













## Budget must aim for inclusive development

THE first Budget of the new government is being prepared in the backdrop of continuing tensions in the geopolitical arena. The Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict show no signs of abating. The domestic economy may be growing in a sustained manner at around 8 per cent, but the outlook may alter, depending on the stability of the external environment. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman must be hoping that global oil prices would remain subdued and that Western economies emerge from recessionary trends that have affected export growth. Keeping international ocean lanes free from strife will also be critical to avoiding an undue rise in costs of inbound or outbound trade. Clearly, the external headwinds have the potential of playing spoilsport with the India growth story. It is, therefore, essential that the Budget keep the focus on strengthening key sectors like infrastructure and services while supporting agriculture and the rural economy in equal measure. On the infrastructure front, policymakers would do well to maintain the steep rise in capital expenditure recorded over the past few years. The 2024-25 Interim Budget scaled down the earlier 30 per cent rise in capex to about 16.9 per cent, but a higher increase is warranted, given the vast infrastructure gap in the country. Though this may not create a huge number of skilled jobs immediately, it will undoubtedly have a long-term impact on employment creation. The fact that the Reserve Bank of India has transferred Rs 2.11 lakh crore to the Central Government exchequer gives it considerable cushion to continue in this direction during the current fiscal as well. The Budget will also need to move towards creating an easier climate for private investment, which has been lagging behind the public sector. While policies already in place — such as the production-linked incentive schemes — will give a boost to manufacturing, procedures need to be further streamlined. The regulatory environment has certainly come a long way since the 1991 economic reforms. But comparisons with the past are no longer relevant. Comparisons now need to be made with other emerging economies. Countries like Vietnam and Indonesia are offering simpler and easier investment regimes, an attraction for multinationals to set up base there. India, in contrast, is not looking so appealing. Domestic investors have to contend with higher capital and logistics costs. Yet, the main hurdle for both domestic and foreign investors remains the plethora of clearances needed to set up new projects. These issues are now largely at the level of the states or even local municipalities. Bringing the ease of doing business down to this level needs to be part of next-generation reforms. An indication that this is already being considered lies in the economic statement issued with the 2024-25 Interim Budget in February. It referred to improving governance at the block, district and village levels. A one-time loan to states, amounting to Rs 75,000 crore, was also offered for growth and development-oriented reforms. The focus areas were identified as health, education, skilling and land acquisition.

The only snag in this plan is that not all states will cooperate despite the availability of loans to carry out reforms. BJP-ruled states are bound to comply with directives from the Centre, but the same response may not be forthcoming from other states. The aim of kickstarting next-generation reforms may, thus, be only partially successful. At the same time, some states, especially in the southern region, already seem to have streamlined regulatory processes. The result is that investors are making a beeline for them. For instance, tech giants like Apple and Microsoft are locating new projects primarily in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Policies adopted by these states need to be studied and replicated in others. In this context, budgetary provisions need to be made for the critical segment of education and skilling. While job creation is bound to be high on the government agenda, the fact is that many sectors are facing a shortage of skilled personnel. There is also a mismatch between the type of education and the specific skills needed by the industry. Long-term policy prescriptions should be formulated to resolve this issue but, in the short run, the upcoming Budget can provide adequate allocations for skilling institutes. In addition, education needs to be given greater attention.

## India needs a strategic approach to hybrid warfare

Leveraging its inherent strengths, India can put adversaries at a disadvantage and fortify its strategic stance against hybrid threats.

IN the evolving landscape of modern warfare, India must adapt to the concept of hybrid warfare to strengthen its defence and deterrence strategies. Hybrid warfare, characterised by a blend of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, cyberattacks and other unconventional methods, requires a nuanced and resilient approach to effectively counter the multifaceted threats from its adversaries. According to NATO, hybrid threats combine military and non-military as well as covert and overt means, including disinformation, economic pressure, deployment of irregular armed groups and the use of regular forces. "Hybrid methods are used to blur the lines between war and peace, and attempt to sow doubt in the minds of target populations. They aim to destabilise and undermine societies... the speed, scale and intensity of hybrid threats have increased in recent years," observes the US-led alliance. The cornerstone of India's strategy should be resilience. Leveraging its inherent strengths, India can put adversaries at a disadvantage and fortify its strategic stance against hybrid threats. Eschewing the traditionally rigid distinctions between conventional and irregular warfare, India's approach should recognise the continuum of conflict, integrating various methods and modes of warfare.

