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ED raids Bhupesh Baghel



Gathering during raids by the ED on premises linked to Chaitanya Baghel in connection with an alleged liquor scam in Bhilai on Monday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Raipur

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday raided the premises of former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister and Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel as part of a money laundering investigation against his son in the alleged liquor scam case, official said.

The raid is part of an investigation into an alleged liquor scam in Bhilai. Chaitanya Baghel's son Chaitanya Baghel (Durg district), an alleged close associate of Chaitanya Baghel, Laxmi Narayan Bansal alias Pappu Bansal and some others are also being searched under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the sources said.

Chhattisgarh was ruled by a Congress government-led by CM Baghel. Assets worth about ₹205 Crore of various accused have been attached by the agency as part of this investigation till now. The Supreme Court in 2024 had quashed ED's first ECIR (FIR) in this case that was based on an Income Tax Department complaint. The federal agency later filed a fresh case after it asked the Chhattisgarh EOW/ACB to file a fresh FIR against the accused on the basis of material shared by the anti-money laundering agency.

Newlywed couple found dead after wedding ceremony in UP

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

What was meant to be the beginning of a lifetime together ended in unimaginable tragedy. A newlywed couple was found dead in their room barely hours after their wedding, shrouding the family in grief instead of celebration. The groom was discovered hanging, while the bride lay lifeless on the bed, raising suspicions of murder and suicide.

The bride and groom were found dead in their room. Police sources indicated that the presence of broken bangles and signs of struggle suggested foul play. SPP Rajkaran Nayyar stated, "The room was locked from the inside, ruling out forced entry. We have sent the bodies for post-mortem, and forensic findings will help determine the exact cause of death."

Yogi govt to revise land circle rates in many districts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Yogi government, striving to make Uttar Pradesh a leading state, is set to revise land circle rates in multiple districts, including Lucknow. Prioritising areas where rates have remained unchanged for years, the process has already been completed in 37 districts since January 1, 2024, with ongoing and upcoming revisions in others.

Indian-origin drug lord Shawn Bhinder arrested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Police on Monday said it has arrested an Indian-origin transnational drug lord, wanted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in connection with one of the largest narcotics seizures in the US, in Ludhiana.

Shahnaz Singh, also known as Shawn Bhinder, had been operating under the guise of a transportation business in Canada since 2014 and allegedly facilitated the movement of drugs from Colombia to the US and Canada via Mexico, the police said. After a crackdown by the FBI, Bhinder, a native of village Mandiala in Batala who had been residing in Brampton in Canada, managed to give a slip to the FBI sleuths and clandestinely landed in India.



Punjab Police take away Shahnaz Singh alias Shawn Bhinder, a trans-national drug lord wanted by the FBI-USA after his arrest in Tarn Taran on Monday

The six arrested by the FBI were identified as Amritpal Singh alias Amrit alias Bal, Amritpal Singh alias Cheema, Taqdeer Singh alias Romi, Sarabjit Singh Saabi, Fernando Valladares alias Franco and Gurlal Singh. The arrest came amid Punjab government's ongoing "Yudh Nashian Virudh" (war against drugs) campaign, launched on February 25.

Karnataka gangrape 'very unfortunate', says HK Patil

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bengaluru

Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil on Monday called the recent rape of an Israeli woman and a home stay operator near Hampi "very unfortunate" and assured that the State Government is seriously considering ways to strengthen the security for tourists so that such incidents don't recur.

Patil said he will request Home Minister G Parameshwara to convene a meeting of very senior officers to discuss the same. Speaking to reporters here, the Minister said, "It is very unfortunate that such a crime is committed in Hampi and around. In fact, government has taken all serious measures to summon the people who are involved, and we are trying our best to give courage to the victims. In fact, the government is seriously thinking of how to strengthen the security for tourists."

Clashes in Madhya Pradesh, 13 arrested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ MHOW/INDORE

Thirteen persons have been arrested in connection with clashes in Madhya Pradesh's Mhow town after stone pelting at a rally celebrating the Indian cricket team's victory in the ICC Champions Trophy final, officials said on Monday.



Police personnel try to douse a fire after clashes that broke out during a rally celebrating the Indian team's victory in the Champions Trophy final in Mhow in Madhya Pradesh on Sunday

Four persons suffered injuries in the incident which took place late on Sunday night, Indore Collector Ashish Singh told reporters. According to police, there were five incidents of violence in different areas of the town, located in Indore district, and three cars and several two-wheelers were attacked and set afire.

restored in the area at present. Nobody will be spared and stringent action will be taken against those responsible for it (violence), he said. The collector also appealed to the people not to spread rumours/messages on social media and warned of action against those indulging in such acts.

who all are responsible for it, the official said. Meanwhile, Mhow police station in-charge Rahul Sharma said three cars and a dozen two-wheelers were attacked and set ablaze. The police were investigating all five incidents in Taal Mohalla, Sewa Marg, Patti Bazar, Manek Chowk and Jama Masjid areas, he said.

