near Bapdev Mandir on the old Mumbai–Pune Highway in Raigad district. Manish Tavale, then 15, was travelling as a pillion rider on his mother’s TVS Jupiter scooter, which was being driven by his cousin when it reportedly lost control. The accident left the teenager with a severe head injury that resulted in permanent neurological disability.

The insurance company opposed the claim, alleging collusion among family members because the claimant, vehicle owner and rider were relat-

ed. However, the tribunal rejected the contention, observing that medical records and other evidence clearly established that the injuries were directly caused by the accident.

The insurer also argued that poor road conditions, including potholes and loose sand, were responsible for the crash and that the road authority should have been made a party to the case.

The tribunal dismissed this argument, ruling that the claimant was entitled to seek compensation from the rider, vehicle owner and insurer. It observed that drivers are expected to adjust their speed according to road conditions and cannot escape liability solely by blaming the condition of the road.

Another objection raised by the insurer was that the victim was not wearing a helmet.

While the tribunal acknowledged that helmet use is mandatory, it held that the insurer had failed to prove through medical evidence that wearing one would have prevented or

substantially reduced the injuries suffered in this case.

The insurer further alleged a breach of policy conditions on the ground that the rider’s driving licence had not been produced. The tribunal ruled that the absence of the licence on record did not by itself establish that the rider was unlicensed at the time of the accident.

While permitting the insurer to pursue any independent legal remedies available under law, the tribunal declined to grant an immediate right of recovery, noting that no policy violation had been conclusively established during the proceedings.

To safeguard the claimant’s long-term financial interests, the tribunal directed that 30 per cent of the compensation, along with applicable interest, be released to him after verification, while the remaining 70 per cent will be invested in fixed deposits with a nationalised bank for staggered periods, with the accrued interest to be paid to him periodically.

Patnaik Calls for Dialogue with Students Amid Examination Crisis

Bhubaneswar, July 16: Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president and Leader of Opposition in the Odisha Assembly Naveen Patnaik has urged the central government to hold immediate and meaningful discussions with students protesting over alleged irregularities in the examination system, saying the issue has damaged public confidence in the country’s educational institutions.

In a statement issued ahead of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, the former Odisha Chief Minister expressed solidarity with students and said the crisis should not be viewed as an isolated examination-related issue. He argued that repeated allegations of paper leaks and failures in assessment processes have raised broader concerns about transparency, fairness and the future of millions of



young aspirants.

Patnaik said the credibility of competitive examinations is closely linked to social mobility, as millions of students depend on these tests to secure educational and career opportunities. He warned that any compromise in the examination system could weaken faith among deserving candidates who rely on merit and hard work to progress.

“A nation that compromis-

es the integrity of its examination system, compromises its own future,” Patnaik said, stressing that the matter should receive priority attention in Parliament.

The BJD chief called for an open dialogue between the government and protesting students, saying democratic institutions must respond to genuine concerns through discussion rather than confrontation. He urged authorities to rise

above political differences and provide students with an opportunity to present their grievances directly.

Patnaik also demanded a detailed parliamentary debate and the introduction of long-term reforms to strengthen examination security mechanisms. He called for strict accountability against those responsible for alleged failures while emphasising the need for structural changes to prevent similar incidents in the future.

Reiterating his party’s support for students, Patnaik said restoring confidence in the education system requires transparency, accountability and constructive engagement with young people. He added that protecting the credibility of academic institutions is essential for safeguarding the aspirations of future generations.

Doctors’ Strike Deferred After Bombay High Court Stays Bail Order in Assault Case

Mumbai, July 19: The Maharashtra chapter of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has suspended its proposed 24-hour statewide medical strike after the Bombay High Court intervened in the case involving the alleged assault of doctors and healthcare workers at a municipal hospital in Dombivli.



The strike, which was scheduled to begin from 6 am on July 20 and continue until 6 am on July 21, was called off after the high court stayed the bail granted to Shiv Sena corporator Ramesh Mhatre, who has been accused of leading an attack on medical staff at Shastri-nagar Municipal Hospital. The court’s intervention came following widespread protests from the medical community over concerns regarding the safety of healthcare professionals.

The incident occurred on July 6 when Mhatre and his associates allegedly assaulted doctors and nursing staff

on duty at the Dombivli hospital. The matter escalated after a magistrate’s court in Kalyan granted bail to Mhatre on July 14, citing medical grounds. The decision triggered strong opposition from doctors’ organisations, prompting the planned statewide protest.

Taking suo motu cognizance of the controversy, the Bombay High Court stayed the bail order and directed Mhatre to surrender before authorities by Sunday evening. The court’s decision led the IMA and

the Association of Medical Consultants (AMC) to withdraw their immediate strike plans.

However, the medical association has warned that the issue remains unresolved and issued an ultimatum to the Maharashtra government to introduce stronger legal safeguards for healthcare workers. The IMA has threatened to launch an indefinite statewide strike from August 9 if the government fails to implement stricter measures to prevent violence

against medical professionals.

The association is demanding amendments to the Maharashtra Medicare Service Persons and Medicare Service Institutions Act, 2010, seeking stronger provisions that would make attacks on doctors and healthcare workers non-bailable offences and impose stricter punishments on offenders.

The case has been registered at Vishnunagar Police Station under multiple sections, with four people arrested so far. Further arguments in the matter are expected during the next hearing before the Bombay High Court on July 22.

The development has temporarily eased tensions between healthcare workers and authorities, but medical organisations have maintained that long-term reforms are necessary to ensure a safer working environment for doctors and hospital staff across the state.

Delhi Police Warn Legal Action Against Unauthorized Parliament March



New Delhi, July 19: The Delhi Police has issued a warning to organisers and participants of the proposed “Chalo Sansad” march, stating that no official permission has been granted for the demonstration scheduled on Monday, July 20. Authorities cautioned that any attempt to conduct an unauthorised procession towards the Parliament complex would invite legal action and possible prosecution under applicable laws.

In an official advisory, the police said prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) continue to remain in force across the New Delhi dis-

trict. The provision, which replaced the earlier Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, restricts unauthorised gatherings, public processions and demonstrations involving five or more people in notified areas.

Police officials clarified that Jantar Mantar continues to remain the designated location for public protests in the national capital, but even demonstrations at the permitted site require prior administrative approval. Authorities said any attempt to move towards Parliament without clearance would be treated as a violation of existing restrictions and dealt with according to law.

The warning comes ahead of the Monsoon Session

of Parliament, which is scheduled to begin on July 20. Security arrangements across central Delhi have been significantly strengthened, with additional personnel deployed around Parliament and other important government establishments. Barricades have been placed at strategic points, while multiple layers of security checks have been introduced to regulate movement and prevent disruption.

Officials said individuals or organisations found violating the restrictions could face detention and legal proceedings under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including provisions related to disobedience of lawful orders. Police maintained that the measures were necessary to ensure public safety and maintain security around sensitive government zones during the parliamentary session.

The proposed march has gained attention following the removal and hospitalization of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk from the Jantar Mantar protest site. Wangchuk was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital after doctors raised concerns over his deteriorating health during his indefinite hunger strike linked to the ongoing

agitation over alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination process.

Wangchuk’s wife, Gitanjali J. Angmo, has announced that she will lead the planned march to Parliament along with students and parents participating in the movement. She said the demonstration would continue despite the police action and urged supporters to maintain discipline and ensure that the protest remains peaceful.

The organisers have maintained that the march is intended to highlight concerns of students and demand accountability over alleged failures in the examination system. They have rejected suggestions that the protest could create law-and-order issues, asserting that the demonstration will remain non-violent.

Meanwhile, authorities have remained firm on enforcing security restrictions, citing the importance of protecting the Parliament complex and ensuring the smooth functioning of legislative proceedings. The situation has created a tense atmosphere between protesters seeking wider attention for their demands and law enforcement agencies responsible for maintaining order in the national capital.

RG Kar Hospital Faces 48-Hour Deadline After Surprise Health Audit

Kolkata, July 19: West Bengal Health Minister Sharadwat Mukherjee conducted an unannounced inspection of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, expressing serious concerns over waste disposal practices, infrastructure limitations and allegations of unauthorised intermediaries operating within the healthcare facility.

The inspection began around 12:30 pm and covered key sections of the hospital, including the emergency department, trauma unit and specialised wards for women and children. During the visit, the minister found significant amounts of general waste and medical waste lying unattended in several areas, including common spaces and ward corners. He also interacted with doctors, hospital staff and relatives of patients to assess the quality of services and daily functioning.

After completing the inspection, Mukherjee held a meeting with the hospital's senior officials and directed the administration to address the identified shortcomings within 48 hours.



The minister instructed authorities to improve basic maintenance systems, ensure better utilisation of unused medical equipment, including an idle MRI machine, and address delays that were resulting in vacant beds despite long waiting lists.

Mukherjee said surprise inspections would continue regularly to improve accountability across healthcare institutions. He directed hospital personnel to remain alert and ensure that patient attendants were properly involved in the admission process.

Staff were also instructed to establish direct communication channels with the principal and Medical Superinten-

dent-cum-Vice-Principal to report any individuals demanding illegal payments for medical services or official procedures.

Reviewing the hospital's infrastructure, the minister noted that while some general wards had available beds, critical care facilities were facing severe pressure. The trauma centre and emergency buildings were found to have inadequate space and poor sanitation conditions.

At the conclusion of the inspection, hospital authorities were instructed to undertake immediate improvements in sanitation standards and surgical service arrangements to strengthen overall patient care.

Kolkata, July 19: A spell of daily monsoon showers is expected to continue across Kolkata and several districts of south Bengal over the coming week, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting a significant increase in rainfall and thunderstorm activity from July 22 due to the formation of a low-pressure system over the Bay of Bengal.

According to the weather forecast, Kolkata is likely to experience intermittent light to moderate rain over the next few days under generally cloudy skies. Rainfall is expected to become more widespread and intense from the middle of the week as the developing weather system strengthens and draws abundant moisture from the Bay of Bengal, creating favourable conditions for heavy showers accompanied by thunderstorms and gusty winds.

The IMD has indicated that Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, East Midnapore, West Midnapore and several adjoining districts are likely to receive moderate to heavy rainfall during the active phase of the monsoon. Isolat-

Rainy Week Ahead as Thunderstorm Activity Set to Intensify



ed places may also witness intense rain spells, lightning and wind speeds ranging between 40 and 50 kmph during thunderstorms.

Meteorologists said the anticipated weather conditions are being driven by an active monsoon trough extending across eastern India, along with favourable upper-air circulations and increasing moisture incursion from the Bay of Bengal. These systems are expected to sustain widespread rainfall over south Bengal while also influencing weather conditions in neighbouring states over the next several days.

The forecast has prompted civic authorities in Kolkata and surrounding urban centres

to place drainage infrastructure, pumping stations and emergency response teams on alert to minimise waterlogging in low-lying areas. Officials have been instructed to closely monitor vulnerable stretches that are prone to flooding during periods of heavy rainfall.

Transport authorities have advised commuters to remain updated on traffic and public transport advisories, as intense showers during peak hours could lead to congestion, reduced visibility and temporary disruptions to road and rail services. Ferry operations along the Hooghly River may also be affected if strong winds accompany the thunderstorms.

The IMD has also cautioned residents against taking shelter under isolated trees or near electric poles during thunderstorms due to the possibility of lightning strikes. Fishermen have been advised to monitor official weather bulletins before venturing into the sea, as wind conditions over the Bay of Bengal are expected to deteriorate with the development of the low-pressure system.

Agricultural experts have urged farmers across south Bengal to ensure adequate drainage in paddy fields and vegetable farms to prevent water accumulation that could damage standing crops. Horticulture growers have also been advised to secure temporary structures and protect harvested produce from heavy rain and gusty winds.

The active monsoon conditions are expected to provide further rainfall across much of southern West Bengal through the week, bringing relief from humid weather while increasing the risk of localised flooding, waterlogging and weather-related disruptions in urban and rural areas alike.

Lawyer Attacked Outside Patuli Police Station Over Political Cases



Kolkata, July 19: A woman lawyer has lodged a police complaint alleging that she was attacked with a knife by two unidentified men outside the Patuli police station, with the assault reportedly aimed at pressuring her to withdraw criminal cases filed against political leaders.

According to the complaint, the lawyer was confronted by the assailants after she came out of the police station late in the evening. The attackers allegedly threatened her and demanded that she stop pursuing legal proceedings against former Trinamool Congress councillor Bappaditya Dasgupta and party youth wing member Sourav Ghosh.

The lawyer raised an alarm during the attack, following which the accused fled from the spot before police personnel and local residents could intervene. She suffered injuries during the assault and was provided medical assistance.

Kolkata Police has launched an investigation into the incident and is examining the possibility that the attack was intended to intimidate the lawyer and interfere with ongoing legal proceedings. Investigators are reviewing CCTV footage from the police station area and nearby locations to identify the attackers.

Police teams are also recording statements from witnesses and gathering other available evidence to trace those involved in the assault. Officials said further action would be taken after the suspects are identified and the circumstances behind the attack are established.

49 Kolkata Police Personnel Recalled After Nearly a Decade on State Duty

Kolkata, July 19: The West Bengal Home and Hill Affairs Department has ordered the repatriation of 49 Kolkata Police personnel who had been serving with the West Bengal Police for nearly a decade, marking the end of one of the force's longest external deployment exercises. The officers have been directed to report back to Kolkata Police with immediate effect.

The transfer order covers personnel across multiple ranks, including one Assistant Commissioner of Police, six inspectors, four sub-inspectors, four assistant sub-inspectors, one sergeant and several constables. According to official directives, the returning officers will be posted to the metropolitan divisions, specialised wings and battalions where they had served before being transferred to the state police in 2016.

The decision follows a request from Kolkata Police Commissioner Ajay Nand, who recently urged the state government to bring back experienced personnel to address a growing manpower shortage within the city



police force. Officials said Kolkata Police is currently facing a vacancy of more than 10,000 posts, affecting policing, investigations, traffic management and other operational responsibilities across the city.