India's western border with Pakistan is a significant area of concern. Pakistan has been accused of engaging in hybrid warfare tactics, including sabotage, terrorism and cyberattacks, particularly in regions like Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. Recent incidents underscore the gravity of the threat. In a deadly encounter in Doda, four Army soldiers, including a Captain, were killed earlier this week, bringing the total number of personnel killed in the region to 48 over the past 32 months. The joint operation by the Army and the Jammu and Kashmir Police highlights the persistent danger of cross-border terrorism. The Army has claimed that a number of measures have been instituted to enhance synergy between various agencies, such as joint training with the J&K Police and Central Armed

Police Forces and "a robust intelligence-sharing mechanism between the Army, the police and other intelligence agencies". The rise of narco-terrorism and the use of drones for cross-border insurgency reflects the evolving nature of this hybrid conflict. Pakistan's support for proxy forces, terrorist organisations and drug cartels poses a severe threat to India's security. The blending of advanced military capabilities with irregular tactics has been a persistent issue, necessitating preparedness to



deflect these 'wars in the shadows' while enhancing collective defence capabilities. On the northern front, India's relations with China present a different set of challenges. China's strategy includes psychological, political and legal tactics — collectively known as the 'three warfares' — to achieve its geopolitical goals. The Chinese investment in the United Front Work Department to influence the Chinese diaspora and foreign communities, along with the use of front organisations, exemplifies its hybrid warfare strategy. Beijing's increasing use of commercial security operations to protect its interests abroad, coupled with its blurred tactics and quasi-military forces in the maritime domain, underscores its innovative approach to hybrid conflicts. The likelihood of indirect and proxy Chinese intervention is a growing concern, particularly as

China expands its influence across Asia and beyond. The insurgency landscape within India also demands attention. The spate of terror attacks in the Jammu region and the continued unrest in Manipur highlight the internal challenges. Additionally, the Naxal insurgency in central India remains a significant threat, with numerous attacks on security forces and civilians. In response to the rising terror incidents, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reviewed the security situation, discussing counter-terrorism efforts with top officials. The situation in Punjab is also concerning, with increased activities of narco-terrorism and drone infiltrations from Pakistan necessitating a robust response.

To effectively counter these hybrid threats, India must integrate hybrid warfare into its defence strategies. This involves overcoming natural disadvantages and leveraging India's strengths, interests and values. India's strategic approach should emphasise resilience, with border guarding forces and Army personnel equipped to handle advanced technologies and hybrid threats. The ongoing conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur and other regions underscore the need for a robust and adaptive defence strategy. India must be prepared to counter both direct and indirect threats from Pakistan and China, utilising a comprehensive approach that includes conventional military capabilities, irregular tactics and cyber defence.

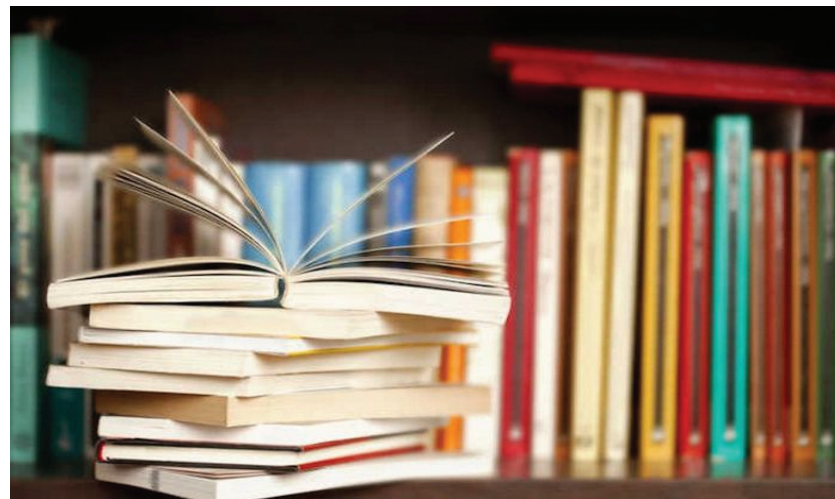
As India navigates the complex landscape of hybrid warfare, it is crucial to adopt a flexible strategy. By integrating hybrid warfare into its defence framework, leveraging its strengths, and preparing for the diverse threats from Pakistan, China and internal insurgencies, India can enhance its security and maintain stability in the region. This strategic shift, while challenging, is essential for safeguarding India's national interests and ensuring its sovereignty in an increasingly hybrid conflict environment.