BJP MLA close to Adhikari joins TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In what is being viewed as a counter-move by the Trinamool Congress against Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari's efforts to strengthen saffron organisation in the backyard of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at Bhawanipore in South Kolkata, the TMC again on Monday drew BJP blood getting yet another saffron MLA to join its ranks. Saffron MLA from Haldia Tapasi Mondal along with a senior party leader Shyamal Maity joined the TMC in presence of State Minister Arup Biswas bringing down the number of BJP legislators in the State to about 65 (down from 77 in 2021).

within the party forum but we were ignored," Mondal said adding "on the other hand I felt that I should be a part of Mamata Banerjee's developmental works in the State ... so I decided to switch over to the TMC." Incidentally Mondal won the Haldia seat on CPI(M) ticket in 2016 in but changed sides and joined the BJP before the 2021 Assembly elections when Adhikari himself left the Trinamool Congress to join the saffron outfit. Shyamal Maity another influential BJP leader from the district too joined the TMC alleging, "The BJP-led by Suwendu Adhikari is trying engineer riots in Bengal ... they are trying to break the traditional unity in diversity here."

from Adhikari's own backyard is considered a countermove of the Chief Minister to restrain and confine him within East Midnapore at least for the time being, experts said. Meanwhile, in a parallel development the BJP MLAs staged a walkout from the State Assembly after two of its legislators were forced out by the marshals at the order of Speaker Biman Bandyopadhyay with whom the saffron legislators allegedly entered into a verbal spat.











# SEBI tightens norms for SME IPOs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Markets regulator SEBI has notified a stricter regulatory framework for small and medium enterprise (SME) IPOs by introducing a profitability requirement and capping a 20 per cent limit on offer-for-sale (OFS).

The reforms aim to provide SMEs with a sound track record an opportunity to raise funds from the public while protecting investor interests.

This move follows a rise in SME issues, which has driven significant investor participation.

With regard to profitability criteria, SEBI said SMEs planning to launch an IPO are required to have a minimum operating profits (earnings before interest, depreciation and tax or EBITDA) of Rs 1 crore for at least two out of the three previous financial years.

Also, the OFS component by selling shareholders in SME IPOs has been capped at 20 per cent of the total issue size. Additionally, selling shareholders will not be allowed to offload more than 50 per cent of their existing holdings, SEBI said

in a notification dated March 4. Further, promoters' shareholding over the Minimum Promoter Contribution (MPC) would be subject to a phased lock-in period. Half of the excess holding would be released after one year, while the remaining 50 per cent would be unlocked after two years.

The allocation methodology for non-institutional investors (NIIs) in SME IPOs would be aligned with the approach followed in main-board IPOs to ensure uniformity.

"Further SEBI has increased the minimum application size for SME IPO to two lots making entry stricter to avoid unnecessary speculation in SME IPO. This would help protect the interest of gullible investors who generally invest looking at the escalating share price," Makarand M Joshi, founder and Partner of corporate compliance firm MMJC and Associates, said. The amount allocated for general corporate purpose (GCP) in SME IPOs has been capped at 15 per cent of the total issue size or Rs 10 crore, whichever is lower.

SME issues will not be permitted to use IPO proceeds to repay loans taken from

promoters, promoter groups, or related parties, whether directly or indirectly.

"Objects of the issue should not consist of repayment of loan taken from the promoter, promoter group or any related party, from the issue proceeds, directly or indirectly," SEBI said

The Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) for SME IPOs must be made available for public comments for 21 days. Issuers will be required to publish announcements in newspapers and include a QR code for easy access to the DRHP.

Joshi said DRHP pertaining to IPO on the SME segment, which was till now cleared by the stock exchange, would now be available for public comment on the SME exchange, website of the issuer and merchant banker to the issue. The public would be made aware by way of a public advertisement that SME IPO DRHP is available for public comment.

This would allow the public at large to submit comments or raise complaints on draft red herring prospectus of companies going for IPO on small and medium enterprises segment, he added.

SME companies would be allowed to

raise funds through further issues without migrating to the main board, provided they comply with the SEBI (LODR) rules applicable to main Board-listed entities.

"Where the post-issue paid-up capital pursuant to further issue of capital, including by way of rights issue, preferential issue, bonus issue, is likely to increase beyond ₹25 crore, the issuer may undertake further issuance of capital without migration from SME exchange to the main board, subject to the issuer undertaking to comply with the provisions of LODR Regulations, 2015, as applicable to companies listed on the main board of the stock exchange(s)," the regulator said. SME-listed entities will have to comply with related party transaction (RPT) norms applicable to the main board-listed companies.

To give this effect, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has notified ICDR (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirement) Rules.

Driven by the strong performance of India's equity markets, the number of public issues by SMEs has significantly increased over the past two years.

# Goyal to discuss trade issues with export councils

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will on Thursday hold discussions with export promotion councils on trade issues amid the threat of imposition of reciprocal tariffs by the US, an industry official said

In the meeting, exporters are expected to raise issues pertaining to the proposed bilateral trade agreement between India and the US, the official added.

The meeting assumes significance as the minister has recently returned from Washington after holding trade talks with his US counterparts.

An industry official said the exporting community is concerned about the threat of the US to impose reciprocal tariffs as it could impact India's exports to America, which is its largest trading partner. However, they added that if the US would give duty concessions under the proposed trade agreement to India, sectors like textiles, handicrafts, leather, and gems and jewellery would get a boost.