While recruitment is underway to strengthen the force, senior officials believe that the immediate return of trained personnel will help bridge the staffing gap until new recruits complete their training and are deployed. The repatriated officers are expected to bolster police stations, detective units, traffic divisions and other specialised branches facing shortages.

The officers were trans-

ferred to the West Bengal Police in 2016 during a major administrative reshuffle that sparked considerable debate within the police establishment. At the time, several personnel and their families alleged that the postings amounted to punitive transfers, forcing them to serve outside Kolkata for prolonged periods. Many affected officers repeatedly appealed for their return, arguing that the extended postings had disrupted family life and career progression.

Officials noted that over the past decade, several personnel retired while serving under the state police without returning to their parent organisation. Police

associations had also periodically sought a review of the transfers, citing concerns over prolonged deputation and the need to utilise experienced officers within Kolkata Police.

The latest repatriation is expected to improve operational efficiency across the metropolitan force, particularly at a time when the city police are dealing with increasing demands related to law and order, cybercrime, traffic regulation and public security. Senior officials said experienced officers returning to familiar assignments would strengthen supervision, investigations and emergency response capabilities.

The move is also seen as part of a broader administrative initiative by the state government to review manpower distribution across departments and expedite measures to fill long-standing vacancies. Officials said periodic workforce assessments and redeployment of personnel are being undertaken to improve public service delivery and ensure that critical government agencies remain adequately staffed.

Teen Survives 12th-Floor Fall After Landing on Building Ledge

Kolkata, July 19: A 19-year-old youth survived a fall from the 12th-floor terrace of a high-rise residential complex in Kolkata after landing on a concrete ledge on the ninth floor, preventing what could have been a fatal plunge. He is undergoing treatment at a city hospital, where doctors said his condition is critical but stable.

The incident took place on Friday evening at an apartment complex under the Anandapur police station area. According to preliminary findings, the teenager, who lives in the building, had gone to the terrace alone when he reportedly lost his balance

and fell over the edge. His fall was broken by a projecting concrete slab about three floors below, significantly reducing the impact.

Residents and security guards rushed to the spot after hearing a loud noise and cries for help. They found the injured youth stranded on the narrow ledge and immediately alerted the police and emergency services. Rescue personnel carefully brought him down from the ledge before shifting him to a nearby hospital in an advanced life support ambulance.

Doctors said the teenager suffered multiple fractures to his legs and pelvis, along

with internal injuries. He remains under close medical observation, and his condition is being continuously monitored by a team of specialists.

Police have launched an investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding the incident. Officers are examining whether it was an accidental fall or whether any other factors were involved. Statements are being recorded from family members, residents and security personnel, while investigators have also inspected the terrace and other parts of the building as part of the inquiry.

Experts Call for Wetland Restoration to Revive Native Fish Species

Kolkata, July 19: Environmental scientists and fisheries experts have called for urgent ecological restoration measures in the East Kolkata Wetlands to revive rapidly declining populations of indigenous fish species and safeguard the livelihoods of thousands of fishermen and cooperative fish farmers dependent on the internationally recognised wetland ecosystem.

The recommendations were presented during a conservation workshop attended by researchers specialising in wetland management, fisheries science and environmental conservation. Experts stressed that restoring a steady flow of treated municipal wastewater into the wetlands is essential to maintaining the ecosystem's natural productivity and improving conditions for native fish breeding.

Participants expressed concern over the sharp decline of several indigenous fish varieties that were once abundant across the wetlands. Species such as punti, chyang, singhi, native magur and folui have become increasingly scarce over the past four to five decades as traditional aquatic habitats have undergone significant ecological changes.

Today, most of the wetlands' fish ponds, locally known as bheris, are dominated by commercially farmed species such as Indian major carps and tilapia. Scientists also highlighted the growing threat posed by the invasive African catfish, a prohibited species that preys on native fish and disrupts the



ecological balance of the wetland ecosystem.

Researchers explained that the East Kolkata Wetlands represent one of the world's largest natural wastewater-fed aquaculture systems, where nutrient-rich municipal wastewater supports the growth of plankton and other natural organisms that serve as food for fish. This unique ecological process has sustained fish production in the wetlands for decades while simultaneously helping recycle a substantial portion of Kolkata's wastewater.

Scientists cited findings from a two-year study conducted by the Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI), which concluded that properly treated wastewater entering the Ramsar site remains suitable for biological aquaculture and supports productive fish farming. However, they noted that irregular wastewater inflow, heavy siltation, declining water quality and alterations to natural drainage channels have significantly affected the shallow freshwater habitats required by many indigenous species

for successful breeding.

Experts observed that most native fish species are now unable to reproduce naturally in sufficient numbers because changing environmental conditions have disrupted their breeding cycles. As a result, fish farmers increasingly depend on hatcheries outside the wetlands to procure fingerlings, adding to production costs and reducing the ecological diversity that once characterised the wetland fisheries.

To reverse the decline, the expert panel proposed a comprehensive restoration strategy centred on habitat improvement and scientific fish conservation. The recommendations include breeding endangered indigenous species in controlled nursery ponds before releasing healthy fingerlings into the wetlands to rebuild natural populations. Scientists said such programmes have shown encouraging results in other freshwater ecosystems and could help restore biodiversity in the East Kolkata Wetlands.

The panel also recommended increasing the depth of

bheris to improve water retention, maintain stable temperatures during summer months and create more favourable conditions for fish growth. Additional proposals include establishing designated clean-water breeding enclosures, using traditional organic oil-cake feed to encourage natural food production and restoring aquatic vegetation that provides shelter and spawning grounds for smaller native species.

Experts further stressed the need for regular desiltation of water channels, improved wastewater distribution networks and continuous monitoring of water quality to maintain the ecological health of the Ramsar site. They said coordinated action involving environmental authorities, fisheries departments, scientists and local fishing communities would be essential for the long-term success of conservation efforts. Recognised as a Ramsar wetland of international importance, the East Kolkata Wetlands perform multiple ecological functions by naturally treating urban wastewater, supporting biodiversity and sustaining one of the country's most unique wastewater-fed fisheries. Scientists warned that protecting the wetland's ecological integrity is critical not only for conserving indigenous fish species but also for ensuring food security, environmental sustainability and the livelihoods of thousands of families who depend on its natural resources.

Tight Security Foils Protest Near Kolkata Airport Over Mosque Access Row

Kolkata, July 19: Heavy security deployment by state police and Central Armed Police Forces prevented a proposed demonstration near Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport on Saturday, as supporters of a local religious committee sought to protest restrictions on public access to the 136-year-old Gouripur Jame Masjid, popularly known as the Bankra mosque, located within the airport's operational area.

Authorities imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), barring the assembly of more than four persons in the sensitive zone surrounding the airport. The restrictions were enforced to prevent demonstrators from gathering along Jessore Road and approaching the airport's high-security perimeter.

The Bidhannagar Police CThe protest had been called by the West Bengal Jamiat

Ulema-e-Hind, led by its state president Siddiqullah Chowdhury, following the suspension of public access to the historic mosque. However, organisers later withdrew the demonstration after police blocked supporters and vehicles from reaching the designated protest site.

The dispute centres on security measures introduced after authorities discontinued the long-standing practice of allowing worshippers to enter the airport's restricted operational zone to access the mosque. Officials said the revised policy was implemented following security reviews aimed at strengthening protection around one of eastern India's busiest airports.

Airport authorities have maintained that the mosque is situated approximately 165 metres from the secondary runway, within an area earmarked for future aviation infrastructure upgrades. Officials said the structure falls



inside the prescribed safety zone required for runway expansion and the installation of advanced Instrument Landing System (ILS) equipment to improve aircraft operations during poor visibility.

Government officials defended the restrictions, stating that unrestricted civilian movement through sensitive airside areas is incompatible with modern aviation security standards. They argued that previous arrangements permitting worshippers to cross operational airport zones after

identity verification no longer meet present-day security requirements.

The ruling side, however, maintained that national security and aviation safety cannot be compromised, particularly at a strategically important international airport. Officials reiterated that all future decisions would be guided by aviation regulations, security assessments and applicable legal provisions as the matter proceeds through administrative and judicial channels.



Fresh Diplomatic Push on Falklands

The long-running sovereignty dispute between Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands, known as the Islas Malvinas in Argentina, remains one of the world’s most enduring territorial disagreements, continuing to influence diplomatic relations more than four decades after the 1982 Falklands War. While the conflict ended with Britain re-establishing control over the islands, competing claims of sovereignty have persisted, fuelled by historical narratives, national identity and contrasting interpretations of international law.

The issue recently returned to public attention after a banner reading “Las Malvinas son Argentinas” (“The Malvinas are Argentine”) was displayed during a football match, illustrating how the territorial dispute continues to resonate far beyond political circles. Such symbolic expressions underscore the enduring emotional significance of the islands in Argentina and demonstrate that the question remains deeply embedded in public consciousness despite decades of diplomatic stalemate. At the centre of the dispute lie two fundamentally different positions. Britain maintains that the Falkland Islands are a self-governing British Overseas Territory whose future should be determined solely by the wishes of its residents. Argentina, meanwhile, argues that the islands form an integral part of its national territory and that British control represents an unresolved legacy of colonialism dating back to the nineteenth century. Several proposals considered during that period explored innovative constitutional arrangements, including the possibility of shared administration, leaseback agreements and transitional sovereignty models. British policymakers examined options that might have recognised Argentina’s historical concerns while preserving extensive guarantees for the islanders’ political rights, culture and internal self-government. None of these proposals ultimately secured sufficient political support, either in Britain or among the islanders themselves. The diplomatic process came to an abrupt end in April 1982 when Argentina’s military government launched an invasion of the Falkland Islands. The conflict lasted 74 days and claimed the lives of more than 900 people, including Argentine and British military personnel as well as civilian casualties. Britain’s military response restored its control over the territory and fundamentally transformed the political landscape surrounding the dispute. In the aftermath of the war, Britain’s commitment to defending the islands became significantly stronger. Successive governments invested heavily in military infrastructure, expanded defence capabilities and consistently ruled out sovereignty negotiations unless the islanders themselves expressed a desire for change. The conflict also reinforced public support within Britain for retaining the territory and ensuring the security of its inhabitants. Argentina, however, has dismissed the referendum as legally irrelevant to the sovereignty dispute. Buenos Aires contends that the principle of territorial integrity should

prevail because it considers the islands part of its national territory. Argentine governments have repeatedly called for bilateral negotiations under United Nations resolutions that encourage both countries to seek a peaceful settlement through dialogue.

Britain maintains a permanent military presence on the islands centred around RAF Mount Pleasant, established after the 1982 conflict to deter any future military action. Supporters argue that the deployment provides essential security guarantees for the islanders and contributes to regional stability. Critics, however, contend that maintaining substantial defence infrastructure thousands of kilometres from mainland Britain involves considerable long-term financial commitments and reflects the unresolved nature of the dispute.

Analysts note that the sovereignty question remains politically sensitive in both countries. In Britain, no major political party has indicated any willingness to reconsider the islands’ status without the explicit consent of their residents. In Argentina, successive governments across the political spectrum have consistently reaffirmed the country’s claim, making the issue a rare point of national consensus despite broader political differences. Some diplomatic observers argue that although immediate sovereignty negotiations appear unlikely, practical cooperation between the two countries could still expand in areas such as fisheries management, environmental protection, scientific research, humanitarian initiatives and transportation links. Similar confidence-building measures existed before 1982 and could potentially help reduce tensions while leaving the sovereignty question unresolved.

Supporters of renewed dialogue emphasise that the dispute need not remain permanently frozen because of the events of the past. They argue that many territorial disagreements around the world have gradually evolved through sustained diplomacy, confidence-building measures and mutually beneficial agreements rather than confrontation. For the foreseeable future, the Falkland Islands are expected to remain under British administration, with little indication that London intends to reopen sovereignty discussions. Nevertheless, the dispute continues to occupy an important place in Argentine foreign policy and remains a recurring issue in international forums. While public demonstrations, political statements and symbolic gestures periodically bring renewed attention to the issue, most observers agree that any lasting resolution would ultimately require sustained diplomatic engagement, mutual respect and a willingness to recognise the legitimate concerns of all stakeholders. More than forty years after the war, the challenge facing Britain and Argentina is not simply preserving their respective historical narratives, but determining whether future generations can find a path toward peaceful coexistence that prevents the conflict of 1982 from permanently defining relations between the two nations.

World Cup Inspires Debate on Creating Spaces for Social Unity in Britain

The FIFA World Cup has always been about more than football. While the tournament’s biggest moments are usually remembered through goals, trophies and individual performances, some of the most powerful memories are created away from the stadiums — in streets, parks, public squares and neighbourhoods where strangers come together to share the emotional highs and lows of the game. As the 2026 World Cup approaches its conclusion, one of the most striking lessons from the tournament has been the importance of collective viewing experiences and how public spaces can become places of connection, celebration and community.

For many fans, the most memorable moments do not necessarily come from watching their national team inside a stadium or from the comfort of their homes. They come from being surrounded by others — singing, celebrating, arguing over refereeing decisions and sharing the unpredictable drama that makes football unique. The experience of watching Colombia’s match against Switzerland in London’s Elephant and Castle demonstrated how powerful these informal gatherings can be and how they might offer lessons for cities seeking to rebuild community life.

The area, sometimes known as “Little Bogotá” because of its large Colombi-

an community, transformed into a vibrant unofficial fan zone during the match. Streets and pavements filled with supporters wearing yellow shirts, waving flags and gathering outside cafés and restaurants. Businesses benefited from the crowds, while neighbours and visitors came together in a shared celebration that extended far beyond the football itself.

The scene was not a carefully planned event with expensive infrastructure or elaborate organisation. It was a spontaneous gathering built around enthusiasm, community spirit and a shared interest. People watched the match on small television screens placed in shop windows and on mobile phones held up among crowds. In one memorable example, a phone balanced on top of a mop became an improvised viewing platform for a group of fans gathered around it.

The simplicity of the moment was part of its charm. During breaks in play, music replaced commentary, and supporters danced to Colombian rhythms. Children played nearby, older generations socialised, and strangers who might otherwise never have spoken found themselves connected through a common experience. The football match provided the reason to gather, but the human interaction was the real attraction.