## Educational deadlock

Punjab, Centre must resolve differences

THE Punjab education sector has been caught in the crosshairs of the ongoing political feud between the Bhagwant Mann-led AAP government in Punjab and the BJP-led regime at the Centre. The recent setbacks in both higher and school education systems underscore the urgent need for a resolution to safeguard the future of students and the welfare of teachers and other staff. A significant blow was dealt recently when the President of India returned the Punjab Universities Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023. This Bill, passed during a special Assembly session in June last year, sought to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as the Chancellor of state-run universities. The President's refusal to clear the Bill has left the administrative structure of Punjab's higher education in limbo.

Compounding this issue is the Centre withholding Punjab's share of over Rs 500 crore under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. This crucial funding, meant for



upgrading the public school infrastructure, has been halted because of the state's withdrawal from the PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) scheme. Punjab says

that it has done so as it already has its own comparable schemes, like 'Schools of Eminence', 'Schools of Brilliance' and 'Schools of Happiness', which would be linked with the National Education Policy. The impasse has stalled vital upgrade of school infrastructure, impacting the quality of education. The Centre must ensure a fair distribution of funds. The state and Central governments need to resolve these disputes on priority. It is imperative that educational institutions receive the necessary support and resources to operate effectively, fostering a stable and conducive learning environment. The ongoing political tussle threatens to undermine the state's long-term developmental goals, underscoring the need for a more collaborative and less adversarial approach to governance.

## Address ethical concerns to optimise AI use

India's unique demographic and socioeconomic context provides a fertile ground for AI applications.

INDIA is at a pivotal juncture in its technological evolution, with artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly advancing in sectors like healthcare, agriculture, education and finance. Government initiatives such as the National Strategy for AI (NSAI) and NITI Aayog's efforts highlight India's ambition to be a global AI leader. The 'AI For All' initiative aims to democratise AI, ensuring inclusive growth and accessibility for all citizens. Collaborative efforts between government bodies and private sector companies are fostering a robust environment for AI innovation and application. A robust policy framework is crucial for sustainable AI development. The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, emphasises safeguarding citizens' data, addressing surveillance, data misuse and ethical AI use. Given AI systems' handling of vast personal data, stringent data protection laws are central to ensuring secure data handling and prevent breaches. Ethical AI development must align with guidelines promoting fairness, transparency, accountability and bias avoidance. Regulatory sandboxes can facilitate supervised testing of AI solutions by startups and researchers, encouraging innovation while upholding ethical standards. Addressing algorithmic bias is essential to ensuring fairness and inclusivity in AI applications. Frameworks for ethical AI use that promote fairness, accountability and transparency can build public trust. It involves educating people about AI's benefits and potential risks.

India faces challenges pertaining to technological infrastructure, data availability and a skilled workforce. These challenges present opportunities for upskilling and education initiatives to build AI expertise. Investment in AI infrastructure, like data centres, cloud computing and high-speed Internet, is crucial. Encouraging AI research through grants,

scholarships and collaborations between academia and industry can drive innovation. Building public trust in AI involves transparent communication about its benefits and risks and addressing fears of job displacement due to AI automation. Global collaborations, learning from the EU's AI strategy and OECD AI Principles enhance India's AI policies. Leveraging AI boosts India's global tech competitiveness. A balanced regulatory approach fosters innovation aligned with public interest and ethics. Incentives for AI research, development and startup investments nurture a vibrant innovation ecosystem, supporting AI-driven startups and SMEs (small and medium enterprises).

AI can tackle major societal challenges. In healthcare, it enables early diagnosis, personalised treatment and efficient delivery, improving outcomes. In education, AI-driven tools offer personalised learning and adaptive technologies, revolutionising the landscape. For environmental sustainability, AI helps monitor resources, predict natural disasters and mitigate the impacts of climate change, optimising energy, agriculture and waste management for more sustainable practices.

In agriculture, AI-driven precision farming boosts productivity, optimises resources and supports farmers with predictive analytics. In healthcare, AI improves diagnostics and treatment recommendations. Public-private partnerships with tech giants like Google, Microsoft and IBM foster AI research, training and capacity-building, keeping India at the forefront of AI innovation.

India is actively advancing AI through initiatives like the NSAI by NITI Aayog, promoting AI research, development and deployment in healthcare,



agriculture, education, smart cities and infrastructure. The 'AI For All' initiative aims to democratise AI, enhancing literacy and capacity-building. Practical applications, such as the Aarogya Setu for Covid-19 contact tracing and health updates, highlight AI's real-world impact.

