

Buchi Babu Sana clarified that the portrayal of Janhvi Kapoor in Peddi was designed to suit the film's rural drama narrative and not intended to demean the actress, amid criticism over her character's presentation in the movie.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday chaired a meeting of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (PM-EAC) to review India's economic outlook amid rising global uncertainty, geopolitical tensions and concerns over energy security.

INSIDE

Good morning

Problems never stay long, they just put the signature in the experience book of your life and move away.

BRIEFS

Ghaziabad Seals Two Illegal Madrasas

► Vikrama Vahini | Ghaziabad

The Ghaziabad district administration has sealed two alleged illegal madrasas in Kanawani Colony of Indirapuram and Ashok Vihar in Loni as part of an ongoing drive against unrecognised religious and educational institutions.

Officials said the action was taken following inspections conducted by a joint team comprising representatives from the Waqf Department, municipal authorities and the revenue department.

According to District Minority Welfare Officer Kailash Chandra Tiwari, the institutions were found to be operating without registration from the Minority Welfare Department and did not possess valid registration certificates.

The inspection team also reported that the madrasas lacked mandatory no-objection certificates (NOCs) from the fire safety and electrical safety departments, raising concerns over compliance with safety regulations.

Authorities said further action would be taken in accordance with applicable rules and regulations as the verification drive continues across the district.

Modi Hails Praggnanandhaa's Historic Win

► Vikrama Vahini | Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Indian chess Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa on his historic victory at the prestigious Norway Chess tournament, becoming the first Indian to win the elite event.

In a message posted on social media, Modi described the achievement as a remarkable milestone and praised Praggnanandhaa's continued excellence on the global chess stage. He extended his best wishes for the young grandmaster's future endeavours.

The 20-year-old Chennai-born chess star secured the title in Oslo with a series of impressive performances against some of the world's strongest players. His latest success further strengthens India's growing reputation as a global chess powerhouse.

Praggnanandhaa, one of the youngest grandmasters in chess history, has consistently excelled in international competitions and defeated several top-ranked players. His Norway Chess triumph is being hailed as one of the biggest achievements of his career and an inspiration for aspiring chess players across the country.

The victory also highlights the emergence of a new generation of Indian chess talent, including D Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi, who are carrying forward the legacy of former world champion Viswanathan Anand.

Portfolio Row Ends on Happy Note

Congress leaders successfully persuaded Minister Ramalinga Reddy to withdraw his resignation over portfolio allocation, bringing an end to the brief Cabinet crisis and projecting unity within the Karnataka government.

► Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

The political controversy surrounding Karnataka Minister Ramalinga Reddy's resignation over dissatisfaction with portfolio allocation has been resolved following intensive negotiations by the Congress leadership. Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar reportedly held late-night discussions with Reddy at a private hotel in Jayanagar, Bengaluru, attempting to persuade him to withdraw his resignation. Despite the efforts, Reddy initially maintained a firm stand on his demand related to the Bengaluru Development portfolio.

On Saturday morning, AICC General Secretary (Karnataka in-charge) Randeep Singh Surjewala held detailed discussions with Reddy for over 30 minutes, urging him to reconsider his decision. KPCC President B.K. Hariprasad also intervened, following which Reddy agreed to reconsider his resignation. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Surjewala said Reddy is a senior leader and an asset to the party. He stated that the resignation stemmed from a "misunderstanding" and confirmed that Reddy would formally withdraw it.

Surjewala added that discussions had also involved former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, and senior party leaders, all of whom worked together to resolve the issue. The Congress leadership also accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of spreading false narratives regarding the internal issue. Surjewala dismissed such reports as politically motivated and claimed that voters had already rejected the BJP.

He further asserted that the Karnataka government remains focused on development and welfare through its flagship guarantee schemes, which continue to drive the state's progress.

With Reddy expected to formally withdraw his resignation, the Congress has sought to project unity and stability within the Cabinet, aiming to put an end to speculation over internal rifts in the ruling party.



CM PLEDGES MORE AID FOR SACRED MALLAGHATTA

► Vikrama Vahini | Tumakuru

Karnataka Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar on Friday assured full government support for the development of the sacred Mallaghatta region near Nonavinakere in Tumakuru district, stating that works worth ₹35 crore are already underway and additional projects will be taken up after consultations with local representatives and religious leaders.

Speaking to reporters after inspecting development works at Mallaghatta Lake in Burudegatta, Shivakumar said the historic and spiritually significant area would receive all necessary assistance for further growth and infrastructure improvement.

₹35 Crore Development Works in Progress

The Chief Minister said he has visited the historic Gangadhreshwara Temple at Mallaghatta several times in the past and described the region as a place of peace and spiritual fulfilment.

He noted that the lake has remained a vital source of water and cultural significance for decades.

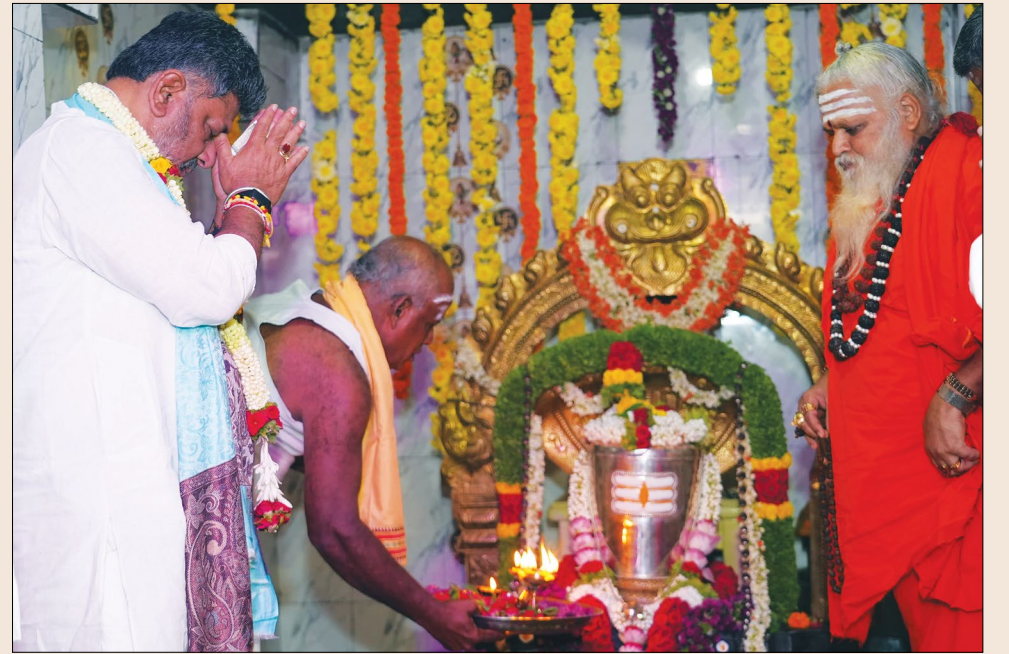
Shivakumar said several development initiatives, including canal systems, community halls and guest houses, have already been undertaken to benefit farmers, devotees and local residents.

He added that discussions have been held with representatives of local bodies and the Kadusiddheshwara Mutt regarding future development plans.