Such scenes highlight an important truth about sport:

the value of football is not only in the competition itself but in the relationships and experiences created around it. Watching a dramatic match alone at home can never fully replicate the atmosphere of sharing the moment with hundreds of other people. The excitement, frustration and celebration become collective emotions rather than individual reactions.

This raises a broader question about public life in Britain. Could more outdoor screens and organised fan zones help create stronger communities beyond major sporting events? For political leaders and local authorities looking for ways to encourage social connection, public viewing spaces could offer a practical and relatively simple solution.

Andy Burnham’s administration in Greater Manchester, like many local governments across the country, has spoken frequently about strengthening communities and improving public spaces. Large-scale fan zones and outdoor events could become one way of turning those ambitions into reality. often succeed when they invite people to stay, participate and share experiences. Parks, town squares and pedestrian areas can become lively meeting points when there is a reason for people to gather. A major football tournament provides an obvious opportunity, but the concept could extend far

beyond sport.

Recent examples show that outdoor screenings can attract large audiences when they are accessible and well organised. During major tournaments, cities such as Brighton and Leeds have created fan zones featuring large screens capable of hosting thousands of supporters. These events demonstrated that people are willing to gather in public spaces when the environment feels welcoming and inclusive.

However, the potential of outdoor community events extends beyond football. Large public screenings could be used for cultural moments, entertainment programmes and national occasions. Wimbledon matches, major television finales, concerts, documentaries and important public broadcasts could all become shared experiences.

Imagine major cultural events being shown in parks and city centres, allowing communities to experience them together. A popular television finale projected on a large screen in a public square could create the same kind of atmosphere as a football match. Such events could encourage people to spend time in local areas, support nearby businesses and rediscover public spaces as places of social interaction.

Privately managed public spaces have already begun experimenting with similar

ideas. Areas such as Canary Wharf and Coal Drops Yard in London host outdoor screenings of films and sporting events, creating attractive environments where people can gather without paying admission fees. These initiatives demonstrate that public entertainment does not always require large stadiums or expensive venues.

Local authorities could potentially build on this model by investing in portable screens, basic infrastructure and event management. The costs could be balanced through partnerships with local businesses, sponsorships and increased spending in surrounding shops, cafés and restaurants. When successful, these events can generate economic benefits while also improving community engagement.

There are, however, challenges. Organising large gatherings requires careful planning, security arrangements and consideration for local residents. Noise, waste management and crowd control must be addressed. Yet the success of many informal fan zones suggests that communities themselves often have the ability to manage events responsibly when given the opportunity.

One of the strongest arguments in favour of public fan zones is accessibility. Major sporting events can sometimes become expensive experiences. Tickets, travel and food costs can

prevent many people from participating. Free outdoor screenings allow wider sections of society to enjoy the atmosphere of major events without financial barriers.

This issue has become particularly relevant as traditional venues struggle to accommodate demand. During major football matches, many pubs and hospitality businesses face overwhelming interest. The demand for places to watch games can exceed available capacity, leading some venues to introduce entry fees or ticketing systems.

While pubs remain central to British sporting culture and deserve support, they cannot realistically accommodate every fan who wants to watch a major match. Public fan zones could provide an additional option rather than a replacement. They could reduce pressure on hospitality venues while allowing pubs to benefit from smaller groups seeking food and drinks before or after events.

The challenge facing Britain’s public spaces is not simply a lack of facilities but sometimes a lack of confidence in allowing people to use them. Many parks and squares are managed with restrictions designed to prevent problems, but excessive caution can also prevent positive community activity. Public spaces are valuable precisely because they belong to everyone.

Ann Widdecombe’s Exit Raises Questions Over Britain’s Political Civility and Democratic Discourse

Ann Widdecombe’s death has reopened a difficult and increasingly urgent conversation about the state of political culture in Britain: how disagreements are expressed, how public figures are treated, and whether a democracy can survive when political opponents are viewed not as fellow citizens with different ideas but as enemies to be defeated at any cost. Widdecombe, a former Conservative minister, author and broadcaster known for her outspoken views and combative style, spent decades as one of the most recognisable figures in British public life. Her career was marked by strong opinions, fierce debates and frequent controversy, but also by a willingness to engage directly with opponents and accept the outcomes of democratic processes.

Her passing has prompted reflections not only on her individual legacy but also on a wider shift in the relationship between politicians and the public. Britain has long been a country where political arguments can be intense, sometimes deeply personal, but there has traditionally been an understanding that disagreement should ultimately be resolved through elections, parliamentary debate and public discussion rather than intimidation or violence. The concern now is that this basic democratic principle is being weakened by a political environment increasingly shaped by anger, online hostility and the tendency to reduce individuals into symbols of everything their critics dislike.

Widdecombe belonged to a generation of politicians who operated in a very different environment. During much of her career, public figures faced criticism, satire and media scrutiny, but the scale and speed of online

communication had not yet transformed political debate. Social media has created new opportunities for participation and accountability, but it has also created spaces where extreme language, misinformation and personal attacks can spread rapidly. The result is a political atmosphere where public figures are often judged not as complex individuals but as representatives of causes, movements or ideologies.

The danger of such a culture is that it can make hostility appear acceptable. When politicians are constantly described in terms that deny their humanity, the boundaries between criticism and hatred become blurred. Democratic debate depends on recognising that opponents are still people, even when their views are strongly rejected. Without that recognition, political disagreement can become a justification for cruelty.

The deaths of other British politicians in recent years have already forced the country to confront these issues. The murder of Labour MP Jo Cox in 2016 shocked the nation and led to widespread reflection across political parties about the tone of public debate. Cox’s death was followed by renewed calls for greater respect between political opponents and for a reduction in the increasingly aggressive language used in public life. Similarly, the killing of Conservative MP Sir David Amess in 2021 raised concerns about the safety of elected representatives and the risks faced by those who engage directly with the public.

These incidents highlighted an uncomfortable reality: politicians are both powerful public figures and ordinary individuals. They make decisions that affect millions of lives, and they must be open to criticism and accountability.

At the same time, criticism cannot become a justification for threats, harassment or violence. A healthy democracy requires both accountability and basic respect.

The debate surrounding political security has become more complicated as threats increase. One response has been to call for greater protection for politicians, including increased security arrangements and measures to reduce risks. Such steps are understandable when individuals face genuine threats. However, there are limits to how far security measures can address a deeper cultural problem. Democracy depends on representatives remaining connected to the people they serve. If fear forces politicians behind increasingly higher barriers, the relationship between citizens and elected officials could become more distant.

The challenge is therefore not only about protection but also about political culture. Britain must consider what kind of public debate it wants to encourage. Strong disagreement is not a problem in itself; in fact, it is essential to democracy. The problem arises when disagreement turns into hatred and when opponents are treated as threats rather than participants in the same democratic system.

Widdecombe’s own political career reflected the complexity of public life. She was admired by supporters for her clarity, independence and willingness to defend unpopular positions. Critics strongly disagreed with many of her views, particularly on issues including abortion, European integration, LGBTQ+ rights and social change. Her positions often placed her at the centre of national debates and made her a frequent target of criticism.

Yet those who worked with

her and covered her career have also described qualities that complicated the public image of her as a purely ideological figure. She was known for directness, humour and a willingness to argue openly. Like many politicians, she contained contradictions: she could be both uncompromising and approachable, determined and vulnerable, traditional in some beliefs while supporting reform in others.

That complexity is important because modern political discussion often removes complexity from public figures. Politicians are frequently transformed into simplified characters: heroes to their supporters and villains to their opponents. This approach may make political communication easier, but it weakens understanding. Real people rarely fit completely into political categories.

Widdecombe’s religious beliefs were central to her worldview and influenced many of her political positions. Her Catholic faith shaped her views on social issues and contributed to some of the controversies surrounding her career. Supporters saw her as a politician guided by principle, while critics argued that some of her positions conflicted with changing social attitudes. As society evolved on issues such as LGBTQ+ rights and family structures, Widdecombe remained committed to many traditional positions, making her an increasingly distinctive figure in British politics.

However, democracy does not require everyone to agree with changing social values. It requires that disagreements can be expressed peacefully and that political decisions are ultimately determined through democratic institutions. The ability to coexist with people whose beliefs differ from our own is one of the

central tests of a free society.

The reaction to Widdecombe’s death has also highlighted the impact of online communication on political attitudes. Social media platforms have created environments where people can express views instantly and often anonymously. While many users engage thoughtfully, some online spaces encourage extreme reactions and reward outrage. The result is a debate culture where shocking statements can receive more attention than balanced arguments.

This raises difficult questions about responsibility. Governments, technology companies, political parties and individuals all have roles in shaping public discourse. Regulating harmful content presents challenges because free expression is a fundamental democratic value. However, protecting free speech does not mean accepting unlimited hostility or the deliberate encouragement of threats.

Political leaders also carry responsibility. The language used by politicians can influence public attitudes. Strong criticism is part of political competition, but repeated attempts to portray opponents as illegitimate or dangerous can damage trust in democratic institutions. Leaders across the political spectrum have a duty to challenge violence and reject language that encourages hatred.

At the same time, citizens also play an important role. A healthier political culture requires people to recognise that disagreement is not the same as hostility. It is possible to strongly oppose someone’s policies while acknowledging their humanity. This distinction is essential for maintaining a functioning democracy.

Ann Widdecombe’s career represented an era when political arguments were of-

ten passionate but remained connected to personal interaction. She was a figure who could provoke disagreement while still participating in the same democratic conversation as those who opposed her. Her legacy, therefore, is not only about the positions she defended but also about the importance of maintaining a political culture where debate remains possible.

The question facing Britain is not whether political disagreement should become less intense. Democracy requires argument, criticism and competing visions for the future. The real question is whether those disagreements can exist within a framework of respect and shared commitment to democratic principles.

As political divisions deepen around issues such as identity, immigration, social change and economic policy, the need for responsible debate becomes even more important. A society that loses the ability to see opponents as fellow citizens risks damaging the very institutions that allow disagreement to exist.

Widdecombe’s death serves as a reminder that behind every political position is a person. Politicians can be criticised, challenged and held accountable, but they should not be reduced to symbols of hatred. The future health of British democracy will depend not on eliminating disagreement but on ensuring that disagreement remains human.

The measure of a civilised political culture is not the absence of conflict. It is the ability to manage conflict without losing respect for the people involved. Britain’s challenge is to preserve that balance — allowing fierce debate while rejecting the idea that political opponents are enemies who must be destroyed.

Earnings, Global Cues to Drive Market Movement This Week

Mumbai: Indian equity markets are expected to witness increased volatility in the coming week as investors track a mix of domestic earnings announcements, global technology sector movements and key macroeconomic developments that could influence the direction of the Sensex and Nifty.

Market participants are likely to closely watch six major factors that may determine trading trends on Dalal Street

The first key trigger will be the ongoing corporate earnings season for the first quarter of the financial year. Results from major companies, including Reliance Industries, Infosys and Wipro, are expected to provide fresh cues on sectoral performance and overall market sentiment. Strong or weak earnings outcomes from these index-heavyweights could have a significant impact on benchmark movements.



Global technology sector trends will be another important factor for investors. A recent decline in international technology stocks has increased caution across global markets, with Indian IT shares likely to remain under pressure if concerns over global technology valuations continue.

Foreign portfolio investor (FPI) and domestic institutional investor (DII) activity will also remain under close observation. Market

experts said changes in institutional buying and selling patterns could influence liquidity conditions and determine the sustainability of recent market trends.

Investors will further track global economic indicators, particularly signals from the US Federal Reserve regarding interest rates and inflation. Any change in expectations over monetary policy could affect capital flows into emerging markets, including India.

Derivative market data and volatility indicators are also expected to play a crucial role during the week. Traders are monitoring option positions, support and resistance levels and volatility trends ahead of the weekly expiry, with market participants preparing for possible sharp movements.

Apart from equity-specific factors, crude oil prices and currency movements will remain important macroeconomic indicators. A rise in global oil prices could increase concerns over imported inflation, while fluctuations in the rupee against the US dollar may influence investor sentiment and corporate costs.

Analysts said the combination of earnings developments, international market movements and economic signals is likely to keep trading conditions highly sensitive, with investors adopting a cautious approach while awaiting clearer market direction.

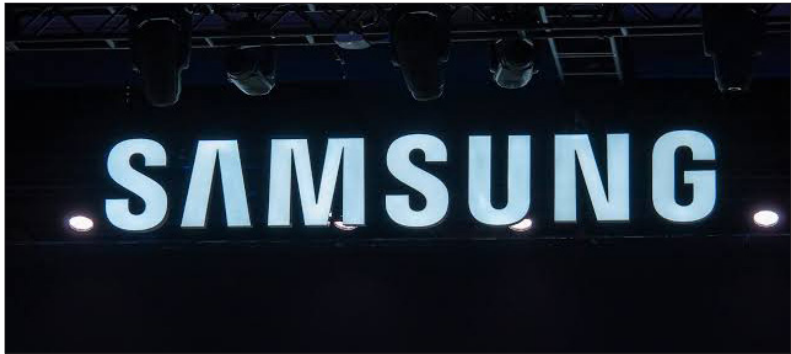
Samsung Shifts US Consumer Electronics Base to Texas, Cuts Jobs

Washington: Samsung Electronics has begun a major restructuring of its North American consumer electronics operations, involving workforce reductions and the relocation of its subsidiary Samsung Electronics America's headquarters from New Jersey to Texas.

The move primarily affects employees working across the company's display, mobile devices and digital appliance divisions.

According to corporate filings, 739 positions at Samsung Electronics America's headquarters in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, have been impacted as part of the transition. The company said most affected employees were offered relocation opportunities to the new Texas base, while some positions were eliminated. In addition, around 100 employees at Samsung's Plano, Texas office, mainly associated with the mobile hardware division, were affected by a broader workforce reduction programme.

The restructuring reflects contrasting trends within Samsung's business segments. The company's semiconductor division has benefited from strong global demand for artificial intelligence-related chips, driving significant improvement in profitability.



However, its consumer electronics operations have faced pressure from rising component costs, weaker demand and tighter margins in global markets.