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has said that India should open

its agri sector also.

India has by and large protected the agri sector in all the free trade agreements as the segment involves the protection of the interest of millions of domestic farmers, who are engaged in sustenance farming. Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal on Monday told a Parliamentary panel that negotiations are still on and no agreement on trade tariffs has been reached so far between India and the US.

The Commerce Secretary briefed the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs on US President Donald Trump's recent claims that India has agreed to reduce its tariffs "way down" while Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri briefed the committee on China and Europe.

India has not committed to anything on trade tariffs to the US, he told the panel.

Last week, US President Donald Trump said India has agreed to cut its tariffs "way down" as he reiterated his claim that the country charges America massive tariffs that make it difficult to sell products there.

# Rupee sinks 36 paise against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The rupee depreciated by 36 paise to close at a week's low 87.31 against the US dollar on Monday due to volatile crude oil prices amid tariff uncertainties worldwide and unabated outflow of foreign funds.

A weaker American currency failed to support the local unit as a sell-off in the domestic equity market hit the sentiment adversely, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 87.24 and touched the day's low of 87.36 amid intense volatility. The unit touched an intraday high of 87.16 before ending the session at 87.31 against the greenback, registering a loss of 36 paise from its previous closing level.

Earlier, the domestic currency had recorded a steep single-day loss of 47 paise against the dollar on February 25.

On Friday, the rupee appreciated 17 paise to close at 86.95 against the US dol-



lars. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.15 per cent at 103.65.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.28 per cent to \$70.56 per barrel in futures trade. Domestic equity markets closed lower with the 30-share BSE Sensex falling by 217.41 points, or 0.29 per cent, to 74,115.17, and the Nifty losing 92.20 points, or 0.41 per cent, to close at 22,460.30. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 485.41 crore on a net basis on Monday, according to exchange data.

The latest RBI data released on Friday showed the country's forex reserves dropped by \$1.781 billion to \$ 638.698 billion in the week ended February 28. The overall forex kitty had jumped by \$ 4.758 billion to \$ 640.479 billion in the previous reporting week.

On the global macroeconomic froth, the US Labour Department data on Friday showed increased hiring activity in February though the unemployment rate rose slightly to 4.1 per cent. Economists say the outlook remains cloudy with President Donald threatening a trade war and purging the federal workforce.

# Gold falls ₹150 to ₹88,750

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Falling for the third day in a row, gold prices retreated by ₹150 to ₹88,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid a weak trend in the overseas markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled lower at ₹88,900 per 10 grams on Friday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped by ₹150 to ₹88,350 per 10 grams from the previous close of ₹88,500 per 10 grams.

Silver prices also declined by ₹250 to ₹99,250 per kg, snapping the four-day winning run.

Comex gold futures for April delivery fell 0.32 per cent to \$ 2,904.80 per ounce in the international markets. Meanwhile, spot gold also fell 0.13 per cent to \$2,905.31 per ounce.

"Gold and silver saw profit-taking from recent highs due to a rebound in US bond yields. The US administration's decision to delay Mexico tariffs by a month added to the cautious sentiment. However, a weakening dollar, which fell to a five-month low and recorded its worst weekly decline since November 2022, provided tailwinds for gold and silver," Rahul Kalantri, VP Commodities, Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Silver futures for May delivery traded lower at \$ 32.80 per ounce.

# Real money gaming industry bodies issue code of ethics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Industry bodies representing online real money gaming companies, AIGF, EGF and FIFS, have jointly signed a "code of ethics" which their member companies will adopt for promoting user safety and responsible gaming practices, including KYC verification, spending limit etc, a joint statement said on Monday. The members of these gaming industry bodies include Dream11, My11Circle, Khelo Fantasy Live, SG11 Fantasy, WinZO, Games24X7, Jungle Games etc. "The All India Gaming Federation (AIGF), the Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports (FIFS), and the E-Gaming Federation (EGF), today jointly signed a 'Code of Ethics' (CoE)

"The CoE is aimed at enforcing consistent standards of user safety across the industry through the implementation of responsible gaming and advertising policies and mandates annual third-party audits and comprehensive reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency," the statement said.

The statement claimed that CoE has been created based on global best practices and lays down a strong framework for responsible gaming, such as age-gating, adopting stringent KYC and enabling user-set spending limits and self-exclusion. "It will apply to all online gaming

operators who are members of the federations and offer skill-based real-money gaming services in India and safeguard the interests of over 50 crore Indian gamers," the statement said.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT are yet to execute online gaming rules that were released in April 2023.

Tamil Nadu has earlier banned Real Money Games (RMG) but in February issued stringent rules to regulate these platforms, including a ban on minors from playing on these platforms, spending limit, blank hours from 12 am midnight to 5 am when no login in the games should be allowed.

The CoE signed by the gaming industry bodies includes age gating, no operations in restricted states, and a robust KYC mechanism, safeguarding data, appropriate management of player funds, ensuring integrity and fairness in gameplay. "Through collaboration with other industry federations, we are setting new benchmarks for ethical gaming, strengthening the credibility of India's online gaming sector, and building a sustainable, globally competitive ecosystem." All India Gaming Federation (AIGF) CEO Roland Landers said.