"I Will Not Abandon My Faith"

Responding to questions about the religious rituals followed during his oath-taking ceremony, the Chief Minister said he respects all religions while remaining rooted in his own faith.

"I respect every religion and therefore invited



representatives of all faiths. At the same time, one cannot abandon one's own faith or traditions. Every stage of life, from naming ceremonies to other rituals, is connected to religious beliefs. I have sought blessings from all communities before beginning my responsibilities," he said.

Prayed for Peace and Prosperity

Asked whether he had made any specific vow at the temple, Shivakumar clarified that he had not sought any personal favour.

"My prayer is that the authority entrusted to me should serve the people. I prayed for peace and happiness for the citizens of the state and for Karnataka's lakes and reservoirs to remain full," he said.

"I Came as a Devotee, Not as Chief Minister"

Later, while visiting the Nonavinakere Sri Kadusiddheshwara Mutt, Shivakumar said his association with the mutt spans over 25 years.

"I am not new to this mutt. I have visited it countless times throughout my life for guidance and blessings. I have come here not as the Chief Minister but as a devotee. This is a bond between a devotee and the divine," he said.

The Chief Minister reiterated that spiritual institutions continue to play an important role in guiding society and fostering harmony, while assuring continued support for the development of the Mallaghatta region and its religious heritage.

NEET Leak Row Sparks Chitradurga Protest

► Vikrama Vahini | Chitradurga

Thousands of students and NEET-UG aspirants staged a massive protest in Chitradurga on Saturday, demanding a fair investigation into alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination, including claims of a question paper leak.

The demonstration was organised by the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and witnessed participation from its national and state leaders, along with students from different parts of the district. Protesters raised slogans seeking accountability and transparency in the conduct of the national-level medical entrance examination.

Addressing the gathering, NSUI National President Vinod Jakhar alleged that the future of more than 22 lakh NEET aspirants had been put at risk due to alleged lapses in the examination



process. He called for accountability from the Union Education Ministry and demanded a transparent inquiry into the matter.

NSUI Karnataka President Kirthi Ganesh said repeated allegations of malpractice had created anxiety and uncertainty among students and parents.

LPG Gets Costlier by ₹29

► Vikrama Vahini | New Delhi

Domestic cooking gas prices have been increased by ₹29 per 14.2-kg LPG cylinder, marking the second hike in the last three months amid sustained pressure from rising global energy costs. With the latest revision, the price of a domestic LPG cylinder in Delhi will rise from ₹913 to ₹942 with effect from June 7, according to industry sources.

The increase comes after a ₹60-per-cylinder hike announced on March 7, following disruptions in global energy supplies caused by geopolitical tensions in West Asia. The conflict has contributed to a sharp rise in international fuel prices, impacting the cost of LPG imports.

Industry officials said the earlier price increase had only partially compensated for losses incurred by state-owned fuel retailers on domestic LPG sales. The latest revision is aimed at reducing the burden of higher procurement costs while ensuring continued supply of cooking gas across the country.



CONGRESS EYES BJP BEFORE FINAL RS PICK

► Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

The Karnataka unit of the Congress has adopted a wait-and-watch strategy regarding its final candidate for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections, with the deadline for filing nominations set for June 8.

KPCC President B. K. Hariprasad said the party would take a final decision only after assessing the Bharatiya Janata Party's strategy. "We will wait until June 8 and see how many candidates the BJP fields. Then we will decide. Four nominations have already been filed, and one more nomination will be submitted on Monday," he said.

The Congress has already announced seven candidates for

the Rajya Sabha polls, including Mallikarjun Kharge, along with Mansoor Ali Khan, Pawan Kherra, Meenakshi Natarajan, Neeraj Dangi, Praveen Chakravarty and Pranav Jha.

Party leaders said discussions are continuing over the allocation of the remaining seat, while closely monitoring the BJP's next move ahead of the biennial elections.

The Election Commission of India has scheduled elections to 24 Rajya Sabha seats across 10 states, including Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. Nominations will close on June 8, while polling is scheduled for June 18.



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Panchatantra Stories

The Brahmin and the Cobra

Haridatta, a humble Brahmin, lived in a small village where he worked tirelessly on his farmland. Despite his dedication, the soil gave him poor harvests, and he often struggled to meet his daily needs.

One day, tired from the scorching heat, Haridatta rested under a large tree in his field. Nearby, he noticed an anthill. Suddenly, a cobra emerged from it with its hood raised. Haridatta believed the serpent was the guardian spirit of his land. Hoping for blessings, he decided to worship it.

From the next day, he began offering milk to the cobra, placing it respectfully near the anthill. To his amazement, the next morning he found a gold coin in the bowl. Believing it to be a divine reward, he continued the practice every day and soon became wealthy.

After some time, Haridatta had to leave for another village. Before leaving, he instructed his son to continue the daily offering. The son obeyed, but curiosity soon turned into greed. Seeing the gold coin each day, he assumed that a treasure must be hidden inside the anthill.

Driven by greed, the young man decided to kill the cobra and take the treasure. Instead of offering milk, he struck the cobra with a stick. The cobra, though injured, defended itself and bit him in self-defence. The poison spread quickly, and the son died.

When Haridatta returned and heard of his son's death, he was heartbroken. While others demanded revenge, the Brahmin understood that his son's greed had caused the tragedy. Still, grief weighed heavily on him.

Despite his sorrow, Haridatta went back to the anthill and called out to the cobra.

The cobra appeared and spoke with pain and anger, saying that greed had destroyed trust between them. It reminded Haridatta that true respect cannot be replaced by selfish desire.

Before leaving, the cobra gave him a diamond instead of gold and warned him never to return. Haridatta accepted the gift silently and walked away with a heavy heart.

He never returned to the anthill again, forever remembering the lesson that greed destroys wisdom, trust, and life itself.

Thus, the story reminds us that true wealth lies not in gold or diamonds, but in wisdom and restraint.

As the wise say, greed crosses all borders of reasoning and ends in disaster.

DKS SET FOR GRAND KANAKAPURA ROADSHOW

Vikrama Vahini | Ramanagara

Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar will visit his home constituency of Kanakapura on Sunday to thank voters and supporters following his elevation as Karnataka's Chief Minister. The visit marks his first trip to the constituency after assuming office.

A grand welcome has been planned by party workers, supporters and residents of Kanakapura and Harohalli, with several folk and cultural troupes set to participate in the celebrations. Shivakumar is scheduled to arrive at Harohalli Circle at around 10 a.m., where he will be accorded a traditional reception before offering special prayers at the historic Kote Veeranjaneya Swamy Temple.

The Chief Minister will then undertake a massive open-vehicle roadshow covering several towns and villages across Kanakapura constituency, including Harohalli,

Tungani, T. Bekuppe Circle, Narayanapura, Kodihalli, Herindayapanahalli, Kolagondanahalli, Hunasanahalli, Hosadurga, Hukunda, Mullahalli, Nallahalli, Doddalahalli, Sathanur, Kabbalu and Somadyapanahalli.