Company officials said the consolidation is aimed at improving operational efficiency, reducing duplication of functions and creating closer coordination among business teams. By bringing key operations together in Texas, Samsung plans to streamline decision-making and strengthen its presence within the US technology ecosystem.

The decision to move away from the New Jersey headquarters has surprised business observers, as the Englewood Cliffs facility had opened less than a year earlier following a major investment and public launch

event.

The office had initially accommodated around 1,200 corporate employees and was positioned as a key centre for Samsung's US operations.

A company spokesperson said the changes do not represent a worldwide restructuring of Samsung's consumer products division.

However, some employees have expressed concerns that the consolidation of home entertainment and mobile operations under a single structure could lead to further workforce adjustments in the future.

The Texas relocation comes as global technology companies continue to reassess their operational models, balancing cost management, regional consolidation and investment priorities amid changing market conditions.

IPO Pipeline Expands as Seven Companies Prepare Market Debuts

Mumbai: India's primary capital market is set for a busy week with seven companies scheduled to launch initial public offerings (IPOs), including four mainboard issues and three small and medium enterprise (SME) offerings. The upcoming fundraising activity comes amid strong investor interest in recent public issues, particularly from institutional participants.

The mainboard segment will see significant activity across infrastructure, technology and manufacturing sectors.

Leading the upcoming IPO calendar is Cube Highways Trust, which will open its ₹5,000-crore Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) public offering from July 22 to July 24. The issue will be entirely an offer for sale, involving 32.89 crore units with a price band of ₹151 to ₹152

per unit. The offering will mark the transition of the platform from a privately listed entity to a publicly traded investment vehicle. Before the IPO, the trust raised ₹1,250 crore through a pre-IPO placement from strategic investors.

Technology solutions provider Xtranet Technologies will launch its ₹166.80-crore mainboard IPO from July 23 to July 27. The issue comprises a fresh issue of 1.31 crore shares priced between ₹120 and ₹127 per share. Retail investors will be required to apply for a minimum lot size of 110 shares, involving an investment of ₹13,970 at the upper price band. The company plans to utilise around ₹102 crore from the proceeds towards working capital requirements, while the remaining funds will be allocated for technology infrastructure upgrades and debt repayment.



ment.

Two more mainboard offerings are scheduled during the same period. Precision engineering components manufacturer Indo-MIM will launch an IPO featuring a ₹500-crore fresh issue along with an offer for sale of 6.83 crore equity shares. The total issue size is expected to exceed ₹3,500 crore. Meanwhile,

technical textile machinery maker Lohia Corp will bring an offer-for-sale issue involving 2.59 crore shares, with no fresh funds being raised by the company.

The SME segment will also witness increased activity, with three smaller companies opening their issues for subscription

Gulf Lloyds India will

launch its BSE SME issue from July 20 to July 22 at a fixed price of ₹100 per share, aiming to raise ₹18.19 crore. Metalic Technoforge will open its NSE SME offering from July 21 to July 23 with a price band of ₹72 to ₹77 per share, targeting ₹49.96 crore. Shree Balaji (Mala) Textiles will follow with its BSE SME issue from

July 22 to July 24, carrying a price band of ₹66 to ₹70 per share and seeking to raise ₹18.90 crore.

Apart from new subscriptions, investors will also track several upcoming stock market listings during the week. Four companies are expected to make their exchange debuts on the BSE and NSE, including SBI Funds Management, whose listing on July 21 is expected to attract significant attention after receiving exceptionally strong demand during its IPO process.

Market participants said the combination of large infrastructure offerings, technology sector fundraising and SME participation reflects continued confidence in India's equity markets, though investor sentiment will remain dependent on valuations, earnings trends and broader market conditions.

Netflix Faces Market Rout After Cautious Revenue Guidance



New York: Shares of Netflix witnessed a sharp decline of 13 per cent in heavy trading after investors reacted negatively to the company's weaker-than-expected revenue outlook for the upcoming quarter. The steep fall marked the streaming giant's worst single-day market performance in nearly two years, sending the stock to a 22-month low and wiping out billions of dollars in market value.

The decline came after Netflix released its latest financial results, which showed continued subscriber growth but raised concerns over future revenue momentum. Although the company maintained steady membership expansion, its forward guidance failed to meet Wall Street expectations, leading investors to question whether recent growth strategies would deliver the level of returns previously anticipated.

Company executives highlighted several challenges affecting revenue growth, including foreign currency fluctuations across international markets and promotional pricing measures aimed at attracting new customers. Analysts said these factors could put pressure on average revenue per membership, particularly as Netflix continues to expand into regions where competition remains intense and consumer spending patterns are changing.

Investor concerns have also focused on Netflix's recent efforts to diversify its revenue model. The company's global crackdown on password sharing and expansion of its advertising-supported subscription tier were introduced as key growth initiatives designed to generate additional income. However, market observers said the financial benefits from

these strategies may take longer to appear, raising questions about the company's near-term growth trajectory.

The cautious outlook has intensified wider debates over the profitability of the global streaming industry. Platforms across the sector are facing mounting challenges, including higher production costs, increased competition from rival services and the need to continuously invest in original programming to retain subscribers. While streaming demand remains strong, investors are increasingly focused on whether companies can convert audience growth into sustainable profits.

Netflix has responded by outlining measures to improve operational efficiency, manage content expenditure more carefully and strengthen its advertising business. The company expects advertising revenue to become an increasingly important contributor as it seeks to reduce dependence on subscription growth alone and improve profit margins.

Despite these efforts, investor sentiment remained under pressure following the earnings update. Several brokerage firms revised their outlook on Netflix shares, lowering price targets and adopting more cautious recommendations due to limited immediate catalysts that could drive a rapid recovery in valuation.

The sharp decline in Netflix shares also contributed to weakness across broader internet and media stocks, as investors reassessed valuations and growth expectations throughout the digital entertainment sector. The market reaction highlighted increasing scrutiny of streaming companies as the industry moves from rapid expansion towards a more competitive and profitability-focused phase.

Nifty Hits Record High as Banking Earnings Drive Market Focus

Mumbai: Indian equity markets are set for an important trading session after the benchmark Nifty ended a five-day consolidation phase by breaking out to a fresh record high. Market analysts said the index's next movement will depend on corporate earnings, particularly from major banking companies, along with global economic developments.

Technical experts said the Nifty's decisive move above short-term resistance levels reflects strong buying momentum. The index formed a positive pattern on daily charts, supported by gains in large-cap financial and technology stocks.

Analysts expect the immediate support zone to remain elevated, while further upside will depend on sustained investor participation.

The banking sector will be closely watched as leading lenders prepare to announce their first-quarter financial

results. Investors will focus on key indicators such as asset quality, net interest margins, loan growth and future business outlook. Strong earnings from banks could provide additional support to the ongoing market rally, while weaker-than-expected numbers may lead to short-term profit booking.

Global factors will also remain important for domestic markets. Investors are monitoring international technology stocks after recent corrections, along with foreign institutional investor flows and upcoming central bank policy decisions.

Analysts said the broader market trend remains positive but advised investors to remain selective and focus on fundamentally strong companies. Maintaining proper risk management through stop-loss levels will be important as markets may witness increased volatility in the coming sessions.

Power Sector Poised for Growth as Demand and Capacity Expansion Accelerate

Mumbai: India's power sector is expected to maintain strong growth momentum during the current financial year, supported by rising electricity consumption, record peak demand levels and continued expansion of generation capacity. Increased industrial activity, urbanisation and growing energy requirements are creating favourable conditions for power generation and distribution companies across the country.

Electricity consumption recorded a significant rise during the first quarter of the fiscal year, with the country using nearly 485 billion units of power, marking an eight per cent increase compared with the corresponding period last year. Peak electricity demand reached a record 270.82 gigawatts as prolonged heatwave conditions, delayed monsoon arrival and increased dependence on cooling systems pushed consumption higher across urban and industrial centres.

The increase in demand



also strengthened short-term electricity market activity, with trading volumes on power exchanges registering a 16 per cent year-on-year rise. Industry observers said higher demand and supply balancing requirements have increased opportunities for utilities and power market participants.

India's total installed electricity generation capacity has crossed 548 gigawatts, with non-fossil fuel sources accounting for nearly 54 per cent of the overall capacity mix. During the first quarter alone, the country added 16.8 gigawatts of new generation capacity, including 13.2 gigawatts from renewable energy sources, 2.9 gigawatts from coal-based thermal power and 650 megawatts from

hydropower projects.

The expansion highlights the government's continued focus on strengthening energy security while increasing the share of clean energy in the national grid. Renewable power generation recorded a 21 per cent growth during the quarter, reflecting rapid expansion in solar and other green energy segments. However, coal-based generation also grew by seven per cent, underlining the continued importance of thermal power in meeting India's round-the-clock electricity requirements.

Experts said companies with a balanced portfolio of reliable thermal assets and growing renewable energy capacity are likely to remain better positioned for sustained growth. Al-

though renewable energy investment continues to accelerate, coal-fired power plants currently contribute around 70 per cent of total electricity generation, providing essential base-load support for grid stability.

The sector outlook remains positive, supported by rising electricity demand, expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, increased investment in energy storage systems and continued capacity additions. However, analysts cautioned that higher borrowing costs, interest rate pressures and rising depreciation expenses could affect profitability for highly leveraged companies, particularly those focused heavily on renewable energy projects.

Despite short-term financial challenges, industry assessments suggest that India's expanding economy, growing electricity needs and long-term infrastructure development plans will continue to drive investment and growth opportunities across the power sector.

Israel Announces Gaza Outpost Plans and West Bank Construction Funding Amid Political Tensions

Jerusalem: Israel's defence and finance ministries announced major initiatives involving the establishment of new outposts in the Gaza Strip and the allocation of hundreds of millions of dollars to expand construction activity in the occupied West Bank, as political and international criticism intensified over the moves.

The announcements came ahead of Israel's parliamentary elections scheduled for October 27, with the ruling right-wing coalition advancing measures aimed at strengthening territorial control over occupied Palestinian areas before the end of its term.

Defence Minister Israel Katz confirmed plans to establish three military-linked outposts in northern Gaza, areas where similar installations have historically preceded the development of permanent civilian settlements. Alongside the Gaza plans, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich confirmed a 1.3 billion shekel package, worth around \$400 million, to support dozens of construction projects in the West Bank. The funding package had received cabinet approval in June but was not publicly disclosed at the time due to concerns over opposition from inter-



national partners.

The policy shift received further backing from Major General Avi Bluth, the military commander overseeing Israeli forces in the West Bank, who praised leaders of unauthorized settlement outposts during a meeting of the Farms Association, describing them as security partners. The association represents several agricultural outposts that are not legally recognized under Israeli law.

The developments trig-

gered criticism from political leaders and former security officials, including two former prime ministers and former heads of intelligence and defence agencies, who indicated plans to seek legal action against the government over its support for radical settler activities. A United Nations human rights body also reported that state-backed impunity had allowed settler actions to become a key method of territorial expansion. Meanwhile, activists track-

ing land developments said construction equipment was already active at seven locations to establish permanent communities ahead of the elections.

During a visit to the area, Katz defended the plans, saying the proposed outposts would be located at sites where Israeli settlements existed before the 2005 withdrawal from Gaza. The prime minister's office did not issue a statement on the defence minister's announcement.

The announcement coincided with a broader expansion of Israeli military control in Gaza. Major General Tamir Yadai informed defence officials that Israeli forces currently controlled around 65 percent of the territory, exceeding the 53 percent area outlined under an earlier US-brokered ceasefire framework. The current military perimeter has left an estimated two million displaced Palestinians restricted to the remaining portion of the Gaza Strip.

Yadai described the operation as a success, citing territorial control and claiming that more than 70,000 opposing fighters had been eliminated. However, the figures reportedly grouped all casualties under a single category, including more than 21,000 children and 1,000 infants identified through population records. Military officials declined to clarify how women, children and elderly casualties were classified, stating that an internal review of casualty data was ongoing.

The military also declined to comment on Bluth's remarks regarding agricultural outposts, saying decisions related to settlement expansion remained matters of political policy.

Voting Dispute Deepens Ahead of Elections



Washington: Opposition leaders and voting rights organizations raised concerns over a presidential address focused on unverified claims of foreign interference in the previous election, alleging that the remarks were part of an effort to influence the outcome of upcoming legislative races.

The November elections, which will determine control of Congress and several state legislatures, are expected to serve as a major political test for the administration two years after the president returned to office by defeating the previous governing party's candidate. Polling models showing declining public approval ratings and the possibility of losses for congressional allies have intensified scrutiny over the administration's approach to election issues.

A senior member of the congressional oversight committee accused the address of spreading baseless claims aimed at creating grounds to question future election results by undermining confidence in voting systems. The lawmaker said election security efforts should instead focus on ensuring that eligible citizens can cast ballots freely and that votes are accurately counted. A prominent federal representative from Georgia, facing a closely contested re-election campaign, also argued that the speech indicated an intention to challenge state-level results and weaken voting protections, drawing comparisons with disputes that followed the previous presidential con-

test.

Since state governments oversee most election procedures, a group of 24 governors issued a joint statement expressing concern over attempts to undermine public trust in established voting systems. The governors said repeated reviews had confirmed the reliability and security of election processes. The leadership of a national body representing state election officials also criticised the president's remarks.

During the address, renewed calls were made for the passage of the Save America Act, a proposed election law that would prohibit remote mail-in voting nationwide and introduce stricter identification requirements for voter registration and in-person voting. However, the legislation faces significant hurdles in the Senate, where opposition lawmakers remain firmly against the proposal and attempts to overcome procedural barriers have failed.

Supporters of stricter voting regulations used the address to press lawmakers for immediate action, arguing that election systems require stronger safeguards similar to those used in other sensitive sectors. However, senior congressional leaders from the ruling party showed limited public involvement, with neither the House speaker nor the Senate leader attending the address or issuing formal statements afterward.

The House leadership has continued exploring ways to attach voting-related provisions to wider budget legislation that could pass

with a simple majority, while Senate leadership has faced pressure from party activists seeking stronger measures to advance the administration's priorities. The Senate minority leader said opposition to the proposal remained firm, citing previous rejections by courts, lawmakers and members of the governing party.