E-Gaming Federation (EGF) CEO Anuraag Saxena said that national interest, consumer interest, and the industry's interest have all suffered too long.

# RBI to push payment innovations, says Governor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Reserve Bank will continue to promote innovations in payment systems with soft touch regulations within regulatory guardrails and expand the reach of UPI for more efficient cross-border payments, Governor Sanjay Malhotra said on Monday.

In his address at the Inauguration of Digital Payments Awareness Week 2025 here, the governor said apart from the RBI, the government and other important stakeholders like banks and payment system operators have also taken a number of initiatives to encourage the adoption of digital payments.

"While these efforts have produced results, as visible in the huge growth of digital payments, there is still a lot more to be done. Going forward, we will work on three broad areas," he said.

The areas are soft-touch regulations to continue promoting innovation, promote awareness generation, and more efficient cross-border payments.

"We will continue to encourage innovation while promoting safety and security through soft touch regulations," the RBI chief said and added that the central bank has adopted a soft-touch approach to regulating the payments ecosystem and fin-techs.

With these regulations, he said the RBI attempts to balance these divergent sets of expectations. "Our approach has been to put in place regulatory guardrails within which all stakeholders are free to operate."

While mentioning that initiatives to encourage the adoption of digital payments have produced results, Malhotra said there is still a lot more to be done.

On cross-border payments, the governor said while in domestic payments, the success of UPI has propelled India to a leadership position with a share of 48.5 per cent in global real-time payments by volume, "we will endeavour to make cross-border payments more efficient."

As per a World Bank report, it has been estimated that in 2024, India received remittances totalling approximately USD 130 billion.

"We need to address the challenges of high cost, slow speed, and insufficient access and transparency in cross border payments... We will continue to expand the reach of UPI bilaterally by linking UPI with fast payment systems of other countries," Malhotra said.

The RBI will also explore the possibility of linking payment systems other than UPI to facilitate efficient cross-border payments. "We will continue our engagement in a multilateral project called Project

Nexus to enable instant cross-border retail payments," he added.

Malhotra further said though much progress has been made in the development, spread and adoption of digital payments, there is a lot of scope to further deepen and expand digital payments in the country.

In January 2025, more than 20 billion payments worth almost Rs 250 trillion were made in India through digital modes. Digital payments have become the preferred mode of payment for many of us.

"However, surveys have shown that nearly 40 per cent of our adult population still do not use digital payments. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of awareness or familiarity with using digital payments," he said.

The 5th Digital Payments Awareness Week (DPAW) is being observed from March 10 to 16.

DPAW is an initiative to highlight the impact and importance of digital payments and to create awareness about the safe usage of digital payment products.

Under the mission 'Har Payment Digital', the theme for the current year is 'India Pays Digitally'.

This theme reflects India's transformative journey toward a digitally empowered citizenry, with the ubiquity and convenience of digital payments, the RBI said.

# Energy conclave Gridcon 2025 to discuss issues in power sector



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a significant step towards strengthening India's Power Grid and fostering innovations in renewable energy integration, Union Minister of Power and Housing and Urban Affairs, Manohar Lal, inaugurated GRIDCON 2025 — The International Conference cum Exhibition on March 9, 2025.

The grand event was held at IICC, Yashobhooni, Dwarka, New Delhi in the presence of Union Minister of State for Power and New and Renewable Energy, Shripad Yesso Naik.

GRIDCON 2025 is organised by the Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), from March 9 to March 11, 2025, under the patronage of the Ministry of Power and in association with CIGRE India. The inaugural event was graced by prominent power sector professionals from across the world. It was attended by RK Tyagi, Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) of POWERGRID, along with Directors and senior

officials from the Ministry of Power, POWERGRID, and other public sector undertakings (PSUs) in the energy sector.

Over 2,000 conference delegates, 150 technical papers, 150 exhibition companies, and representatives from 30 countries, making GRIDCON 2025 a truly international event. Industry leaders, researchers, academicians, and global experts in power transmission, distribution, and smart energy solutions related matters were presented in the conclave. The central theme of GRIDCON 2025 is "Innovations in Grid Resilience", focusing on cutting-edge technologies, infrastructure advancements, and smart solutions that will revolutionise: Renewable Energy Integration, Grid Resilience and Stability, Smart Asset Management, Digital Transformation in the Power Sector.

The event aims to create a collaborative platform where industry experts, policymakers, and researchers can exchange ideas, showcase innovations, and discuss best practices for shaping the future of the power grid.

# Domestic commercial vehicle volumes to grow 3-5 per cent: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Domestic commercial vehicle industry's wholesale volumes are expected to grow 3-5 per cent year-on-year in FY26, rating firm Ica said on Monday. This follows a flat volume movement estimated in FY25, marred by the demand slowdown in the first half of the fiscal due to the general elections, it said in a statement.