During the tour, Shivakumar is expected to interact with residents and address public gatherings at various locations, expressing gratitude for their continued support. The roadshow will conclude in Kanakapura town in the evening, where large crowds are expected to gather. Police have made elaborate security arrangements along the entire route to ensure smooth conduct of the programme and manage the anticipated turnout of supporters, local leaders and party workers are expected to submit memorandums highlighting key developmental needs of the constituency for the Chief Minister's consideration.



BJP Slams Cong Over Governance

Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

The BJP on Saturday intensified its attack on the Karnataka Congress government, alleging that governance has taken a back seat amid internal disputes and leadership uncertainty within the ruling party.

In a social media statement, the BJP claimed that the Congress, which came to power promising development and welfare, is now facing instability, factionalism and a struggle for power.

The opposition also questioned the absence of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from the ongoing developments in Karnataka and criticised the party's central leadership for not intervening effectively.

Referring to issues such as the Valmiki Corporation case, fiscal pressures arising from welfare guarantees, the Bengaluru stampede incident and the Waqf land controversy, the BJP argued that the state government is struggling to manage governance challenges.

The Congress, however, has maintained that its focus remains on welfare delivery, development programmes and ensuring stability in the state despite political criticism from the opposition.

Yeshvantpur-Vijayapura Express Upgraded to Bi-Weekly Service

Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

South Western Railway has announced an enhancement in services of Train No. 06577/06578 Yeshvantpur-Vijayapura Express Special, upgrading it from a weekly to a bi-weekly operation to improve passenger convenience and connectivity.

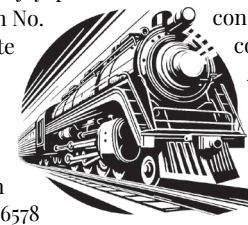
The Yeshvantpur-Vijayapura Express Special (Train No. 06577) will now operate twice a week on Saturdays and Mondays, effective from June 1 to June 29, 2026. In the return direction, Train No. 06578 Vijayapura-Yeshvantpur Express Special will run on Sundays and Tuesdays from June 2 to June 30, 2026.

Railway authorities said the revised frequency aims to meet growing passenger demand on the route and ensure better travel options between Bengaluru and north Karnataka regions. Officials said this move will help in reducing travel time

and improving overall punctuality of the service.

The train will continue to operate via Hubballi bypass and serve key stations including Tumakuru, Arsikere, Davangere, Haveri, Badami, Bagalkot, Almatti and Basavana Bagewadi before reaching Vijayapura.

The special train will consist of 19 ICF coaches, including 2 AC 2-tier coaches, 4 AC 3-tier coaches, 7 sleeper class coaches, 4 general second class coaches, and 2 luggage cum brake



vans with Divyangjan-friendly facilities. Officials confirmed that the train will operate a total of seven trips in each direction during the notified period.

South Western Railway has requested passengers to take note of the revised timetable and stoppage pattern while planning their journeys.

3,146 Agniveervayus Join IAF Ranks

Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

The Passing Out Parade of the seventh batch of Agniveervayu Trainees (Intake 01/2026) was held with military precision and ceremonial grandeur at Air Force Station Jalahalli on Saturday.

A total of 3,146 Agniveervayus, including both men and women, successfully completed 22 weeks of intensive training and are now ready to serve in the Indian Air Force as trained air warriors.

Air Vice Marshal Atul Laxmandas Golani, Command Technical Training Officer,



Headquarters Training Command, reviewed the parade and congratulated the trainees for their discipline, dedication and outstanding

performance. He encouraged the newly inducted personnel to remain adaptable, mission-ready and committed to continuous

learning in a rapidly changing security environment.

During the ceremony, trophies were awarded to outstanding trainees. Agniveervayu Nagaraj Dhulappa Chinchane, Agniveervayu Priyanshu Gupta and Agniveervayu Shailendra Kushwaha were adjudged the "Best All Rounders" from their respective training institutes.

The Reviewing Officer also commended the instructors and staff of Air Force Station Jalahalli for their contribution in shaping the new batch of air warriors.



BJP MP Tejasvi Surya at the AEV Model United Nations and Debate Session held at The Oxford College of Science, Bengaluru, where students from across the country engaged in discussions on governance, urban mobility, and civic participation. The event highlighted the enthusiasm and awareness of young participants and their commitment to shaping the nation's future.

LPG Gets Costlier by ₹29

From PG1

Industry experts said LPG prices continue to be influenced by fluctuations in international crude oil and liquefied petroleum gas markets, as India imports a significant portion of its domestic requirement. With global energy prices remaining volatile due to ongoing geopolitical uncertainties, oil marketing companies are closely monitoring market conditions.

The hike is expected to affect household budgets, particularly for consumers who do not receive LPG subsidies. However, industry sources indicated that the revision was necessary in view of prevailing global market conditions and elevated energy prices.

NEET Leak Row Sparks Chitradurga Protest

From PG1

The organisation also reiterated its demand for a Supreme Court-monitored investigation and reforms to strengthen the examination system.

Protesters urged authorities to take strict action against those responsible for any irregularities and warned that nationwide agitations would be intensified if their demands were not addressed.

Meanwhile, officials of the Union Education Ministry and the National Testing Agency

have denied allegations of any large-scale paper leak, stating that investigations into reported complaints are ongoing.

Heavy security arrangements were made across Chitradurga as the protest drew large crowds. The demonstration remained peaceful despite sustained sloganeering and strong public participation. The protest highlighted growing concerns among students and parents over the credibility and transparency of competitive entrance examinations in the country.

NEWS

MONSOON BATTERS SOUTH INDIA

Vikrama Vahini | New Delhi

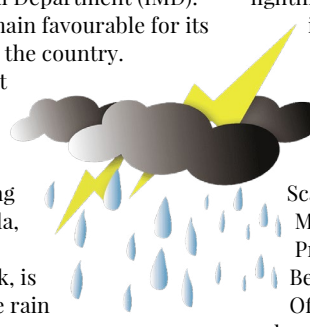
The Southwest Monsoon has advanced into Karnataka and is expected to reach Mumbai between June 10 and 15, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Weather conditions remain favourable for its further progress across the country.

The IMD has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall over Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Lakshadweep during the next few days. Kerala, where the monsoon arrived earlier this week, is likely to witness intense rain accompanied by thunderstorms and gusty winds.

Several parts of central and eastern India, including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, are also expected to experience thunderstorms, lightning and strong winds along with intermittent rainfall.

The weather department said rainfall activity is likely to intensify between June 9 and 11, bringing heavy showers to the west coast, particularly Kerala and Karnataka. Scattered rainfall is also forecast across Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and the northeastern states.

Officials have advised people in vulnerable areas to remain alert as monsoon activity strengthens.



Belagavi Investment Scam Under CID Lens

Vikrama Vahini | Belagavi

A major investment fraud case has surfaced in Belagavi, with police registering an FIR against six individuals, including the management of Adityaraj Capital Pvt. Ltd., for allegedly collecting deposits worth hundreds of crores of rupees from more than 6,500 investors without regulatory approval.

District authorities said the company had allegedly lured investors by promising monthly returns of five per cent and operated without permission from the Reserve Bank of India or other competent authorities.

Four bank accounts linked to the firm have been frozen, and over ₹200 crore has been seized during the investigation.

A special police team has been formed to

trace the company's CEO, Balraj Mane, against whom a lookout notice has been issued. Officials said preliminary findings indicate the operation resembled a Ponzi scheme.

Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Roshan stated that the case involves deposits exceeding ₹50 crore and will be recommended for transfer to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for a detailed probe. Authorities have also alerted airports and other agencies to prevent the accused from leaving the country.

Officials said digital records and financial documents seized during the raids are being examined to determine the full extent of the alleged fraud and identify additional beneficiaries or accomplices.



HEALTH & Lifestyle

Jamun Benefits Explained

Jamun, known in Sanskrit as "Jambu" and scientifically as *Syzygium cumini*, is widely regarded in Indian traditional medicine as one of the most valuable medicinal fruits. Every part of the tree—fruit, seed, leaves, bark and roots—is used in Ayurveda for its therapeutic properties, especially in managing diabetes, improving digestion, purifying blood and supporting oral health.

Jamun fruit and its seeds are traditionally recommended for controlling blood sugar levels. Powder made from dried seeds is commonly consumed in controlled quantities with water to help regulate glucose levels. The fruit is also considered beneficial in treating indigestion, stomach pain, diarrhoea and other digestive disorders. Rich in iron and vitamin C, Jamun is believed to support blood production and help reduce anaemia while also aiding blood purification. Consuming the fruit after meals is said to improve digestion and overall gut health.

Medicinal Value of Seeds and Bark

Jamun seeds are used in traditional remedies for diabetes, urinary tract infections and kidney-related issues. A decoction made from the seeds is believed to help reduce urinary discomfort and infections.

The bark of the Jamun tree has long been used in rural practices for oral hygiene. Powdered bark is used as a natural toothpaste to strengthen gums and reduce bleeding. It is also applied in face washes in traditional treatments to improve skin health and reduce acne.

Benefits of Leaves for Oral and Skin Health

Fresh Jamun leaves are sometimes chewed to reduce bad breath and improve gum strength. Traditional practices also use



leaf extracts for minor wounds due to their natural antiseptic properties, helping in faster healing.

Side Effects and Precautions

Despite its benefits, excessive consumption of Jamun or its seed powder may cause health issues. It can lead to dangerously low blood sugar levels in diabetics already on medication. Overconsumption may also cause acidity, stomach pain or constipation. Jamun should not be consumed immediately with milk or curd, as it is considered an incompatible food combination in Ayurveda.

Special Caution for Pregnant Women

While moderate consumption of Jamun fruit is generally safe during pregnancy, medicinal use of seeds should be avoided without medical supervision. Some individuals may also experience allergic reactions such as itching or breathing discomfort. Experts recommend limiting intake to 100–150 grams per day.

Traditional Practice of Eating with Salt

In many parts of India, Jamun is eaten with a pinch of salt to balance its sour and astringent taste. Rock salt or sea salt is traditionally used to enhance flavour and aid digestion. However, diabetic and hypertension patients are advised to consume it without salt.

SCIENCE & Technology

Instagram Launches Paid "Plus" Tier in India

Vikrama Vahini | New Delhi

Meta has launched Instagram Plus in India, a new paid subscription tier aimed at users seeking advanced customisation, deeper audience insights, and enhanced Story features, while keeping the core Instagram experience free for all users.

Optional Upgrade with Subscription Model

The company has positioned Instagram Plus as an optional add-on rather than a replacement for the free app. The service is priced at ₹99 per month, with an introductory offer of ₹49 per month for the first six months. Meta clarified that all existing features of Instagram will remain free.

Expanded Story Tools and Analytics

A major focus of the subscription is enhanced Story functionality. Users will get features such as extended Story visibility up to 48 hours, Story Spotlight for weekly highlighting, and custom sharing groups beyond Close Friends.

Subscribers will also have access to advanced analytics, including viewer search options, replay counts through Rewatch Insights, and Ghost Mode for anonymous viewing. Additional engagement tools like Super Hearts are also included.

Customisation and Profile Control

Instagram Plus offers greater personalisation options, including custom app icons, exclusive font styles, and an increased number of pinned posts. Users can also manage profile content more flexibly without affecting follower feeds.

Target Users

Meta said the subscription is primarily designed for content creators, influencers, small businesses, and highly active users who rely on engagement insights. Casual users, however, are expected to continue using the free version without disruption.

Devaraj Urs Shaped Modern K'taka: CM

Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Saturday paid tribute to former Chief Minister Devaraj Urs on his death anniversary and said that Urs laid the foundation for Karnataka's progress through visionary reforms and development initiatives.

Speaking after offering floral tributes to Urs' portrait at Vidhana Soudha, Shivakumar said the late leader's contributions would remain alive for generations.

He described Urs as a transformative leader who championed social justice and worked extensively for the upliftment of backward communities.

The Chief Minister noted that the landmark land reforms introduced under Urs' leadership, with the support of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, brought revolutionary changes by granting land ownership rights to cultivators.

He said the legislation became a model for the entire country and significantly empowered farmers and



marginalized sections of society.

Shivakumar also credited Urs for laying the groundwork for Bengaluru's industrial growth, including the establishment of Electronic City. He said Urs' vision contributed not only to agricultural development but also to

the expansion of industry, education, and economic opportunities across Karnataka.

Recalling his student days, Shivakumar said he had listened to Urs' speeches and remained inspired by his commitment to public service.

He urged people to follow the ideals and developmental vision of the former Chief Minister, whose legacy continues to shape modern Karnataka.

He said Devaraj Urs' administration was remembered for introducing several welfare-oriented policies that expanded access to education, housing, and economic opportunities for disadvantaged communities. According to Shivakumar, Urs firmly believed that inclusive growth was essential for the state's long-term progress and worked to ensure that development reached every section of society.

The Chief Minister also observed that Urs' leadership helped strengthen Karnataka's identity as a progressive state committed to social equality and economic advancement.

Jarkiholi Eyes Welfare Portfolio

Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

Minister Satish Jarkiholi is reportedly seeking the Social Welfare portfolio, considered one of the most influential departments in the Karnataka government with an annual outlay of nearly ₹42,000 crore.

Sources said Jarkiholi has conveyed his preference to the Congress high command and is keen on handling the department either alongside or instead of the Public Works portfolio. Food and Civil Supplies Minister K. H. Muniyappa is also said to be interested in the same department.

The development comes amid ongoing discussions over portfolio allocations and a possible future Cabinet expansion, with several ministerial positions still vacant. Party leaders have not officially commented on the reports. The issue is expected to figure prominently in upcoming discussions on Cabinet restructuring and portfolio allocation.



MODI REVIEWS GROWTH AMID GLOBAL RISKS

Vikrama Vahini | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday chaired a meeting of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (PM-EAC) to review India's economic outlook amid rising global uncertainty, geopolitical tensions and concerns over energy security.

The meeting focused on the potential impact of the ongoing West Asia crisis, disruptions in global trade routes, supply chain challenges and volatility in international energy markets. Council members assessed how these developments could affect India's growth trajectory and discussed measures to strengthen economic resilience.