Criticism also came from former allies of the president. A former Georgia lawmaker published a separate critique that repeated unsupported claims about past elections but described the presidential address as a distraction from issues including foreign military involvement, pending investigative records and unfinished policy commitments. A Kentucky lawmaker who recently lost a primary election after the president backed a rival also questioned claims of foreign data theft and intelligence agency concealment, arguing that much of the referenced demographic information is commercially available.

Campaign finance and ethics advocacy groups accused the administration of promoting false claims to reshape election rules ahead of November in favour of the ruling party. Representatives from the groups argued that public dissatisfaction over economic priorities benefiting wealthy interests could put the governing party at electoral risk, and alleged that changes to election regulations were being pursued instead of addressing voter concerns through policy measures.

World Cup Finale Overshadowed by Political and Administrative Disputes



Washington: Administrative changes, diplomatic controversies and on-field rivalries dominated discussions as the global football tournament moved into its final weekend, with the third-place playoff and championship match set to conclude the competition.

Gabon appointed a 53-year-old French-born coach to lead its upcoming continental qualification campaign, bringing back

the manager who recently guided Haiti to a historic tournament appearance before their group-stage elimination. The coach will oversee upcoming fixtures against Morocco and Niger, while financial details of the agreement were not disclosed by the regional football authorities.

Off the field, a former member of Spain's 2010 World Cup-winning squad was denied entry into the

United States after authorities rejected a required travel authorization request. The former defender appealed to senior US political leaders, including the president, seeking assistance to attend the final match with his family and former teammates.

Meanwhile, football officials indicated that the president of the global governing body is unlikely to face action from the In-

ternational Olympic Committee over allegations of violating political neutrality rules. The controversy followed direct communication with the US president regarding a disputed red card issued to Folarin Balogun during the tournament. The incident drew criticism in the United Kingdom, where political leaders called for European football bodies to consider leaving the global federation and forming a more transparent structure.

On the field, France and England prepared for the third-place playoff, with England aiming for its best tournament finish in 60 years despite both teams expressing limited enthusiasm for the fixture. The match follows England's semi-final defeat to Argentina, which triggered debate over tactical decisions and player fitness under manager Thomas Tuchel. Former players defended

Argentina against criticism of their performances, highlighting the continued influence of their veteran captain Lionel Messi.

Political tensions also surfaced after Argentina's semi-final victory, when players displayed a banner supporting their claim over the Falkland Islands. European officials called for disciplinary action over the political message, while US officials expressed support for the Argentine team.

The final stages of the tournament have also been affected by a rise in artificial intelligence-generated content and misinformation, complicating public debate over refereeing decisions. Ahead of the final, Spain entered the match on a 14-game unbeaten run dating back to 2024, while Argentina aimed to secure back-to-back world titles in a contest expected to showcase contrasting football styles.

UK Aid Cuts to Hit African Nations as Overseas Funding Faces Major Reductions

London : Several African countries are set to experience substantial declines in direct financial assistance from the United Kingdom, with some nations facing cuts of up to 90 percent as part of the government's revised overseas development spending strategy, according to internal government figures.

The detailed country-by-country breakdown, included in the foreign ministry's annual report, outlines projected aid allocations over the next three years and highlights the scale of reductions expected across several regions. An independent review of the figures by Bond, a network representing international development organisations, found that bilateral aid allocations for Malawi

and Mozambique are expected to decrease by 90 percent by 2029.

The assessment further indicated that Sierra Leone and Rwanda could see their funding reduced by 80 percent, while Somalia is expected to face a decline of 49 percent in direct assistance. Humanitarian organisations said reduced financial support could weaken essential programmes aimed at improving healthcare, education, food security and poverty reduction. They cautioned that vulnerable populations in countries including Ethiopia, Uganda and other crisis-affected regions could face increasing hardship as international funding becomes more limited.

The reduction in overseas development spending was



introduced last year as part of a broader government effort to redirect financial resources towards domestic defence priorities. The policy shift con-

tributed to the resignation of the former development minister, while government officials defended the decision by arguing that partnerships

with major multilateral organisations, including the World Bank, could deliver assistance more efficiently through larger-scale funding mechanisms.

The foreign secretary previously explained the changes in a written statement submitted to lawmakers in March, stating that although direct government-to-government grants would be reduced in several areas, the country's broader international development objectives would continue through a more strategic and modernised approach.

The revised funding plans have faced criticism from humanitarian agencies and development campaigners, who argued that reducing direct country-level assistance could disrupt ongoing projects and limit support for communities most in need. The responsibility for shaping future overseas aid policy will pass to the incoming

administration, with political observers suggesting that the current energy secretary is among the leading candidates for the foreign affairs portfolio. Several lawmakers have called on the next government to reconsider the cuts and establish a clear pathway towards restoring the historic target of allocating 0.7 percent of gross national income to international development.

The debate over aid priorities comes as the country prepares to assume the rotating chair of the G20 next year, placing renewed attention on its role in global economic cooperation and international assistance.

Defending the government's position, Development Minister Jenny Chap-

man said global crises in distant regions continued to have direct consequences for domestic communities. She highlighted conflicts in the Middle East that have contributed to rising agricultural costs and the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo as examples of why international cooperation remains essential.

Chapman maintained that the government was not abandoning its global responsibilities but was instead focused on ensuring that every unit of development spending produced maximum impact. She said the revised approach aimed to support populations facing severe instability while also protecting the interests of domestic taxpayers.

Missing Shooter Found Unconscious
Near Riverbank, Probe Underway

Howrah: A teenage state-level shooter who had been missing for several days was found unconscious near a river ghat in Howrah, bringing an intensive search operation to an end while leaving investigators searching for answers about the circumstances surrounding her disappearance.

The athlete, a resident of central Kolkata, had reportedly gone missing while travelling to a shooting range on the northern outskirts of the city for training. Her family alerted police after she failed to return home and could not be contacted, prompting authorities to launch a search operation.

Investigators examined CCTV footage and digital records to trace her movements, identifying her last known location near a major transit point before all communication ceased. River police and rescue teams later intensified patrols along nearby riverbanks, eventually locating the teenager in a semi-conscious condition near a ghat during the early hours.



She was immediately taken to a government hospital, where doctors treated her for dehydration and exhaustion. Hospital officials said she was out of danger but remained disoriented and was not yet in a condition to provide a detailed account of what had happened.

Police have expanded the investigation to determine whether the incident involved abduction or other circumstances. Officers are examining electronic records, reviewing transport routes, analysing surveillance footage and questioning individuals connected to her training programme in an effort to reconstruct the events leading to her discovery.

Illicit Relationship Allegedly Behind
Bihar Man’s Murder, Five Arrested

Siliguri: Police investigating the brutal murder of a Bihar resident in north Bengal have alleged that an extramarital relationship was the primary motive behind the crime, with the victim’s wife and four others arrested in connection with the case.

The investigation gained momentum after police recovered the victim’s severed head from Liusipukuri in the Phansidewa area, around 15 kilometres from Haskhowa Tea Garden, where the headless body was discovered earlier this week.

Forensic experts have seized the suspected murder weapon along with other materials for scientific examination as investigators continue to reconstruct the sequence of events leading to the killing and disposal of the body.

Police cracked the case within 48 hours and arrested five people on charges of murder, criminal conspiracy and destruction of evidence. The victim, Imam, a

resident of Bihar’s Kishanganj district, worked as a traditional faith healer and frequently travelled to Siliguri, where members of his wife’s family reside.

Those arrested include the victim’s wife, Tumpa Ghosh, also known as Momi Begum; her alleged partner, Sudip Pal of Bagdogra; Sudip’s relatives, Bapi Pal and Nitai Pal of Jalpaiguri; and another accused, Kaushik Nath.

A local court has remanded all five accused to seven days of police custody to facilitate further interrogation and collection of evidence.

According to investigators, the victim’s wife converted before marrying him about 12 years ago, and the couple had four sons while jointly participating in traditional healing practices. Police alleged that she developed a relationship with Sudip Pal nearly seven years ago. Sudip, who is also married and has two children, was reportedly acquainted with the victim

before the alleged affair began.

Investigators said the woman frequently told her husband that she was visiting her parental home in Siliguri but instead travelled to Bagdogra to meet her alleged partner.

Police claimed she changed her attire during these visits to avoid attracting attention and prevent local residents from recognising her.

According to the investigation, the alleged relationship eventually developed into a conspiracy to murder the victim. Siliguri Police Commissioner Syed Waqar Raza said evidence collected during the investigation strongly indicated that the alleged extramarital relationship and a prolonged domestic dispute were the primary motives behind the killing.

Police said further investigation is underway to establish the precise role played by each of the accused in planning and carrying out the crime.

Smart Border Network
to Debut in Bengal



Kolkata: The Union government is set to launch an ambitious “smart borders” programme to modernise India’s frontier management, with West Bengal chosen as the first state for the initial phase of implementation. The initiative aims to strengthen border security through an integrated four-tier surveillance network supported by advanced technology and upgraded infrastructure.

During a series of high-level security meetings in Siliguri, Union Home Minister Amit Shah directed the Border Security Force (BSF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) to enhance surveillance across sensitive border stretches. He instructed the forces to eliminate remaining gaps in border fencing and install triple-layer barriers in vulnerable locations to strengthen protection along the country’s frontiers.

A major feature of the initiative is the deployment of indigenous surveillance technologies.

At the Jumagach border outpost, officials reviewed

a radio-frequency breach detection system capable of instantly alerting monitoring teams whenever the border perimeter is tampered with. An infrared-based alarm system has also been installed to secure difficult terrains, including riverine stretches and unfenced areas, by detecting movement through invisible thermal beams. In addition, a modern gate management system has been introduced to regulate the movement of residents and farmers living and working near the India-Bangladesh border.

The Centre has simultaneously approved infrastructure upgrades to support the security drive. Around ₹47 crore has been sanctioned for three development projects, while another ₹30 crore has been allocated for constructing a four-kilometre stretch of border fencing on newly acquired land covering two border outposts in West Bengal.

Special attention is being given to the strategically significant Siliguri Corridor, commonly known as the “Chicken’s Neck.”

Measuring roughly 17 to 22 kilometres in width, the narrow land passage is India’s only land link to the eight northeastern states and is flanked by Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Central security agencies have sought additional land within the corridor to facilitate future infrastructure expansion. The West Bengal government has already transferred nearly 1,025 acres of land covering about 172.6 kilometres across nine districts to support border security projects.

The security roadmap also calls for stronger coordination between central forces and state authorities. Joint operations will be conducted to remove illegal encroachments and prevent unauthorised gatherings near the border, while local police will work alongside central agencies to raise public awareness against cross-border smuggling and other illegal activities. Regular coordination meetings involving central and state officials have also been planned to monitor progress and strengthen border management.

Abhishek Offers to Quit Party Post if Rebels Return to TMC



Kolkata: Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee has offered to resign from all organisational responsibilities if former party leaders who recently switched allegiance return to the Trinamool Congress

under the leadership of party supremo Mamata Banerjee. He said he would step down within an hour if the defectors rejoined the party.

The remarks came amid growing political friction within the ruling party fol-

lowing a series of high-profile defections in the aftermath of recent electoral setbacks. Several former Trinamool leaders have attributed their departure to differences over the party’s internal functioning and leadership structure.

Speaking to reporters outside Mamata Banerjee’s residence in Kalighat, Abhishek Banerjee rejected allegations that he was responsible for the party’s organisational challenges. Referring to the Trinamool Congress’ performance in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, in which the party won 29 of West Bengal’s 42 parliamentary seats, he argued that political accountability must be viewed consistently. He maintained that those who blame him for any elec-

toral setback should also acknowledge the party’s earlier successes achieved under the same leadership.

Banerjee also accused several former party leaders of switching sides to escape legal scrutiny.

He alleged that many defectors joined rival political parties soon after receiving notices from central investigative agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), in an attempt to secure political protection. Stressing that he had chosen to face investigations through legal means, he said he would never compromise his principles or seek relief through political realignment.

Reiterating his confidence in the democratic process,

the Diamond Harbour MP said the trust of the people remained his greatest strength and asserted that no external political pressure could force him to alter his position. He maintained that his commitment to the party and its leadership remained unchanged despite continued political attacks.

The conditional resignation offer drew an immediate response from dissident leaders, who questioned the timing of the statement and described it as an attempt to counter mounting criticism from within the party. Opposition leaders also dismissed the challenge, calling it a familiar political declaration that lacked practical significance and was unlikely to alter the state’s political landscape.

Survey Begins for Expansion
of Malda Airport Runway

Malda: The process of reviving Malda Airport gained momentum on Saturday as a joint team of civil aviation officials and the state land and land reforms department began a detailed field survey for the proposed extension of the airport runway. The exercise marks a key step towards restoring commercial flight operations from the airport under the Centre’s regional connectivity initiative.

Survey teams inspected land surrounding the existing airstrip to determine the technical feasibility of extending

the runway, which is currently suitable only for small aircraft and helicopters. Officials said the proposed expansion is necessary to enable the airport to handle larger passenger aircraft while complying with modern aviation safety standards and operational requirements.

Engineers and land survey personnel used digital mapping equipment and ground measurements to identify the extent of additional land required for the project. The exercise also includes assessing nearby structures, drainage

systems, approach paths and both government and privately owned land that may be needed for runway expansion and associated infrastructure.

The survey follows renewed efforts by the Centre and the West Bengal government to bring the long-defunct airport back into operation under the UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) regional connectivity scheme. Aviation officials have been examining the feasibility of upgrading the airport to improve air connectivity across North Bengal and neighbouring districts.

Officials said the airport’s revival is expected to strengthen regional connectivity, promote trade and tourism, improve access to healthcare through faster medical transport and provide a boost to economic activity in the region. Once the survey is completed, a detailed feasibility report outlining land requirements, engineering specifications and estimated project costs will be submitted to the civil aviation authorities for technical approval, regulatory clearances and funding before construction work can begin.