A balanced AI policy involves creating a regulatory environment that fosters innovation while protecting the public interest. Developing and enforcing ethical standards for AI development and deployment are crucial. Ensuring AI systems are designed with fairness, accountability and transparency is essential to building public trust. Comprehensive data protection laws are critical to safeguarding personal information and promoting best practices for data security and privacy, preventing data breaches and misuse and ensuring responsible AI use. Inclusive and participatory policy-making is essential

for effective AI policies. India's AI landscape is grounded in substantial data and real-world examples, highlighting its transformative potential. For instance, AI-driven initiatives like the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission aim to integrate digital health infrastructure with AI capabilities to improve patient outcomes and streamline healthcare services. Accenture predicts that AI could add \$957 billion to India's economy by 2035, underscoring the economic imperative of robust AI integration. India's unique demographic and socioeconomic context provides a fertile ground for AI applications.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research collaborates with IBM to use AI for crop yield prediction, pest control and weather forecasting, significantly aiding farmers in the decision-making process. AI-driven precision farming techniques, as per the Ministry of Agriculture, can increase crop yields by up to 30 per cent, showcasing the tangible benefits of AI adoption in this sector.

In the field of education, AI-powered platforms like Vedantu have revolutionised learning by providing personalised education experiences. These platforms leverage AI algorithms to tailor educational content to individual learning styles and paces, improving student engagement and performance. The market size of Indian online education, driven by AI advancements, crossed \$5 billion in 2023, highlighting rapid sector expansion.

## AB Group to enter jewellery business next week

**NEW DELHI.** Billionaire Kumar Mangalam Birla-led Aditya Birla Group is all set to enter the branded jewellery market with the launch of Novel Jewels on July 26, almost a year after it first announced its intention to foray into this consumer-facing business. This would be Birla's second big debut into a new vertical after it entered the paint business with Birla Opus earlier in March. Birla will now be competing in a market that has a strong presence of other conglomerates such as Tata Group-owned Tanishq and Reliance Jewels. The other big players in the organized market are Kalyan Jewellers, Malabar Gold, Joyalukkas Jewellers and Senco Gold. In June 2023, the Group had announced its entry into the branded jewellery retail business. Backed by an investment of Rs. 5,000 crores, this new venture is called 'Novel Jewels'. Novel has aims to build large exclusive jewellery stores featuring in-house jewellery brands across India. In the paint business, Birla had committed an investment of Rs 10,000 at the time of launch. Currently, the jewellery industry stands as one of the largest in India, contributing 7% to the nation's GDP. Aditya Birla Group had earlier said that with India's jewellery industry projected to reach \$100 billion by 2027, this presents an opportunity for them to be 'big in the life' of consumers and transform the way India purchases its fashionable jewellery. For decades, India's jewellery landscape has been dominated by the unorganised sector, primarily consisting of local standalone jewellery stores. However, this trend is undergoing a radical shift in favour of national branded jewellery chains. From constituting a mere 5% of the jewellery market in 2005, branded players now make up an impressive 35% of the market.

## Government to establish PMU to oversee BSNL's 4G rollout

**NEW DELHI.** Telecom minister Jyotiraditya Scindia announced on Thursday that the government is establishing a project monitoring unit (PMU) to oversee 4G rollout of state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL).

Speaking on the sidelines of the India Mobile Congress and WTSA, the minister assured that he would monitor the progress on a daily basis. "I'm not going to give you the targets today; it's all in my head. Today, all I can commit to you is that, along with Tejas, BSNL, and C-Dot, and with all our players together, we are forming a Project Management Unit (PMU).

This PMU will not set monthly targets or weekly targets. I have mandated them to set daily targets, and those



daily targets will be monitored by myself and the secretary. So, I will commit to you that, at the earliest, and when I have that project chart ready, I'll be more than happy to share it with you," he said.

In 2023, BSNL cleared a contract of Rs 24,500 crore to a consortium led by TCS, including C-DOT and Tejas Networks, to provide 4G equipment for 100,000 new telecom towers. The company has activated 3,500 4G base transceiver stations (BTS) and will soon launch commercial 4G services.

## Big blow to crypto industry as WazirX falls victim to \$235 million hack

**BENGALURU.** WazirX, which is the country's largest cryptocurrency exchange by volume, on Thursday paused INR and crypto withdrawals temporarily as it suffered a security breach. According to Web3 security firm Cyvers, \$234.9 million of funds have been moved to a new address. WazirX said it is aware that one of its multi-sig wallets has experienced a security breach. "Our team is actively investigating the incident," the crypto exchange said. Crypto storage provider Liminal Custody in a statement said its preliminary investigations show that one of the self-custody multi-sig smart contract wallets created outside of the Liminal ecosystem has been compromised.