"Resumption of construction and infrastructure activities, steady rural demand along with higher replacement sales stemming out of ageing fleets and government mandates are the likely driving factors to propel the said volume expansion towards the end of FY2025 and through FY2026," Ica Senior Vice President and Co-Group Head Kinjal Shah said. The sustained push in infrastructure development, a steady increase in mining activities and the improvement in roads/highway connectivity are expected to support volumes going forward, she added. The replacement demand would also remain healthy, primarily due to the ageing fleet, estimated at 10 years for the medium and heavy commercial vehicles (M&HCVs), and is expected to aid the industry volume expansion in the medium term, Shah stated.

Among the various sub-segments, the M&HCV (trucks) wholesale volumes are likely to grow by 0-3 per cent year-on-year in FY26 after seeing a flatish growth or marginal contraction in FY25, Ica said. Wholesale volumes for the domestic light commercial vehicles (LCV trucks) are expected to see a modest 3-5 per cent YoY expansion in FY26.

# Government seeks Parliament nod to spend ₹51,463 Crore extra in FY25

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government on Monday sought Parliament nod to spend a net additional ₹51,462.86 crore in the current financial year ending March, with a large chunk going towards pension and subsidy fertiliser.

The gross additional spending sought by the government is over ₹6.78 lakh crore, of which ₹6.27 lakh crore would be matched by savings and receipts. The net additional spending by the government would be ₹51,462.86 crore in the current fiscal, as per the second batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha.

The additional expenditure includes ₹14,100 crore to the department of fertilisers, including subsidies for urea and P&K fertiliser. An additional allocation of ₹13,449 crore has been provided for the pension of government employees, including ₹7,000 crore towards the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS).

The total spending also includes a defence pension of ₹8,476 crore and ₹5,322 crore to the Department of Telecommunications.

An additional ₹2,186 crore funds have been allocated to the agriculture department and ₹3,722 crore to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir for meeting additional expenditure to meet the resource gap.

## IN BRIEF

### VIT-AP UNIVERSITY'S GRAND CONCLUSION OF VITOPIA 2025 ANNUAL SPORTS AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Amaravati: The VITOPIA 2025 Annual Sports and Cultural Festival concluded successfully on March 9, 2025. On this occasion, the University Chancellor, Dr G Viswanathan, emphasised the importance of promoting sports and cultural activities along with academics and expressed the university's support for these initiatives.



### GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY WON 1ST RUNNERS UP TROPHY AT NATIONAL YOUTH FESTIVAL



Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University won the first runners-up trophy of 38th Inter University National Youth Festival 2024-25, held at Amity University, Noida in Uttar Pradesh. This prestigious event, organised under the banner of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), witnessed participation from over 2500 students across 148 universities in India, showcasing exceptional talent in various cultural disciplines.

### ADMISSION TO GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY ONLINE COURSES TILL MARCH 31

Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University has extended the last date for admission to University Grants Commission — Distance Education Bureau (UGC-DEB) entitled online programs for the current academic session (Jan-March 2025) until 31st March 2025, as per the latest UGC-DEB notification.



### VICE-CHANCELLOR PROF (DR) KARAMJEET SINGH ESTABLISHED THE ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY ON GNDU



Amritsar: Under the visionary leadership of Prof (Dr) Karamjeet Singh, VC, Guru Nanak Dev University, the university is proud to establish the Animal Welfare Society on campus. This initiative reflects GNDU's commitment to fostering a compassionate and responsible approach to animal welfare while promoting a holistic learning environment.

# Indian shuttlers to face challenge at All England Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Birmingham

Grappling with injuries, health setbacks and poor form, Indian shuttlers will face one of their toughest challenges when they aim to capture the elusive All England Championships beginning here on Tuesday.

Since Prakash Padukone's historic win in 1980 and Pullela Gopichand's triumph in 2001, no Indian has managed to capture the coveted All England title — one of the sport's most prestigious crowns after the Olympics and World Championships.

In the past two decades, Indian badminton has soared to new heights, with stars like PV Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, and Kidambi Srikanth claiming major titles. However, none have been able to conquer the All England Championships, despite their numerous successes on the world stage. Saina and Lakshya Sen came close in 2015 and 2022, finishing as runners-up, while Treena Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand reached the semifinals in consecutive editions. Every year, the Indian contingent sets its sights on this historic title, and yet, the elusive crown continues to slip through their grasp. This year, the challenge will be even greater as India's top shuttlers arrive in Birmingham with a host of difficulties, including injury concerns and inconsistent



form. After a disappointing Paris Olympics, the Indian shuttlers struggled to get off the mark in 2025. Sindhu faced injury woes, HS Prannoy made a slow recovery from a bout of chikungunya, Lakshya Sen has battled poor form, and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy is coping with the loss of his father who died last month. Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist, is back after recovering from a hamstring injury that forced her withdrawal from last month's Asia Mixed Team Championships. The 29-year-old, who hired Indonesian

coach Irwansyah Adi Pratama in January, will face Korea's Ga Eun Kim in the opening round. A potential second-round clash against China's Han Yue awaits, with Indonesia's Gregoria Mariska Tunjung likely to challenge her in the quarterfinals. Lakshya, who was fourth at the Paris Olympics, enjoyed a semifinal run in the previous edition of the All England but has struggled in the new season with two first-round exits and a second-round finish. The 23-year-old, who claimed bronze at the 2021 World Championships, will open

his campaign against Japan's Koki Watanabe. A victory could set up a showdown with Indonesia's Jonatan Christie in the second round.