Demolition Drive Targets MP
Office in South 24 Parganas



Kolkata: The South 24 Parganas district administration launched a demolition drive against a five-storey building in Amtala linked to Trinamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee, alleging that the structure had been constructed without a sanctioned building plan and in violation of statutory building norms. The building, situated on the Amtala-Baruipur Road in the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency, functioned as the MP’s local office and was also associated with the private company Leaps and Bounds.

The operation began on Saturday morning under heavy security, with state police, Central Armed Police Forces and Rapid Action Force personnel de-

ployed to seal off the area and prevent any disturbance. Fire and Emergency Services teams remained on standby as three excavators and drilling machines dismantled the front shed, corrugated façade and portions of the ground and first floors after electricity to the premises was disconnected. Officials also recovered desktop computers, laptops and numerous files from inside the building, while several digitally locked rooms were opened during the operation.

District officials said the demolition followed complaints alleging unauthorised construction. According to the administration, multiple notices were served between late June and early July directing the owners to produce sanc-

tioned building plans and statutory approvals. The property is registered in the name of Leaps and Bounds Private Limited, whose directors include Amit Banerjee, father of the Trinamool Congress leader.

Authorities maintained that demolition orders were issued only after the concerned parties allegedly failed to furnish the required documents or respond satisfactorily during the prescribed hearings. Officials asserted that the action was taken strictly in accordance with legal procedures and was unrelated to political considerations.

The demolition triggered sharp political reactions across the state. Bharatiya Janata Party leaders welcomed the administration’s move, claiming the

multi-storey structure had been illegally built on the site of a former commercial bakery without obtaining mandatory permissions. Supporters gathered near the site, raising slogans as the demolition progressed under tight security.

Abhishek Banerjee strongly disputed the allegations, asserting that the property is privately owned and backed by valid legal documentation. He said his representatives had appeared before the authorities on July 15 and requested a copy of the original complaint, which, according to him, was not produced during the hearing. Describing the demolition as politically motivated and an abuse of administrative power, the Diamond Harbour MP alleged that officials had acted without due process.

He confirmed that documentary evidence had been placed before the Calcutta High Court and said the matter would be pursued through all available judicial forums, including the Supreme Court.

In a subsequent development, the Calcutta High Court directed the authorities to halt any further demolition work at the Amtala premises until further orders, providing temporary relief while the legal challenge is heard.

Federal Quality Review Flags Anomalies
in Mountain Highway Infrastructure

Siliguri: A technical audit conducted by the National Rural Infrastructure Development Agency has revealed significant structural and procedural discrepancies across multiple rural connectivity projects currently underway in the northern mountainous sub-divisions of the state. The federal evaluation team has directed execution bodies to take immediate corrective measures to address substandard operations.

The central technical arm of the Ministry of Rural Development carried out comprehensive physical quality assessments on rural connectivity links being upgraded

under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts. Auditors discovered critical deficiencies in structural design execution, alignment protocols, and material standards across several hilly corridors.

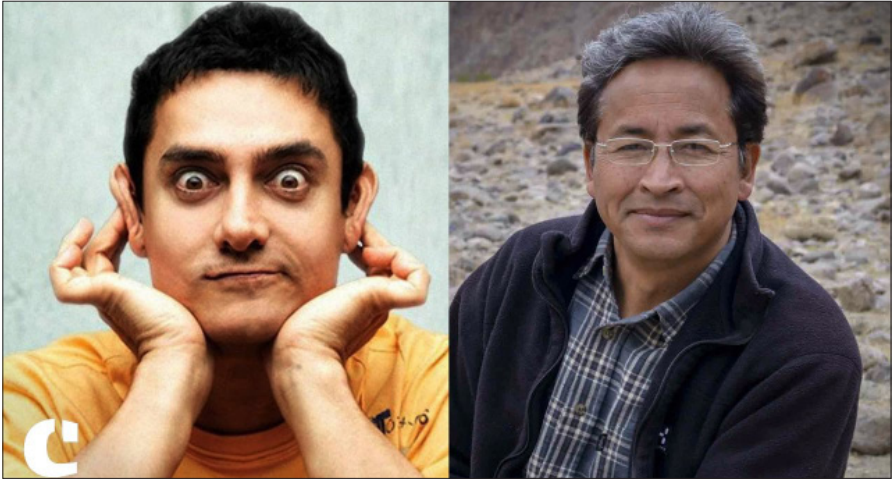
The performance evaluation report specifically highlighted severe shortcomings in the construction of essential cross-drainage assets and protective retaining structures. Engineering inspectors observed that several road corridors lacked adequate protection against slope instability and seasonal landslides, which poses

severe structural risks to the long-term durability of the public infrastructure. The agency also pointed to significant deviations from the geometric design standards prescribed in the Hill Road Manual, noting that inadequate embankment enforcement and missing pavement markings could seriously compromise vehicular safety along high-altitude transport sectors.

The central infrastructure agency has issued a strict non-compliance notice to the State Rural Roads Development Agency and regional program implementation units. The federal directive

mandates a complete technical review of all detailed project reports for hill roads stretching beyond five kilometres. The executing contractors have been ordered to establish comprehensive field testing laboratories and install global positioning tracking systems on all heavy machinery deployed at the sites to ensure compliance with strict federal quality assurance guidelines. The monitoring agency warned that financial disbursements for the ongoing phases would remain contingent upon the successful physical rectification of all flagged anomalies.

Aamir Khan, Hirani and Chopra Offer Different Views on ‘3 Idiots’ Inspiration



Mumbai : A renewed debate over the real-life inspiration behind Rancho, the lead character in the 2009 blockbuster 3 Idiots, has resurfaced following ongoing public discussions around education reformer Sonam Wangchuk, with actor Aamir Khan, director Rajkumar Hirani and producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra offering differing accounts of the character’s origins. The discussion gained momentum after fresh speculation linked Rancho to

Wangchuk, whose work in education and sustainable development has often been associated with the film by audiences. However, speaking during an interaction at BFI Southbank in London, Aamir Khan rejected the claim, stating that neither he nor the film’s writers, Rajkumar Hirani and Abhijat Joshi, were aware of Wangchuk or his work when the screenplay was developed. He described the connection as a misconception that emerged after the

film’s release. Rajkumar Hirani, on the other hand, has previously said that the philosophy behind Rancho was inspired by an experience during his time at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). According to the filmmaker, he had met an individual who attended classes using another student’s identity solely to gain knowledge rather than earn a degree. Hirani said the person’s belief that education should focus on learn-

ing instead of certificates became a key influence in shaping the film’s central theme. Producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra has also shared a different perspective, saying aspects of Rancho’s unconventional approach to education reflected his own experiences as a film student. Chopra recalled often skipping formal classes and following an independent path before eventually completing his academic requirements later in his career. While 3 Idiots was officially adapted from Chetan Bhagat’s novel Five Point Someone, Chopra has also revealed that the character’s onscreen name, Phunsukh Wangdu, was chosen as a tribute to one of his classmates from Ladakh. The contrasting explanations from the film’s principal creators have continued to fuel public curiosity over the inspiration behind one of Indian cinema’s most memorable characters.

‘Kala Hiran’ Teaser Fuels Buzz with Apparent Salman Khan References

Mumbai : The teaser of the upcoming film Kala Hiran has sparked widespread discussion online after viewers identified several visual and thematic elements that appear to reference Bollywood star Salman Khan and some of his best-known screen characters. The promotional clip features action-packed sequences, background score and character styling that many social media users have compared to Salman Khan’s portrayal of Chulbul Pandey in the Dabangg franchise.

Others also pointed to similarities with promotional material from his forthcoming film Sikandar. Although the makers have not made any direct reference to the actor, the teaser has generated considerable speculation over whether the parallels were intentionally incorporated. The film’s title has further intensified the debate. “Kala Hiran”, which translates to “blackbuck”, immediately drew attention because of its association with Salman Khan’s long-running legal case linked to the alleged hunting of blackbucks during the filming of Hum Saath-



Saath Hain in Rajasthan in 1998. The actor was convicted by a Jodhpur trial court in 2018 under the Wildlife Protection Act and later granted bail. His appeal against the conviction remains pending before the Rajasthan High Court. The teaser arrives at a time when Salman Khan continues to remain in the public spotlight following multiple security threats in recent years. The actor’s security cover has been enhanced, and several investigations have been carried out by law enforcement agencies into threat messages and alleged extortion attempts linked to organised criminal groups. Beyond the references, Kala Hiran is being promoted as a rural action dra-

ma centred on conflict and justice. The makers have described the project as a fictional story, although the teaser’s imagery and title have inevitably drawn comparisons with real-life events involving the Bollywood star. The promotional campaign has received mixed reactions across social media platforms. While some viewers praised the teaser for its bold marketing strategy and mass-entertainment appeal, others questioned whether invoking imagery associated with a long-running legal dispute was appropriate. Despite the differing opinions, the teaser has succeeded in generating significant online engagement and curiosity ahead of the film’s release.

Prabhas’ ‘Fauzi’ Set for December 2026 Release with Mega Budget



Mumbai : The makers of Prabhas-starrer Fauzi have officially announced that the much-awaited historical action drama will hit theatres worldwide on December 3, 2026, with the film emerging as one of the biggest-budget productions in Indian cinema. Directed by Hanu Raghavapudi, the period epic is reportedly being made at an estimated cost of ₹600 crore to ₹700 crore, reflecting the scale of its production. The release date was unveiled alongside a new poster featuring Prabhas

in a battle-scarred avatar with the tagline, “अज्ञानपूर्व ENDS. THE REBELLION BEGINS.” Set during the 1940s British Raj and the Second World War, Fauzi explores a lesser-known chapter of India’s freedom movement connected to the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army). Prabhas plays an army officer leading a determined fight against colonial rule. Reports suggest the film has been conceived as a two-part saga, with the second instalment expected to serve as a prequel ex-

ploring the origins of the conflict. The film also marks the acting debut of Imanvi, who stars opposite Prabhas. The supporting cast includes veteran actors Mithun Chakraborty, Jaya Prada and Anupam Kher in pivotal roles. The technical crew features composer Vishal Chandrasekhar, known for Sita Ramam, while cinematography is being handled by Sudeep Chatterjee. Filming is progressing across large-scale sets, including extensive schedules at Ramoji Film City, where major action sequences are being shot. According to industry reports, the digital streaming rights for the South Indian language versions have already been acquired for around ₹180 crore, underlining strong pre-release interest in the film. With its large-scale production, period setting and pan-India cast, Fauzi is expected to be among the biggest theatrical releases of 2026.

Sameera Reddy Recalls Panic Attacks, Colourism During Film Debut



Mumbai : Actor Sameera Reddy has spoken about the challenges she faced at the beginning of her film career, revealing that she experienced panic attacks and struggled with industry beauty standards while shooting her debut film, Maine Dil Tujhko Diya. In a recent interview, Reddy recalled feeling overwhelmed on the first day of filming opposite Sohail Khan in the 2002 romantic drama. She said her anxiety intensified after noticing that Salman Khan and Aishwarya Rai were present on the set during her opening scene. The actor said the pressure of performing in front of established film personalities left her visibly nervous, with trembling hands and difficulty delivering even a single line of dialogue. She added that therapy later helped her confront her fears and gradually build confidence in front of the camera. Reddy also spoke about facing colourism during the early phase of her career, alleging that extensive make-up was used to make her skin appear significantly lighter on screen. According to the actor, the process altered her natural complexion by several shades, leaving her dissatisfied with her appearance in the film. Reflecting on the experience, she questioned long-standing beauty standards in the film industry and society, saying external expectations should not determine a person’s self-worth. She emphasised the importance of self-acceptance and embracing one’s natural identity over conforming to conventional notions of beauty. Maine Dil Tujhko Diya, released in 2002, marked Sameera Reddy’s Bollywood debut after she gained recognition through a popular music video. Since then, the actor has frequently spoken about mental health, body positivity and the pressures faced by women in the entertainment industry.

Producer Refutes Paresh Rawal’s Claims Over ‘OMG 2’ Story Credit

Mumbai : Producer Ashwin Varde has strongly refuted actor Paresh Rawal’s recent claim that the idea for OMG 2 originated with him and that he was denied due credit, calling the allegations “baseless” and asserting that the film’s screenplay was written solely by director Amit Rai. The controversy surfaced after Rawal, who starred in the 2012 hit OMG – Oh My God!, claimed in a recent interview that the concept which eventually evolved into OMG 2 was originally developed by him in collaboration with Amit Rai. He alleged that despite contributing to the initial story, he received no credit when the film was released in 2023. Rawal also claimed he had envisioned the project as a standalone social drama rather than a sequel and had deliberately avoided approaching Akshay Kumar in the early stages. Responding to the allegations, Varde said Rai had narrated the script to him and explained that it had been written in a format resembling the original OMG because Rawal had



suggested maintaining a similar narrative structure. However, Varde maintained that the intellectual property rights to the OMG franchise belonged to Akshay Kumar and that any project closely resembling the original required his approval. Varde further alleged that Rawal had incorrectly conveyed to Rai that he controlled the franchise rights, describing any attempt to develop a similar film under a different title without the rights holder’s knowledge as “unethical” and “unprofessional”. He added that this prompted

Wakao Films to acquire the script to safeguard the project, which, according to him, continues to be officially registered in Amit Rai’s name as the sole writer. Addressing Rawal’s claim that actors such as Ajay Devgn and Salman Khan had declined the project before Akshay Kumar came on board, Varde said several actors recognised the similarities with the original OMG franchise and believed the project should proceed only with the approval of its rights holder. The producer also stated that despite Rawal not be-

ing creatively involved in the final version of OMG 2, the production extended financial compensation and credited Rawal’s wife, Swaroop Rawal, as a co-producer. He said the filmmakers acted within legal and contractual boundaries throughout the film’s development. Released in 2023, OMG 2, starring Akshay Kumar and Pankaj Tripathi, received positive reviews and emerged as a commercial success despite undergoing several modifications during the certification process before its theatrical release.