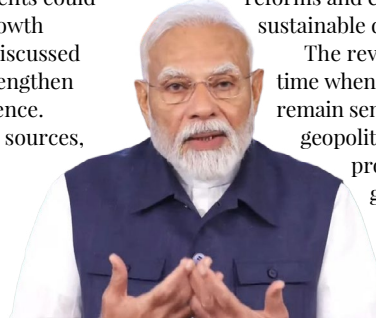
According to sources, the discussions emphasized safeguarding economic momentum, improving ease

of living and ease of doing business, and protecting the country from external economic shocks. Members also shared their views on the changing global economic environment and the need for continued policy reforms.

The council highlighted concerns over global conflicts, rising fuel prices and supply chain disruptions, while noting India's ability to maintain growth despite international challenges.

The meeting concluded with a consensus on strengthening economic fundamentals, promoting reforms and ensuring long-term sustainable development.

The review comes at a time when global markets remain sensitive to geopolitical developments, prompting governments worldwide to reassess economic strategies and growth priorities.



CM Seeks Centre-State Cooperation

Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Saturday extended an olive branch to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling for cooperation between the Centre and the State in the interest of development and public welfare.

Responding to the Prime Minister's recent criticism of the Congress government in Karnataka, Shivakumar thanked Modi for congratulating him

after he assumed office and said he would meet the Prime Minister soon to discuss issues concerning the state.

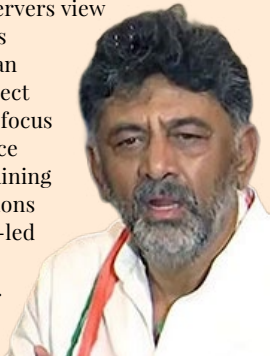
"We should not do politics, and they should not do politics either. Let us work together for development," the Chief Minister said, stressing that Karnataka's growth and welfare would remain his top priority.

Modi had recently claimed that the Congress was forced to change its Chief Minister in Karnataka due to

growing public dissatisfaction. However, Shivakumar adopted a conciliatory tone and emphasized the need for cooperative federalism and constructive engagement with the Centre.

The Chief Minister also dismissed concerns over internal differences within the ruling Congress, asserting that issues related to portfolio allocation and ministerial dissatisfaction had been resolved.

Political observers view Shivakumar's outreach as an effort to project stability and focus on governance while maintaining cordial relations with the BJP-led Union Government.



AIADMK Hit by Fresh Exodus

Vikrama Vahini | Chennai

The AIADMK suffered another setback on Saturday as four former ministers and several ex-MLAs quit the party and joined Chief Minister Vijay's TVK. Former ministers K. Radhakrishnan, M.C. Sampath, Kadambur C. Raju and N.R. Sivapathi were among the prominent leaders who switched sides.

The defections come amid continuing turmoil within the

AIADMK following its poor performance in recent elections.

Several former legislators also joined TVK, strengthening the ruling party's organisational network across Tamil Nadu.

Political observers view the latest exits as a major boost for TVK and a fresh challenge for AIADMK

leadership, which is struggling to contain growing dissatisfaction and factionalism within the party ranks.

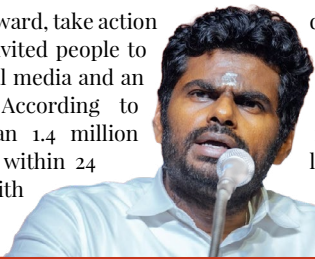


Annamalai's New Movement Draws 14 Lakh Supporters

Vikrama Vahini | Chennai

Former Tamil Nadu BJP chief K. Annamalai has launched a new political movement titled "We The Leaders," marking what many observers describe as the beginning of a new phase in his political journey outside the BJP framework.

Calling on citizens to "step forward, take action and bring change," Annamalai invited people to join the movement through social media and an online registration platform. According to campaign organisers, more than 1.4 million people registered their support within 24 hours of its launch, with registrations continuing to rise.



Political analysts believe the initiative is aimed at building a grassroots network ahead of the next Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. The movement seeks to position itself as a platform for citizen-led political participation and leadership development.

The development comes amid shifting political dynamics in Tamil Nadu, where actor-politician Vijay has emerged as a significant force challenging the dominance of traditional parties. Observers say Annamalai's latest initiative could reshape the state's political landscape and potentially create a new power centre alongside the established Dravidian parties.

Blue Star Anniversary Sparks Khalistan Slogans

Vikrama Vahini | Amritsar

Gatherings Mark Operation Blue Star Anniversary Pro-Khalistan slogans were raised inside the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar on Saturday as Sikh groups observed the 42nd anniversary of Operation Blue Star. Protesters gathered near the Akal Takht and displayed posters of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was killed during the 1984 military operation.

Massive Security Deployment Punjab Police and central security forces maintained a tight security blanket across Amritsar and surrounding areas to prevent any



disruption of law and order. Around 4,000 police personnel, including officers from outside the district and local units, were deployed, along with Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) companies.

Authorities Maintain Vigil Senior police officials monitored

security arrangements ahead of the anniversary, describing the occasion as highly sensitive. Authorities said extensive measures were taken to ensure peace during the commemorative events.

Legacy of Operation Blue Star Operation Blue Star was launched by the Indian Army in June 1984 to remove armed militants from the Golden Temple complex. The operation remains one of the most significant and debated events in modern Indian history and continues to evoke strong emotions among various sections of society.

ENTERTAINMENT

Sudeep Slams Nepotism Debate Over Sanchith's Debut

Vikrama Vahini | Bengaluru

Actor Kichcha Sudeep strongly responded to questions on nepotism during a press interaction for the film Mango Pachcha, featuring his nephew Sanchith Sanjeev in the lead role. The actor made it clear that success in the Kannada film industry depends on talent and not family background.

Sanchith Says Audience Acceptance Matters

Sanchith Sanjeev, who has made his debut as a lead actor with Mango Pachcha, said he is confident about his performance in the film. He added that the positive response from audiences itself reflects the acceptance of his work. "I believe I have done a good job, and

that happiness is visible to everyone," he said.

Sudeep Questions Selective Nepotism Debate

Reacting sharply to a media query on nepotism, Sudeep questioned why the issue is raised selectively. "Do you ask this question to everyone? Was it ever asked about actors from other prominent families? Why is it not asked in every case?" he said.

He added that similar questions are rarely directed at industrial or business families, citing examples to highlight selective criticism. "Why is nepotism not questioned everywhere in the same way?" he asked.

"Talent is the Only Criterion" - Sudeep

Sudeep further stated that Kannada cinema has always been driven by merit. Referring to the legacy of Dr. Rajkumar's family, he said that audience acceptance has always depended on ability and performance.

"From the time of Dr. Rajkumar, the Kannada audience has supported only those who have talent and deserve it. It is not anyone's inherited space," he said.

He also pointed out that several members of film families have entered the industry based on interest and skill, while others have chosen different paths.

"Don't Import Bollywood Narratives"

Taking a strong stand, Sudeep urged media not to import Bollywood-style debates into Kannada cinema. "This is not a debate that applies here. Talent alone survives in this industry," he said firmly.

The actor concluded that Kannada film industry is driven by performance, and anyone with skill and dedication can succeed regardless of background.