Prannoy, who has slipped to World No. 30 after a tough year, is yet to progress beyond the second round in 2025. The 32-year-old, who was hampered by chikungunya ahead of the Paris Olympics, will open his campaign against France's Toma Junior Popov.

In men's doubles, Asian Games champions Satwiksairaj and Chirag Shetty, who are seeded 7th, have been India's most consistent performers, with strong showings at Malaysia and India Opens this year. The Indian duo will open against Denmark's Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard.

In women's doubles, World No. 9 Treena Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand will meet Chinese Taipei's Shuo Yun Sung and Chien Hui Yu, while Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto will face another Taipei pair — Pei Shan Hsieh and En-Tzu Hung. Among other competitors, Malvika Bansod will take on Jia Min Yeo of Singapore.

In mixed doubles, India will be represented by three pairs — Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde, Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha, and Sathish Karunakaran with Aadya Variyath.

# Lyon 2-0 win at Nice



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Coach Paulo Fonseca watched from the stands and saw his substitutions pay off as Lyon won 2-0 at Nice to maintain its push for a Champions League spot.

Fonseca began his nine-month touchline ban in Ligue 1 after aggressively confronting referee Benoit Millot last Sunday. He saw his team struggle in the first half as Nice striker Gaëtan Laborde hit the post in the driving rain.

On Sunday, Lyon punished Nice when midfielder Rayan Cherki scored one minute after coming on. He latched onto a pass from Brazilian midfielder Thiago Almada and finished confidently in the 78th minute.

The 21-year-old Cherki has been linked with a move to a big club since breaking onto the scene as a precocious teenager five years ago, and this was his career-high sixth league goal.

The lively Almada then found Ghana forward Ernest Nuamah with a first-time pass and Nuamah — who came on midway through the second half — expertly curled the ball into the top left corner in the 83rd.

Sixth-placed Lyon is two points behind Lille in fifth and Monaco in fourth. Third-placed Nice is only four points ahead of Lyon with the top four earning a Champions League spot.

Rosenior's first season in charge of Strasbourg is still going along nicely as the Alsace-based club won 1-0 at Nantes to strengthen its grip on seventh place. The 40-year-old Englishman, whose father enjoyed a career as a bustling striker in the 1980s, played in the Premier League for Fulham, Reading and Hull as a defender. Rosenior's coaching

career started three years ago with a brief stint at English club Derby and he then took charge of Hull. He was among the nominees last season for manager of the year in the second-tier Championship.

Rosenior has turned Strasbourg into a well-organised team which has a strong defense and is dangerous counter-attacking down the flanks.

Strasbourg's goal came in the 79th when Félix Lemaréchal turned in a cross from tricky right winger Dilane Bakwa.

Other results At the bottom, strugglers Le Havre and Saint-Etienne drew 1-1 to stay deep in relegation trouble.

Lucas Stassin opened the scoring in the 10th following a scramble and Abdoulaye Touré equalised for Le Havre in first-half stoppage time.

Midtable Brest won 2-0 at home to Angers. Forward Abdallah Sima headed home from a corner against his former club, but left the field close to halftime with an adductor muscle injury. He was replaced by Romain Faivre, who scored the second goal.

Auxerre's goals came in the first half from Canada forward Theo Bair and Hamed Traoré with his 10th of the season. All players in this weekend's games have "WO=MAN" written on the back of their jerseys instead of their names as part of the French league's initiative centered around International Women's Day. Runaway leader PSG won 4-1 at Rennes on Saturday and is 16 points clear of Marseille, which conceded a stoppage-time goal in a 1-0 home loss to Lens on Saturday.

# Hockey India announces record prize pool of ₹12 Crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Hockey India has announced a record prize pool of Rs 12 crore for its seventh Annual Awards for which 32 players have been nominated across eight categories.

The event is scheduled to be held on Saturday here, to celebrate the finest performances of the 2024 season.

One of the key highlights is the coveted Balbir Singh Sr Award for Player of the Year, which will honour the best male and female players.

Young players have also been given the spotlight, with Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Men) and the Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women).

In addition, individual excellence across various positions will be recognised

through awards such as Baljit Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year, Pargat Singh Award for Defender of the Year, Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year, and Dhanraj Pillay Award for Forward of the Year.

This year's awards will commemorate the 50th anniversary of Indian men's team's historic World Cup victory on the same date in 1975 — the country's first and only world title to date.

Adding to the significance, 2025 marks 100 years of Indian hockey, as the country became affiliated with the International Hockey Federation (FIH) on November 7, 1925. India's Olympic bronze medal-winning team will be felicitated, along with the men and women teams that won the Asian Champions Trophy last year.

The Junior Asia Cup-winning men and women teams will also be honoured dur-

ing the award ceremony.

"The Hockey India 7th Annual Awards 2024 is a celebration of the extraordinary talent we have in Indian hockey. It's not just about recognising individual achievements but honouring the collective spirit of Indian hockey that has shone through in 2024," HI president Dilip Tirkey said in a statement.