Zarina Wahab Says Rumours Never Shook Her Marriage with Aditya Pancholi

Mumbai : Veteran actor Zarina Wahab has said that persistent rumours about husband Aditya Pancholi’s alleged extramarital relationships never weakened their marriage, adding that she consciously chose not to let public speculation affect her personal life or family. Speaking in a recent interview, Wahab said she was aware of the reports that surfaced over the years but did not believe constant confrontation would strengthen a relationship. She said that while such stories were initially upsetting, she eventually learned to ignore them and focus on the life they had built together. The actor described Pancholi as a caring husband and father at home, saying his conduct within the



family mattered more to her than media reports. She added that dwelling on allegations would only have caused emotional distress and disturbed the stability of their household.

Responding to the perception that she had silently endured years of emotional hardship, Wahab said the public often forms opinions without knowing the realities of a marriage.

She also questioned why criticism in such situations is usually directed only at married men, arguing that responsibility should not be viewed from a one-sided perspective. Zarina Wahab and Aditya Pancholi married in 1986 after meeting during the filming of the 1985 movie Kalank Ka Tika. Over the years, Pancholi’s name has been linked to several actresses, including Pooja Bedi and Kangana Ranaut, leading to extensive media attention. However, the couple has remained together throughout the controversies. Wahab said she was often aware of the speculation surrounding her husband but deliberately chose not to interrogate or monitor him. According to her, trust is an important aspect

of any long-term relationship, and she preferred to preserve peace within the family rather than engage in repeated arguments over allegations. The veteran actor also dismissed suggestions that she remained in the marriage out of dependence, stating that she has always been financially independent and capable of supporting herself. She said her decision to stay with Pancholi was based solely on love, mutual understanding and the bond they have shared for nearly four decades. Despite repeated public scrutiny over the years, the couple has continued to maintain their relationship, with Wahab saying she has no regrets about the choices she made in protecting her family from the pressures of public attention.

Kardashian-Jenner Family Tree Continues to Expand Across Generations

Mumbai : The Kardashian-Jenner family remains one of the world’s most closely followed celebrity dynasties, with multiple generations continuing to shape popular culture through television, business ventures, fashion and social media. The family’s modern rise began with Kris Jenner and attorney Robert Kardashian Sr., who married in 1978 and had four children—Kourtney, Kim, Khloé and Rob Kardashian—before divorcing in 1991. Robert Kardashian later became widely known for his role on the legal defence team during the 1995 O.J. Simpson murder trial. He died in 2003. Later in 1991, Kris married Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner, who publicly came out as transgender in 2015 and is now known as Caitlyn Jenner. The couple had two daughters, Kendall Jenner and Kylie Jenner,

while Caitlyn also has four children from previous marriages—Burt Jenner, Cassandra Marino, Brandon Jenner and Brody Jenner. The family’s global profile grew significantly after the launch of the reality television series Keeping Up with the Kardashians in 2007. The programme ran for 20 seasons before concluding in 2021 and was followed by the streaming series The Kardashians, which continues to document the family’s personal and professional lives. The eldest sibling, Kourtney Kardashian, shares three children—Mason, Penelope and Reign Disick—with former partner Scott Disick. Following her marriage to musician Travis Barker in 2022, the couple welcomed their son, Rocky Thirteen Barker, in 2023. Kim Kardashian has four children—North, Saint, Chicago and Psalm West—with former husband and rapper

Kanye West, now known as Ye. Since their divorce in 2022, Kim has continued to expand her business portfolio through SKIMS and SKKN while pursuing legal studies. The Jenner branch has also expanded in recent years. Kylie Jenner has two children—Stormi Webster and Aire Webster—with rapper Travis Scott, while Kendall Jenner remains the only sibling without children and has focused on her modelling career. Today, the Kardashian-Jenner family spans three generations and has built a global brand encompassing fashion, cosmetics, media, consumer products and digital entrepreneurship. With several members of the youngest generation already making public appearances alongside their parents, the family’s influence continues to extend well beyond reality television into multiple sectors of the entertainment and business industries.

U Mumba Register Second Straight Win Against Pune



Mumbai: U Mumba TT, the reigning champions, continued their resurgence in Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) Season 7, defeating Maharashtra rivals PBG Pune Jaguars 9-6 on Thursday at the Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium in Taleigaon near Panaji to win their second consecutive match and climb to the top of the standings. After a cagey start, U Mumba took control with a powerful Mixed Doubles performance from captain Manush Shah and Anna Hursey, before France’s Lilian Bardet kept his nerve in a dramatic Golden Point finale against Omar Assar to put the tie beyond Pune’s reach.

The Maharashtra Derby lived true to its title, with Pune taking first blood as Snehit Suravajjala continued his undefeated streak this season, coming back from a game down to overcome Manush in the opening Men’s Singles. U

Mumba replied promptly with Hursey, who put on another calm performance to defeat Diya Chitale in three games and even the tie. The momentum shifted decisively in the mixed doubles, where Manush and Hursey combined superbly to sweep Snehit and Prithika Pavade in straight games, handing the defending champions a crucial cushion. Pune’s hopes then rested on Omar Assar, who took the opening game against Lilian Bardet before the Frenchman fought back to level the contest. The decider produced the tie’s defining moments, as Assar stunned the crowd with a breathtaking around-the-net winner—later named the Shot of the Tie—before Bardet held his nerve on the Golden Point to complete the comeback and seal U Mumba’s second successive victory. With the tie already decided, Pavade ensured Pune finished on a positive note with a 2-1

victory over Anusha Kumbale. The pair produced the longest rally of the season in the second game, a 31-shot exchange that saw Pavade absorb wave after wave of attack from deep behind the table before Anusha eventually blinked. Anusha bounced back to take the third game on Golden Point with a scintillating backhand winner. Manush received the Indian Player of the Tie title, while Hursey was awarded Foreign Player and Player of the Tie.

Earlier, in the UTT Juniors, UTT’s grassroots tournament that runs concurrently with Season 7, Dabang Delhi TTC edged UP Prometheus 5-4 to keep their playoff chances alive; despite the close loss, UP stayed solidly in the top four race. Ahmedabad APL Pipers likewise finished with a 5-4 win over PBG Pune Jaguars, although both teams were ousted from the semifinals.

Protest Fast at Jantar Mantar Continues Following Wangchuk’s Removal



New Delhi: The protest at Jantar Mantar over alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination gathered renewed momentum on Saturday after activist Sonam Wangchuk was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital by Delhi Police, prompting Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke to begin an indefinite hunger strike in his place. Protest organisers asserted that the agitation would continue uninterrupted and reaffirmed plans to hold the proposed “Chalo Sansad” march to Parliament on July 20 despite the police intervention.

Addressing supporters at the protest site, Dipke described Wangchuk’s removal as a failed attempt to weaken the movement, claiming that the police action had instead strengthened public resolve. He urged demonstrators to remain united and continue pressing for accountability over the alleged examination irregularities, stating that the campaign had entered a decisive phase with increasing participation from students and civil society groups.

The agitation, launched at Jantar Mantar on June 20, seeks a transparent investigation into the alleged NEET-UG paper leak, wider reforms in the examination system and the resignation of Union Education

Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Following Wangchuk’s removal from the protest venue, organisers expanded their demands to include the resignation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that the Centre had failed to adequately address concerns raised by students and protesters.

Wangchuk, who had entered the 21st day of his indefinite fast in solidarity with students affected by the controversy, was taken to VMMC and Safdarjung Hospital after doctors expressed concern over his deteriorating health. Hospital authorities said he was admitted to the emergency ward in a stable condition but was suffering from severe weakness and dehydration caused by prolonged fasting and required continuous medical observation. Medical experts had recommended immediate hospitalisation after warning of potentially serious complications, including dangerously low potassium levels.

Delhi Police maintained that the decision to remove Wangchuk from the protest site was taken strictly on medical advice and in compliance with directions issued by the Delhi High Court, which had ordered regular monitoring of his health during the fast. Police denied allegations of excessive force, stating that

the operation was carried out with restraint to ensure the activist received essential medical care. Protest organisers, however, alleged that Wangchuk was removed against his wishes and claimed that several supporters, including Dipke, were manhandled during the operation. Dipke also alleged that he was briefly detained before being released.

From his hospital bed, Wangchuk issued a message urging supporters to remain peaceful and participate in the July 20 march to Parliament, describing the mobilisation as a broader movement for justice and democratic accountability. His legal team and family also raised concerns over his treatment, with his wife approaching the Delhi High Court seeking permission to shift him to a private medical facility, citing a lack of confidence in the treatment being provided at Safdarjung Hospital.

Despite Wangchuk’s hospitalisation, organisers insisted the protest would continue without interruption. Volunteers have been asked to strengthen their presence at Jantar Mantar ahead of the Parliament march, which coincides with the opening of the Monsoon Session. They described the mobilisation as a peaceful demonstration demanding accountability over the alleged examination scam and the handling of the protest by authorities.

The developments have further intensified the political debate surrounding the agitation. Several opposition leaders criticised the police action, accusing the government of suppressing peaceful democratic dissent and calling for dialogue with the protesters, while the administration defended its intervention as a necessary measure to protect Wangchuk’s health in view of the prolonged hunger strike.

RS 5,470-Crore Infrastructure Push Set to Transform Punjab Connectivity

Jalandhar: A series of rail and highway infrastructure projects worth more than ₹5,470 crore were launched in Punjab on Friday, aimed at strengthening transport connectivity, improving logistics and supporting economic growth across the state and neighbouring regions.

As part of the initiative, 75 redeveloped railway stations across 20 states were virtually inaugurated under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

In Punjab, four stations—Jalandhar Cantonment, Anandpur Sahib, Sri Muktsar Sahib and SAS Nagar (Mohali)—were among those modernised with upgraded passenger amenities, improved accessibility and designs reflecting the state’s cultural heritage and sporting traditions. The redevelopment of these stations forms part of a broader investment of around ₹1,570 crore under the scheme.

The railway expansion also included the inaugu-

ration of the Daulatpur Chowk-Kartoli rail line, constructed at a cost of about ₹830 crore.

The new line is expected to strengthen rail connectivity between Punjab and Himachal Pradesh while improving access to important religious and tourist destinations in the region. Officials said the project would enhance

passenger movement and facilitate faster transportation of goods.

To further improve rail services, a new Kartoli-Ambala train service was introduced, while the Sant Ravidas Express was flagged off to provide direct connectivity between Amritsar in Punjab and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. The new services are expected

to benefit pilgrims, tourists and regular commuters by offering improved travel options across northern India.

The infrastructure package also included road projects valued at more than ₹3,070 crore. A 30.9-kilometre stretch of the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway was inaugurated, providing faster connectiv-

ity and reducing travel time for passengers and freight movement. The greenfield expressway is expected to strengthen links between major economic centres while improving access to Jammu and Kashmir.

In addition, the foundation stone was laid for the 25.2-kilometre six-lane Southern Ludhiana Bypass, a project designed to ease congestion in Ludhiana and streamline traffic moving towards Delhi, Amritsar and other destinations. The bypass is expected to improve freight efficiency, reduce travel time and support industrial growth in one of Punjab’s largest manufacturing hubs.

The newly launched projects form part of the Centre’s broader infrastructure development programme focused on modernising transport networks, improving regional connectivity and promoting economic activity through enhanced rail and road infrastructure across the country.



Bellingham Addresses Viral On-Field Exchange with Messi

Atlanta: England midfielder Jude Bellingham downplayed what seemed to be a furious discussion with Lionel Messi after his team’s 2-1 loss to Argentina in the FIFA World Cup 2026 quarterfinal in Atlanta on Wednesday (local time), maintaining that “it was nothing bad,” according to FOX Sports. Argentina won a remarkable comeback against England in Atlanta, overcoming a first-half lead with Enzo Fernandez scoring the equalizer before Lautaro Martinez scored the stoppage-time winner to put the reigning champions into a title match against Spain. Messi had a critical part in Argentina’s triumph. Although he did not score, the captain assisted on both of the defending champions’ goals, contributing significantly to their comeback victory. A first-half interaction between Bellingham and Messi drew a lot of attention, as the two players looked to be having an impassioned conversation,



gesticulating with their arms and reacting expressively before walking off. However, after the game, Bellingham stressed that his altercation with Messi was about a foul and that there was nothing serious behind it. Bellingham told FOX Sports, “We were actually discussing a foul. It wasn’t awful. I’m sure everyone will make a big deal about it, but it actually wasn’t that huge. I believed there was a foul before, and he asked, ‘What about the one on me?’ I told him, ‘You’re strong enough to take it.’ You understand?” Bellingham characterized meeting Messi as an honor,

fiercely contested duel, with both sides vying for midfield possession and producing few clear chances. England ultimately broke the deadlock in the 55th minute, with Anthony Gordon finishing Morgan Rogers’ cross to put the Three Lions ahead. After gaining the lead, England retreated defensively, allowing Argentina to apply pressure. The reigning champions rallied impressively, with Jordan Pickford making crucial stops and Alexis MacAllister hitting the post before Argentina equalised.

Enzo Fernandez scored in the 85th minute after receiving an assist from Lionel Messi to tie the game. Argentina completed their comeback in stoppage time with a cross from Messi to Lautaro Martinez, who headed home the winner. Despite England’s late attempts, Argentina advanced to the final. England will now face France in the third-place match, with Argentina facing Spain for the trophy.

Sindhu Advances to Semifinals After Okuhara Pulls Out



Tokyo: PV Sindhu, an Indian star shuttler, advanced to the Japan Open semifinals after withdrawing from her Japanese opponent Nozomi Okuhara in Tokyo on Friday. This was Sindhu’s third semifinal of the season, following the Malaysian Super 1000 and the Australian Super 500. Furthermore, this is her first Super 750 semifinal appearance since the 2023 Denmark Open.

The 31-year-old Indian, looking for her first victory of the season, will play Tokyo Olympic champion and world No. 4 Chinese shuttler Chen Yufei, whom she trails 6-8 in head-to-head records. Sindhu has suffered a loss in the last five meetings with YuFei. A victory in the semifinal would not only end Sindhu’s that losing streak but also secure Sindhu’s first Super 750 final in nearly three years.