VARANASI TO FEATURE EPIC RAMA-KUMBHAKARNA BATTLE SEQUENCE

Vikrama Vahini | Varanasi

The much-anticipated pan-India film directed by SS Rajamouli is set to include an extensive Rama vs Kumbhakarna war sequence, according to writer Vijayendra Prasad. Varanasi, one of the most awaited upcoming films from SS Rajamouli, continues to generate strong interest among audiences. The film stars Prithviraj Sukumaran, Priyanka Chopra, and Mahesh Babu in key roles, with fans actively speculating about its storyline and mythological elements since its first glimpse was released.

Writer Vijayendra Prasad, who is also SS Rajamouli's father, recently revealed that the film will feature a major action sequence depicting the epic battle between Rama and Kumbhakarna from the Ramayana. Speaking about the scene during an interaction, he indicated that the sequence is designed on a large scale and has already sparked discussion among fans following its brief hint in the trailer.

He further noted that while he could not disclose too many details, the war sequence has been crafted as a significant highlight of the film.

Actor Prithviraj

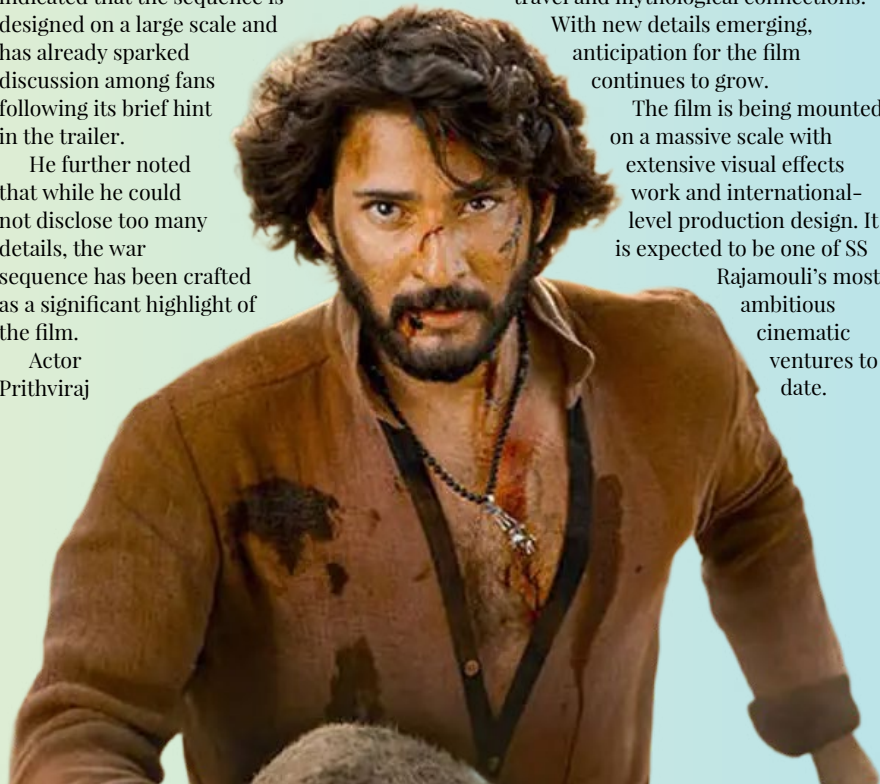
Sukumaran, who plays a key role in the film, described his experience as uniquely demanding. He explained that the character required a different approach to performance, as much of the physical expression is restricted and the portrayal relies heavily on facial emotions.

He added that this limitation pushed him to focus entirely on subtle expressions through the eyes and face, making it one of the most complex roles he has undertaken.

In Varanasi, Mahesh Babu plays the role of Rudhra, Prithviraj Sukumaran portrays Kumbha, and Priyanka Chopra appears as Mandakini. The film is currently in production under SS Rajamouli's direction and is expected to release during Sankranti 2027. The project has already sparked widespread speculation, with early visuals leading fans to theorize about possible time-travel and mythological connections.

With new details emerging, anticipation for the film continues to grow.

The film is being mounted on a massive scale with extensive visual effects work and international-level production design. It is expected to be one of SS Rajamouli's most ambitious cinematic ventures to date.



BUSINESS

RBI Rate Pause Keeps Home Loan EMIs Steady

Vikrama Vahini | New Delhi

The Reserve Bank of India's decision to keep the repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent for the second consecutive time in 2026 is unlikely to reduce home loan EMIs immediately, but it has brought much-needed stability to the housing market, according to real estate developers.

MPC Holds Rates Amid Global Uncertainty The six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) maintained the status quo while assessing risks from rising energy prices and supply disruptions caused by the ongoing West Asia crisis.

The prolonged geopolitical tensions have pushed up crude oil prices and added to inflation concerns.

Borrowing Stability Key for Homebuyers Industry experts say that while borrowers may not see immediate relief in interest rates, the predictable policy environment helps homebuyers plan long-term financial commitments with greater confidence.

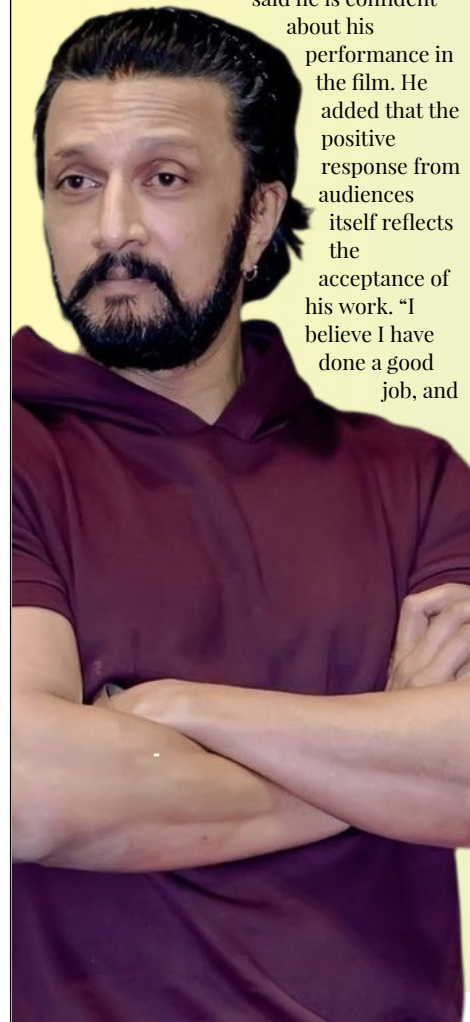
Developers noted that residential demand remains steady across major cities, supported by infrastructure growth, improved connectivity, and rising preference for home ownership.

Developers See Continued Demand Momentum Real estate leaders said stability in interest rates is more important than short-term cuts, especially in an environment of global uncertainty. They added that demand is increasingly driven by end-users rather than investors, making affordability and financial planning key factors in purchase decisions.

According to industry representatives, a steady rate environment allows buyers to proceed with confidence while helping developers maintain planning and execution without policy uncertainty.

Experts also pointed out that despite the rate pause, home loan EMIs are unlikely to come down in the near term. However, the clarity in monetary policy is expected to support sustained housing demand in the coming months as long as macroeconomic conditions remain stable.

Economists also point out that while a rate pause may not immediately impact EMIs, it helps avoid sudden shocks in the housing finance market. They say such policy continuity is particularly important in volatile global conditions, as it supports credit stability, keeps loan disbursement steady, and prevents abrupt shifts in borrower sentiment that could otherwise slow down housing sector recovery.