Nominees for Hockey India Annual Awards 2024 are:

Hockey India Baljit Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year 2024: Bichu Devi Kharibam, Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh, Savita.

Hockey India Pargat Singh Award for Defender of the Year 2024: Sanjay, Amit Rohidas, Harmanpreet Singh, Udita.

Hockey India Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year 2024: Jarmanpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Nilakanta Sharma,

Sumit. Hockey India Dhanraj Pillay Award for Forward of the Year 2024: Lalremiami, Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Navneet Kaur.

Hockey India Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women - Under 21): Beauty Dungdung, Deepika, Vaishnavi Vithal Phalke, Sunelita Toppo.

Hockey India Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Men - Under 21): Arshdeep Singh, Amir Ali, Shardanand Tiwari, Arajjeet Singh Hundal.

Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr Award for Player of the Year (Women): Savita Punia, Salima Tete, Sangita Kumari, Navneet Kaur.

Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr Award for Player of the Year (Men): Abhishek, Hardik Singh, Harmanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh.

# Mumbai City eye ISL play-offs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Mumbai City FC will need a point against Bengaluru FC to qualify for the Indian Super League (ISL) play-offs when the two sides face each other here on Tuesday.

Placed seventh with 33 points, Mumbai City need just a draw to edge past the sixth-positioned Odisha FC (33 points) and finish on top-six.

The Islanders, however, are winless in their previous four games, drawing and losing twice each.

The Blues have already made the cut for the top-six, and are presently fourth in the standings with 38 points from 23 games.

The Blues have faced losses in three of their last four encounters against the Islanders, failing to find the back of the net thrice on the bounce, which are arguably unwanted records they will want to set clear before the playoffs begin.

Talismanic Sunil Chhetri, who has decided to come out of international retirement to help the national team qualify for the 2027 Asian Cup, has converted four spot-kick this season, and if he scores against Mumbai City FC, he will become the first player to reach 10 goals



against the Islanders in the ISL.

The two sides have played 17 matches so far, with Bengaluru FC winning six games and Mumbai City FC emerging victorious nine times. Two games have produced draws.

Bengaluru FC head coach Gerard Zaragoza said that the Islanders will present a tough challenge in the coming game.

"Mumbai City FC will play this match like one final. It's difficult to play against teams like this, but we want to win this game," he said.

Mumbai City FC head coach Petr Kratky too acknowledged the strength of Bengaluru FC.

"Bengaluru FC are a good side. They have quality in them and there is a reason why they are in the playoffs," he said.

# Commonwealth Games Federation renamed to Commonwealth Sport

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) on Monday changed its name to Commonwealth Sport, saying it was a transition from being a governing body to becoming a "movement". The decision to change its name was announced on the occasion of Commonwealth Day — March 10.

"From Commonwealth Day 2025 onwards, the Commonwealth Games Federation will be known as Commonwealth Sport," the governing body of the Commonwealth Games and Commonwealth Youth Games said in a media release. "The Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) is changing its public brand name to Commonwealth Sport. This brand development signifies the organisation's transition from a 'Sports Federation' to a 'Sports Movement'," it added. Commonwealth Sport CEO Katie Sadleir said, "The

brand name Commonwealth Sport demonstrates a stronger, more unified purpose that resonates with our audience on a deeper level."

The 'Commonwealth Games Federation' will be retained as the name of the legal entity only. Meanwhile, King Charles, the Patron of Commonwealth Sport, will officially launch the inaugural Commonwealth Sport King's Baton Relay for the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games at Buckingham Palace on the Commonwealth Day on Monday. King Charles will place his message to the Commonwealth into the first Baton, passing it to the first baton-bearer, Sir Chris Hoy, and starting the relay with 500 days to go to the Opening Ceremony of Glasgow 2026.

The Baton Relay will be the longest-ever relay for a Commonwealth Games, with the Commonwealth Games Associations in the 74 nations and territories each having up to six days to organise their series of activities.

# Sukant, Nitesh win gold

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Paris Paralympics champion Kumar Nitesh and Sukant Kadam secured gold medals in SL3 and SL4 categories respectively, leading India's charge at the Spanish Para Badminton International 2025 - II in Vitoria, Spain.

Nitesh registered a 21-19 21-19 win over Japan's Daisuke Fujiwara in the final of the SL3 category, while Sukant defeated fellow Indian Tarun 21-13 21-10 in the SL4 category on Sunday.

"I'm happy to start 2025 with a gold medal. Every match here was a learning experience, and I'm glad I could perform consistently. This win gives me great motivation for the rest of the season," Sukant said in a press release.

In SH6 category, Nityashre emerged victorious, defeating Poland's Szmigiel in the final to claim a top podium finish.

In men's doubles, Nitesh Kumar and Tarun edged past India's Jagadeesh Dilli and Naveen Sivakumar 21-14, 23-25, 22-20. The mixed doubles events also saw a strong Indian presence.