The two-time Olympic medallist, who is the only Indian challenger left standing at the of the BWF Super 750 tournament, defeated world No. 5 Han Yue of China 21-16, 21-14 in just 35 minutes to make the final eight. This year, YuFei, 28, won the Indonesia Masters and advanced to the Super 500 finals in Thailand and Malaysia. She also regularly made it to the semifinals of the Super 750s in Singapore and India, as well as the Super 1000s Malaysia Open and All England. Earlier, India’s mixed doubles pair of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto bowed out after losing 20-22, 17-21 to China’s Feng Yan Zhe and Huang Dong Ping in the pre-quarterfinals.

India’s challenge suffered another setback in the women’s singles draw, where Unnati Hooda was beaten by Chinese Taipei’s Huang Yu-Hsun despite taking the second game. India had already lost both of its men’s doubles combinations on Tuesday after Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, along with MR Arjun and Hariharan Amsakarunan, bowed out in the opening round, with the former pair sustaining another injury.

State Rules Out Stampede in Devotee Fatalities During Jagannath Chariot Festival

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha government has verified the deaths of two devotees but refuted allegations of a stampede-like occurrence during the annual Rath Yatra celebration, which began in the sacred seaside town of Puri with lakhs of people from across the state, country, and overseas. According to an official statement issued by the Chief Minister’s Office (CMO), the world-famous Rath Yatra 2026 of Mahaprabhu Shree Jagannath, Mahaprabhu Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra, and Chakraraj Sudarshana was celebrated on Thursday in Puri with great religious zeal, devotion, and exemplary administrative coordination. Despite bad weather, the celebration attracted an estimated 8-9 lakh devotees from Odisha, the country, and overseas, demonstrating their unwavering trust in the deities. All of the religious ceremonies associated with the event, including the hauling of the three chariots, went smoothly and as planned. Govardhan Peethadheeshwar Jagadguru Shankaracharya also approached the

chariots and offered prayers. The state government made thorough and multi-layered plans to ensure the festival’s success,” the CMO said in a statement. The state government also stated that extensive planning was carried out well in advance, involving all stakeholder departments, including Police, Health, Fire Services, Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Transport, Municipal Administration, Public Health Engineering, Energy, and other line departments. Round-the-clock monitoring, the deployment of adequate security personnel, extensive CCTV coverage, public announcement systems, traffic regulation, sanitation measures, drinking water facilities, emergency response teams, and medical infrastructure all contributed to devotees’ safety and convenience during the festival. The Odisha government said that due to the enormous number of devotees and the persistent rains, cases of tiredness, dehydration, suffocation, and mild health-related discomfort



were reported throughout the day. “During the celebration, seven people were ill and were quickly removed by the deployed troops and sent to the hospital. Among them, one male devotee over the age of 60 died, and the specific cause of death is being investigated by the relevant authorities,” the state administration stated. According to the CMO, in a separate and unconnected occurrence, a male devotee over the age of 35 experienced a heart attack and died despite receiving urgent medical attention. Furthermore, several devotees felt ill as a result of the constant rain, and they were treated in hospitals before being discharged. “Overall, the event was quiet, orderly, and well-managed. The authorities stressed that there was no stampede or a systemic

breakdown in crowd management. The government, security agencies, servitors, and volunteers worked together to guarantee that devotees could travel freely. The situation remained normal during the event, with all critical services running well. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi extended his deepest thanks to the servants and praised the lakhs of devotees for their patience, discipline, and collaboration, all of which led to the festival’s peaceful and successful conclusion. The Chief Minister emphasized the state government’s unshakable commitment to ensuring that every devotee has a safe, dignified, and convenient experience during the sacred festival by continuously improving infrastructure, public services, and administration.

PV Sindhu Claims Historic Japan Open Title with Dominant Win Over Yamaguchi

New Delhi: Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu ended a long wait for a major title by winning her maiden Japan Open crown, defeating home favourite and world No. 3 Akane Yamaguchi in straight games in the women's singles final of the BWF Super 750 tournament.

The victory at Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium made Sindhu the first Indian shuttler to win the prestigious Japan Open title and marked her return to the top level after a 19-month title drought. The 31-year-old delivered a composed performance against a strong opponent and a packed home crowd, relying on powerful attacking strokes and effective net play.

Sindhu entered the final with a challenging record against Yamaguchi, having last defeated the Japanese star in a completed match



four years ago at the 2022 Thailand Open. However, the Indian controlled the contest with aggressive shot-making and strong defensive discipline to overcome the three-time world champion.

The opening game remained closely contested, with Yamaguchi taking an early 11-9 advantage by capitalising on Sindhu's errors. The momentum

changed after the interval when Sindhu fought back through a lengthy rally to level the score and then produced a series of attacking winners to move ahead. Despite Yamaguchi's attempt to restore parity late in the game, Sindhu maintained her composure to secure the opening set 21-17.

The Indian continued her dominance in the sec-

ond game, building an early lead through sharp movement and accurate attacking play. Yamaguchi attempted a comeback midway through the contest, reducing the gap, but Sindhu held firm under pressure. She earned championship points before sealing the match 21-17, 21-17 after Yamaguchi's final return went long following a video review.

The Japan Open title represents Sindhu's biggest international achievement since her 2019 BWF World Championships triumph and her first BWF World Tour title since winning the Syed Modi International in December 2024.

The victory followed impressive wins over Olympic champion Chen Yufei and world No. 5 Han Yue earlier in the tournament, strengthening Sindhu's confidence ahead of the upcoming World Championships in New Delhi.

India Batting Icons Etch Names in History with 400th Joint Appearance



Mumbai: Indian cricket legends Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli achieved a historic milestone during the third ODI against England at Lord's, becoming the first Indian pair to play 400 international matches together. The landmark was reached when the two batting greats walked out for the series decider at the iconic venue.

The achievement placed Rohit and Kohli ahead of India's previous record-holding partnership of Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid, who featured together in 391 matches. Globally, the Indian duo ranks among the most experienced partnerships, with Sri Lankan greats Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene leading the list with 550

joint appearances. The milestone reflects an extraordinary journey spanning nearly two decades. Since Rohit's international debut in 2007 and Kohli's arrival in 2008, the pair have played a central role in India's batting success across formats, combining for 48,574 international runs and 135 centuries.

Both players have now moved away from Test cricket and T20 internationals, concentrating on the ODI format as they continue their international careers.

Their partnership has remained one of the defining features of Indian cricket, contributing to victories across major tournaments and bilateral series.

The historic appearance came amid uncertainty surrounding Rohit's future, with speculation growing over whether the match at Lord's could be among his final outings for India. With England captain Harry Brook choosing to bat after winning the toss on a favourable surface, Rohit and Kohli faced the challenge of guiding a reshuffled Indian side, which was without injured fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah, towards a much-awaited ODI win at the historic ground.

England Clinch World Cup Bronze After Saka Hat-Trick in 10-Goal Thriller Against France

New Delhi: England secured third place at the FIFA World Cup after producing a dramatic 6-4 victory over France in one of the most entertaining matches of the tournament. Bukayo Saka starred with a stunning hat-trick, while Jude Bellingham also scored as England ended their campaign with a historic podium finish.

The match at Miami turned into a goal-filled spectacle, with England racing into a commanding 4-0 lead before half-time. Declan Rice opened the scoring early, followed by Ezri Konsa's strike and two goals from Saka, leaving France facing a huge deficit at the break.

France, however, launched a remarkable second-half comeback attempt. Kylian Mbappé led the revival by scoring twice, while Bradley Barcola and Ousmane Dembélé also found the net as France reduced the gap and threatened to complete one of the greatest comebacks in World Cup history.

Saka eventually ended France's hopes by completing his hat-trick from the penalty spot in the closing stages, before Bellingham added England's sixth goal in stoppage



time with his seventh strike of the tournament. The result secured England their best World Cup finish since winning the title in 1966.

The match also produced a historic moment for Mbappé, who moved ahead of Lionel Messi in the all-time World Cup scoring charts. The French captain reached his 22 career World Cup goals and finished the tournament among

the leading scorers, strengthening his place among the competition's greatest performers.

For England, the victory provided a positive conclusion after their semi-final disappointment and highlighted the attacking quality of a squad featuring emerging stars and established leaders. Saka's individual brilliance and Bellingham's continued influence were

among the major positives from the campaign.

The 6-4 scoreline also made the contest one of the highest-scoring World Cup matches in history and the most goal-filled third-place playoff ever, underlining the attacking nature of a game that produced memorable moments for both teams despite their failure to reach the final.

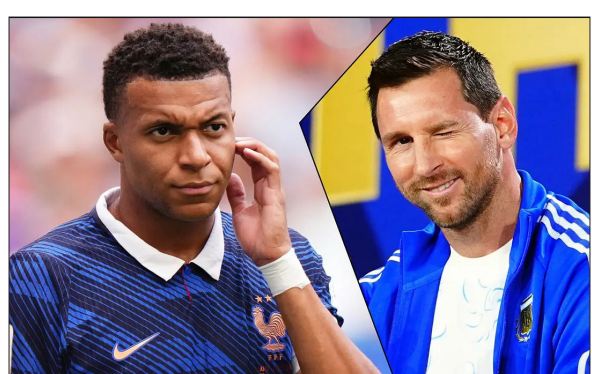
Mbappé Expects Messi to Reclaim World Cup Scoring Record in Final

New York: France captain Kylian Mbappé believes Lionel Messi could soon reclaim the FIFA World Cup's all-time goalscoring record after the Argentine star moved within one goal of his newly achieved milestone.

Mbappé became the highest scorer in World Cup history during France's 6-4 defeat against England in the third-place playoff, scoring twice to take his tournament tally to 22 goals across three editions. The feat moved him past Messi's previous record of 21 goals.

Despite reaching the top of the scoring charts, Mbappé predicted that his record may not remain for long, with Messi set to lead Argentina against Spain in the World Cup final. The French forward said he expects the Argentine captain to find the net, given his consistent record in major matches.

The 27-year-old's brace against England also



strengthened his bid for the Golden Boot, taking his tally in the 2026 tournament to 10 goals in eight matches. Messi entered the final with eight goals and four assists, keeping the race for the individual award open.

The latest milestone came during a historic World Cup scoring battle that saw both Mbappé and Messi surpass Germany legend Miroslav Klose's long-standing record of 16 goals. The pair have emerged as the leading figures in the tournament's modern goalscoring history.

However, Mbappé admitted that the personal

achievement offered limited satisfaction after France failed to reach the final. The defeat against England ended their campaign without a title, despite the forward's outstanding individual performance.

With France preparing for a new era under incoming coach Zinedine Zidane, Mbappé will now watch the final from outside the competition. A goal for Messi against Spain could see the Argentine icon draw level with or overtake Mbappé, continuing one of the most memorable individual battles in World Cup history.

Indian Pace Prospects Join Australian Test Squad for Elite Training Programme



New Delhi: Two emerging Indian fast bowlers, Abhishek Moond and Vasudevan Prasad Singh, have received a major career boost after being selected for a high-performance training programme with the Australian men's Test squad in Brisbane. The young pacers are part of a four-member delegation from the MRF Pace Foundation participating in a two-week exchange programme at Cricket Australia's National Cricket Centre from July 13 to 24.

The visiting group also includes former India fast bowler Tinu Yohannan and MRF Pace Foundation Pro-

gram Manager and Head Coach M. Senthilnathan. During the camp, Moond and Singh will take part in specialised training sessions at Allan Border Field, gaining exposure to the preparation methods, fitness routines and tactical approaches followed by elite international cricketers.

The programme is part of a long-standing partnership between the MRF Pace Foundation and Cricket Australia that began in 1992.

The collaboration was initially developed with the involvement of Australian fast-bowling great Dennis Lillee, who played a key

role in shaping the Chennai-based academy after its establishment in 1987.

Over the past three decades, the exchange initiative has expanded beyond fast bowling to include players from different disciplines, including batters, spinners and wicketkeepers. The programme has contributed to the development of several leading cricketers from both countries, with Indian pacers such as Javagal Srinath and Zaheer Khan benefiting from the foundation's training structure, while Australian greats including Glenn McGrath, Brett Lee and Mitchell Johnson also gained from similar development pathways.

The partnership will continue with Cricket Australia's development squad scheduled to visit Chennai from August 1. The Australian group will undergo a two-week training programme at the MRF facility, where players will experience subcontinental conditions and prepare for the challenges posed by spin-friendly pitches.

Cricket World Pays Tribute to Sir Garfield Sobers at Lord's After Legendary All-Rounder's Passing

Mumbai: The cricketing world came together at Lord's to honour West Indies great Sir Garfield Sobers, with players from India and England, along with match officials, wearing black armbands and observing a minute's silence before the third and final ODI between the two teams.

The tribute was held in memory of Sobers, who passed away on Friday at the age of 89. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) confirmed that the Indian team joined the gesture to recognise the extraordinary contribution of one of the greatest figures in the history of the sport.

The packed stands at the Home of Cricket also participated in the solemn moment, paying respect to the Barbados-born legend whose influence extended far beyond his remarkable playing career. The tribute reflected the widespread admiration for Sobers among players, fans and cricketing institutions across generations.

Widely regarded as the greatest all-rounder the game has produced, Sobers represented the West Indies from 1954 to 1974 and established numerous benchmarks during his illustrious career. In 93 Test matches, he scored 8,032 runs at an impressive average of 57.78 and



claimed 235 wickets, showcasing his exceptional ability as a batter, bowler and fielder.

Beyond his international achievements, Sobers also created one of cricket's most memorable records by becoming the first batter to hit six sixes in a single over in first-class cricket. The historic feat came while he was playing for Nottinghamshire against Glamorgan in 1968, further cementing his place among the sport's most iconic personalities.

His passing prompted emotional reactions from the cricket fraternity, particularly from members of the England squad. Barbados-born fast bowler Jofra Archer expressed his sadness over the loss of a national sporting hero and recalled meeting Sobers shortly before his death.

England all-rounder Jacob Bethell also paid tribute to Sobers, describing him as an inspirational figure whose generosity had a personal impact on his career. Bethell

revealed that Sobers had written a reference letter that helped him move to England and pursue professional cricket opportunities.

The tribute at Lord's served as a reminder of Sobers' enduring legacy and the respect he continues to command across the cricketing world.

Decades after his retirement, his achievements remain a benchmark for all-round excellence, inspiring generations of players across the globe.