SPORTS

India Clinch U-18 Asia Cup Bronze

► Vikrama Vahini | Ranchi

India secured the bronze medal in the Women's Under-18 Asia Cup Hockey Tournament with an emphatic 3-0 victory over Korea in the third-place playoff match played in Kakamigahara, Japan, on Friday.

The Indian team delivered a commanding performance throughout the contest, controlling the pace of the game and capitalizing on key opportunities to finish the tournament on a high note.

India made a dream start when Jharkhand's Sandeepa Kumari found the back of the net in just the second minute, giving her side an early advantage. The quick goal boosted India's confidence and put Korea under immediate pressure.

The lead was doubled in the second quarter when captain Sweetie Kujur scored in the 16th minute, showcasing excellent teamwork and finishing ability. With a comfortable 2-0 lead at halftime, India continued to dominate possession and create scoring chances.

Nausheen Naz effectively sealed the contest in the 33rd minute by scoring India's third goal, leaving Korea with little opportunity to stage a comeback. The Indian defense remained solid throughout the match, successfully denying Korea any clear scoring opportunities and preserving a clean sheet.

For her outstanding contribution, Sandeepa Kumari was named Player of the Match. Her early goal set the tone for India's impressive victory and highlighted her growing importance to the national youth setup. The bronze-medal-winning Indian squad featured six players from Jharkhand - Sandeepa Kumari, Pushpa Manjhi, Shruti Kumari, Sugan Sanga, Neelam Topno and Khilli Kumari. Their contributions reflected the state's continued emergence as a major centre for hockey talent in the country.

India Win U-18 Hockey Asia Cup; Women Secure Bronze

► Vikrama Vahini | Kakamigahara, Japan

India created history at the U-18 Hockey Asia Cup 2026 in Kakamigahara, Japan, as the junior men's team defeated hosts Japan 4-1 in the final to clinch the gold medal. Ashish Tani Purni delivered a stellar performance, completing a hat-trick and playing a decisive role in India's dominant victory.

From the very beginning, India applied strong pressure, earning an early penalty corner in the second minute which Purni converted to give his side a 1-0 lead. India continued to control the game, extending their advantage to 3-0 by half-time with a field goal from captain Ketan Kushwaha and another strike from Purni.

He completed his hat-trick in the third quarter, further strengthening India's grip on the match. Japan managed a consolation goal through Numada Gaku in the fourth quarter, but the result was already sealed in India's favour.

Alongside the men's success, the Indian U-18 women's team also secured a bronze medal, marking a strong overall performance for the country at the tournament.

A Key National Security Infrastructure Project: Zojila Tunnel Nears Completion

The 13.153-km Zojila Tunnel, set to become the world's longest high-altitude bi-directional road tunnel, has achieved a major construction milestone with its final breakthrough. The project will provide year-round connectivity between Kashmir and Ladakh, enhancing regional development, tourism, logistics, and national security in one of India's most strategically important Himalayan corridors.

The 13.153-km Zojila Tunnel, the world's longest single-tube bi-directional road tunnel at the highest altitude, and its final breakthrough will be a historic milestone in India's infrastructure history.

Located in the Zojila region between Baltal (Sonamarg) and Meenamarg (Drass & Kargil) in the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, the project is being executed to provide all-weather connectivity across one of India's most challenging Himalayan corridors, which remains cut off for long periods every year due to heavy snowfall, avalanches, and extreme weather conditions. Positioned at an elevation of about 11,578 feet above sea level, the tunnel represents one of the most significant engineering achievements in India's mountain infrastructure sector.

The main tunnel begins at the West Portal at Baltal and ends at the East Portal at Meenamarg, with tunnelling carried out from both ends. The achievement of the final breakthrough marks the defining construction milestone of the excavation phase and reflects the successful completion of the most critical stage of underground works in highly demanding terrain.

This landmark project is being executed by Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Limited (MEIL) for the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).

The Zojila Tunnel is being constructed using the New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM), a method particularly suited to fragile Himalayan geology and variable rock conditions. NATM relies on sequential excavation, immediate support measures such as shotcrete and rock bolting, and continuous geotechnical monitoring, allowing engineers to respond flexibly to changing ground conditions during tunnelling. This approach has been critical to maintaining stability, safety, and construction progress in one of the most demanding underground environments in India.

In addition to the main tunnel, the project scope includes connecting highway works, bridges, protective structures, cut-and-cover sections, snow protection components, and the Nilgrar twin tunnels, making it a comprehensive corridor development.

Once fully operational, the project will ensure 365-day connectivity between Srinagar and Ladakh, improving access to Drass, Kargil, Leh, and surrounding regions while significantly strengthening mobility, logistics reliability, and strategic access in a sensitive border zone.

The Zojila Tunnel Project carries immense socio-economic and strategic importance. It is expected to transform regional connectivity, improve the movement of people and goods, reduce weather-related isolation, and support economic activity, tourism, and essential services across the region.

At the national level, the tunnel also strengthens operational mobility and logistics preparedness in a strategically important frontier corridor, underlining its role not only as an infrastructure project but also as a national connectivity and security asset.

The execution of the project in the western Himalayas has involved exceptional engineering challenges, including fragile geology, sensitive rock formations, avalanche-prone terrain, harsh winter conditions. Despite these difficulties, the project stands out as a



Extreme Weather & Environment

* **Sub-Zero Temperatures:** The team braved extreme temperatures ranging from -20°C to -30°C for nearly 100 days a year. Despite these freezing conditions, construction work continued without pause.

* **Avalanche Risks:** Over the last five years, the project site faced five major avalanche situations. Two of these were severe incidents with extensive damage to machinery, equipment, and our workshop.

* 12 January 2023, A severe avalanche hit the Sarbal area close to the Nilgrar Tunnels.

* 15 January 2023, following a massive secondary avalanche, The Indian Army rescued and evacuated over 172 workers stranded in avalanche.

* 8 February 2024 / 9 February 2024 / 5 March 2025: Avalanches struck the vicinity, requiring immediate emergency protocols and safety stand-downs.

* **Snow Clearance Operations:** To combat heavy snow accumulation during the winter, a fleet of small and large snow blowers was deployed. This ensured uninterrupted construction work while simultaneously keeping the highway open for regular vehicular movement.

* **Complex Geological Conditions Unpredictable Terrain:** The rock classification changed 67 times across the 13 km stretch, shifting constantly between good and poor formations.

* This highly volatile geology was successfully managed through the expertise of our skilled crew.

* **Logistics, Workforce, and Camp Management**

* **Massive Workforce:** A dedicated team of over 1,200 personnel is working on this prestigious project, comprising 80% local residents and 20% specialists from other parts of the country.

* **Self-Sustaining Infrastructure:** To support the workforce in these harsh conditions, a fully equipped base camp was established for over 1,100 people. The camp provides food that is appropriate for the climate, medical facilities, transportation, and all necessary amenities to sustain round-the-clock operations on this project of national importance.

* **Heavy Machinery Deployment:** A project of this scale required an immense fleet of machinery. Hundreds of trucks, dozens of loaders and excavators, batching and crushing plants, and advanced drilling boomers (ranging from small to large) were utilized to turn this dream into reality.