Krishna Nagar and Nityashre triumphed over England's Shepherd and Choong with a dominant 21-14, 21-11



victory to clinch gold in the SH6 category. Nitesh Kumar, pairing with Manisha Ramadas, added another gold to India's tally in the SL3-SU5 category, defeating Sweden's Rickard Nilsson and Denmark's Hello Sofie Sagoy with a convincing score of 21-9 and 21-15.

Meanwhile, Alpha James fought hard in the women's singles final but had to settle for silver after going down to Switzerland's Ilaria Olgiati.

# Inter Milan 2-1 victory over Fiorentina in Serie A

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Milan

Napoli kept up the pressure on Serie A leader Inter Milan as it finally got back to winning ways with a 2-1 victory over Fiorentina.

Romelu Lukaku on Sunday scored one and set up the other for Giacomo Raspadori to help Napoli move back to within a point of Inter, which fought back from two goals down to beat Monza 3-2 on Saturday.

Atalanta proved it is very much among the fray with a statement 4-0 win at fourth-placed Juventus to close the gap back to three points to Inter.

According to statistics provider Opta, it was the first time Juventus had lost a league match at home by four goals in nearly 60 years — since a loss by the same score to Torino in October 1967.

Atalanta's title credentials will be truly tested next weekend when it hosts Inter. Fiorentina's hopes of making it into the top four diminished after its fourth loss in five league matches.

Napoli also came into the match on a mediocre run, having drawn four of its past five matches and losing the other.

But the hosts took the lead in the 26th minute following great work from Scott McTominay as he cut inside from the left and unleashed a shot that former



Manchester United teammate David de Gea could only parry into the path of Lukaku, who tapped in the rebound.

Giovanni Di Lorenzo hit the crossbar for Napoli as Fiorentina had De Gea to thank for a number of impressive saves that kept it in the match.

Napoli eventually doubled its lead on the hour mark with a team move that ended with Lukaku playing a through ball for Raspadori to sweep into the bottom right

corner. Fiorentina pulled one back six minutes later as a backheeled flick from Moise Kean released Albert Guðmundsson to drill low into the near corner.

## Head-to-Head

The match in Turin was a head-to-head battle for third place, with just three points separating Atalanta and Juventus.

The league's top scorer, Mateo Retegui, gave Atalanta the lead in the 29th from the

spot after United States international Weston McKennie was penalized for handball. It was Retegui's 22nd goal in Serie A this season — seven more than nearest challenger Kean.

A combination of the woodwork and Juventus goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio prevented Atalanta from doubling its lead on the stroke of halftime but Marten de Roon did get the visitors' second within a minute of the restart after Ademola Lookman's effort was parried.

Davide Zappacosta all but sealed the match in the 66th and Lookman capped a fantastic performance from him and Atalanta 11 minutes later.

That started a mass exodus of Juventus fans and the ones who remained loudly booed the team at full time.

Fast goal Matias Soule scored after only 22 seconds to set Roma on its way to a 1-0 win at relegation-threatened Empoli.

Opta said it was Roma's fastest goal in a Serie A match (since that data started being collected in 2004).

It was a fifth straight win in all competitions for Roma, which visits Athletic Bilbao in the second leg of the Europa League round of 16 on Thursday.

Roma also extended its unbeaten run in Serie A to 12 matches, leapfrogging Fiorentina into seventh.

# Toss-up between Axar, Rahul for Delhi Capitals captaincy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Leading all-rounder Axar Patel and senior keeper-batter KL Rahul are the two contenders for Delhi Capitals captaincy in the upcoming Indian Premier League season with the multi-skilled Gujarat man having his nose slightly ahead.

It is understood that the franchise big-wigs will be announcing the name of their new captain in the next few days, having waited for the Champions Trophy to end.

Delhi Capitals will have a short training-cum-simulation camp in Delhi before flying to Visakhapatnam for their first two games. Axar, Rahul, Kuldeep Yadav, South Africa's Tristan Stubbs, Australian Jake Fraser-McGurk and Mitchell Starc are set to gather in Visakhapatnam on March 17 and 18. With Rahul and wife Athiya Shetty expecting their first baby, the senior player could miss a game or two depending on the due date.

Into his seventh season with the Capitals, the 31-year-old Axar, who has played 150 IPL games, scored 1653 runs at a strike rate of nearly 131, and took 123 wickets at an economy rate of 7.28, looks a more likely candidate to lead the team

than Rahul, who will be donning the Delhi blues for the first time.

However, Rahul has been an IPL captain for some years now and has led Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants in the past. LSG reached two play-offs during his time at the franchise although in one of those, he was injured for the better part of the season.

Rahul, who will turn 33 on April 18, has scored 4683 runs at a strike-rate of 134 plus, the runs coming mostly while batting in the top three. He has also struck four centuries across 132 games.

While his strike-rate in the power plays has often been criticised, Rahul has a phenomenal record between 2018 and 2024, amassing more than 500 runs in six out of seven seasons. The only season he scored less was in 2023 when he got 274 runs in nine games before getting injured. In four of those six seasons, he had surpassed 600 runs.

Axar's captaincy at the IPL level is not yet proven while Rahul has led for some years. The composition of Delhi Capitals squad is such that it is very difficult to have a foreigner as captain unless one is looking at Stubbs, who will probably be a sure-shot pick across conditions.