* **Community Support in Coordination with NHIDCL**

* **Facilitating the Amarnath Yatra:** Every year, the project team actively supports the Amarnath Yatra pilgrims. Contributions include providing parking facilities, setting up mobile toilets, and laying flooring for the base hospital.

* **Our staff works tirelessly to ensure a smooth travel experience for pilgrims.**

This monumental progress has been made possible by the unwavering support of the people of Jammu & Kashmir, alongside the seamless collaboration of our expert teams - including designers, execution engineers, planning and safety teams, and the resilient foot soldiers on the ground.

Zojila Milestones & Achievements

• The project began on 1 October 2020, and the first blasting at the Nilgrar Tunnel was performed on 14 October 2020.

• Part one of the project was completed on 15 March 2025, covering approach roads, bridges, Nilgrar twin tunnels, cut-and-cover works, and snow gallery components.

• The final breakthrough of the main Zojila Tunnel is expected on 09th June 2026, marking the most important construction milestone of the excavation phase.

• Overall safety achievement: 10 million safe man-hours. (As on April 2026)

Project Data

- Total project length, including tunnel roads and bridges: 30.894 km.
- Zojila Main tunnel length: 13.153 km.
- Nilgrar Tunnel T1 length: 457.35 metres.
- Nilgrar Tunnel T2 length: 1,953.63 metres.
- Bridges: 3 bridges with a total length of 460 metres.
- Vertical Shaft-1 (West): 474.30 metres. Elevation Level: 3481 M

Longest vertical shaft in India

- Vertical Shaft-2 (Central): 367.38 metres. Elevation Level: 3483 M
- Vertical Shaft-3 (East): 213.50 metres. Elevation Level: 3431 M
- 7 Cut-and-cover structures: 2,350 meters
- Snow Gallery: 450 meters

Breakthrough Milestones

- Nilgrar Tunnel T1 Tube 1 breakthrough achieved on 04.11.2021.
- Nilgrar Tunnel T1 Tube 2 breakthrough achieved on 22.11.2021.
- Nilgrar Tunnel T2 Tube 1 breakthrough achieved on 08.03.2022.
- Nilgrar Tunnel T2 Tube 2 breakthrough achieved on 21.04.2022.
- Shaft-3 breakthrough achieved on 15.11.2023.
- Shaft-1 breakthrough achieved on 28.07.2025.
- Main Zojila Tunnel final breakthrough on 09th June 2026

Zojila Tunnel Breakthrough on June 9



► Vikrama Vahini | Ganderbal

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari is set to mark a major milestone in India's infrastructure development by triggering the breakthrough of the strategically important Zojila Tunnel on June 9.

The 13.15-km tunnel, being constructed beneath the Zojila Pass, will provide all-weather road connectivity between Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

The project is expected to significantly reduce travel disruptions caused by heavy snowfall and harsh weather conditions in the region.

Situated at an altitude of over 11,500 feet, the Zojila Pass remains closed for several months during winter, affecting the movement of

civilians, supplies and vehicles. Once completed, the tunnel will ensure year-round access between Srinagar, Sonamarg, Drass, Kargil and Leh.

Apart from improving civilian transportation, the tunnel holds strategic importance by strengthening connectivity to border areas and enhancing logistical efficiency for defence and emergency operations.

The project is regarded as a key component of India's infrastructure expansion in the Himalayan region and is expected to boost tourism, trade and economic activity across Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir.

Senior government officials, engineers and project representatives are expected to attend the breakthrough ceremony on June 9.

TMC Rebel Crisis Deepens

► Vikrama Vahini | New Delhi

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) is facing a growing internal crisis as a rebellion led by opposition leader Ritabrata Banerjee continues to unsettle the party. The dispute, which began in the West Bengal Assembly, has now raised concerns over support within the party's parliamentary ranks as well.

Several rebel MLAs have backed Ritabrata Banerjee's challenge to the current leadership structure, while the party leadership has rejected claims of majority support for the rebel camp. Senior leaders have launched efforts to bring dissidents back into the fold and prevent further divisions.

Reports of unrest among TMC MPs have also triggered speculation about possible defections, although party leaders maintain that the situation remains under control. In response, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has initiated organisational changes and strengthened communication with lawmakers to restore unity.

The developments are being viewed as one of the most significant internal challenges faced by the party in recent years, with its future cohesion now under close watch.

TTD Launches Medical Volunteer Drive

► Vikrama Vahini | Tirumala

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has launched the Srivari Vaidya Seva programme on a pilot basis, inviting medical specialists and healthcare professionals from India and abroad to offer voluntary services at TTD-run hospitals.

The initiative was inaugurated by TTD Executive Officer M. Ravichandra, who also unveiled an online registration platform for participating doctors. The programme aims to bring the expertise of renowned medical professionals to healthcare institutions serving devotees.

Under the scheme, super-speciality doctors can volunteer for three days, while MBBS doctors may serve for seven days. TTD will provide accommodation and food facilities during their service period. Medical experts will render services at institutions including Ashwini Hospital, SVIMS, BIRRD Hospital, Sri Padmavathi Children's Heart Centre and other TTD-affiliated healthcare centres.

Putin Backs India, Slams US Pressure Over Russian Oil Trade

► Vikrama Vahini | Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin has strongly backed India amid ongoing criticism from the United States over New Delhi's purchase of crude oil from Russia, asserting that India will not bow to external pressure and will continue to make sovereign decisions based on national interest.

Putin's remarks come as tensions continue over Washington's efforts to tighten restrictions on Russian oil exports. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has reportedly indicated that temporary exemptions granted to India for oil imports from Russia will be withdrawn soon. Former U.S.

President Donald Trump has also claimed that India had assured him it would stop purchasing Russian oil, intensifying diplomatic debate around the issue.

Speaking at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), Putin praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, crediting it for India's rapid economic growth. He noted that India is among the fastest-growing major economies in the world and plays a key role in the global digital and software sectors.

Putin also highlighted the strengthening ties between India and Russia, stating that bilateral trade could reach \$100 billion in the coming years, further deepening economic cooperation between the two countries.

Hormuz Flashpoint Fuels Regional Tensions



► Vikrama Vahini | Washington/Tehran

Tensions between the United States and Iran escalated on Friday as both sides exchanged military strikes near the strategically important Strait of Hormuz, raising fresh concerns over regional stability and global oil supplies.

According to US Central Command (CENTCOM), Iranian forces launched missiles and drones toward Gulf targets, prompting American forces to intercept most of the projectiles. The US later carried out strikes on Iranian radar and coastal defence installations overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, describing the action as necessary to protect commercial shipping routes.

Iran, however, claimed it had targeted enemy positions in the region and warned that any large-scale US military action could expand the conflict beyond the Gulf. Negotiations between Washington and Tehran also appeared stalled over Iran's demand for the release of billions of dollars in frozen assets. Meanwhile, violence intensified in southern Lebanon, where Israeli strikes reportedly killed more than 20 people despite an existing ceasefire with Hezbollah. The developments have heightened fears of a broader regional conflict as diplomatic efforts continue to face significant obstacles.