"We can confirm that Liminal's platform is not breached and Liminal's infrastructure, wallets and assets continue to remain safe. It is also pertinent to note that all WazirX wallets created on the Liminal platform continue to remain secure and protected. Meanwhile, all the malicious transactions to the attacker's addresses have occurred from outside of the Liminal platform," the storage provider said. Users have now questioned the safety of their funds on the exchange. This hack is a big blow to the country's crypto industry, which started showing signs of recovery only in recent times. "Even though WazirX is our competitor in the Indian market, I am sad to know about the incident. It's not good news for the Indian web3 ecosystem," said Neeraj Khandelwal, co-founder, CoinDCX. Krishnendu Chatterjee, co-founder and CEO of A2Z Crypto, said, the Indian government should urgently look into regulating crypto, by separating the role of exchanges/VDA from custodians. "If most of the funds were kept under custody (with proper insurance), this kind of scenario might be averted as insurance providers will have covered for any hacks. Only with proper regulation, can investor protection be guaranteed," he said. Edul Patel, CEO of Mudrex, pointed out this incident underscores the importance of continuous monitoring and robust compliance frameworks to protect investors and ensure the integrity of the crypto ecosystem.

As of June 10, 2024, at 6:30 PM, WazirX's total holdings stood at Rs 4,203.88 crore, which is a 79% surge compared to January 2023. WazirX, which has over 16 million users, released Proof of Reserves for June 2024 recently and said it is facilitating transactions across over 350 cryptocurrencies and 700 market pairs.

# Economists ask FM to review inflation targeting

**The Economists believe that the government must re-examine and, if necessary, relax the inflation targeting approach to maintain interest rates at moderate levels.**

**NEW DELHI.** Ahead of the Union Budget 2024 announcement, it is learnt that economists have suggested finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to revisit the inflation targeting by the Reserve Bank of India. The Economists believe that the government must re-examine and, if necessary, relax the inflation targeting approach to maintain interest rates at moderate levels.

According to experts, the 4% (+-2) inflation target mandated to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is difficult to achieve and it also keeps interest rates higher.



"There might be some announcement on inflation targeting on July 23. A group of economists have suggested Sitharaman to revisit inflation targeting. There seems to be unanimity among those economists," one of the sources told TNIE.

As per experts, increasing the inflation target from 4% to 6% can benefit common people by lowering borrowing costs and boosting spending. For investors, it may lead to asset value growth and profit opportunities.

"The central government assigns the

inflation target that the RBI has to pursue. The inflation targeting regime, having been in operation for nearly a decade, probably needs a re-evaluation, especially after continued high interest rates due to inflation above 4%," said Charan Singh, founder and CEO of EGROW Foundation.

"The last 30-year average shows the inflation generally hovers between 5.5% and 6.5%. India has a potential to grow 10% but persistent high rates could be detrimental to growth and employment

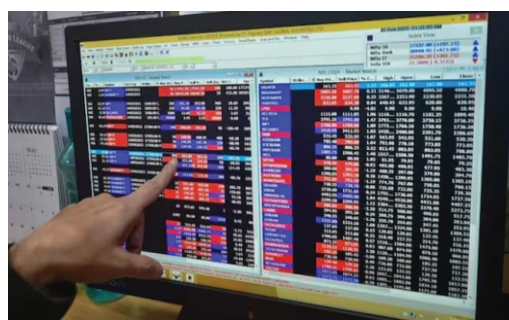
generation. Hence, the need to re-assess the efficacy of the existing target of 4+/-2%," Singh argued. As per former Chief Statistician of India, TCA Anant, it is a valid consideration for the government to reassess the legislative mandate established in 2016 regarding inflation targeting and contemplate adjusting target to encompass both Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and Consumer Price Index (CPI). Dr Ashwani Mahajan, an economics professor and national co-convenor of Swadeshi Jagran Manch, says there has been a major disparity in recent years between the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and WPI, with CPI consistently higher than WPI. "Despite WPI remaining in the negative zone in the last financial year while CPI stayed elevated, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) adhered to CPI-focused inflation targeting as per its mandate. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has maintained the repo rate at 6.5% since January 2023, even with WPI showing lower or negative figures," he argues. Meanwhile, Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist at Bank of Baroda said, based on average inflation in the past, 5% looks a fair number.

## Yes Bank, Suzlon, IRCTC, Tata Power, ITC: Check performance of these retail favourites

**UPDATED** Retail favourite stocks such as Yes Bank Ltd, Tata Power Ltd, Suzlon Energy Ltd, Vodafone Idea Ltd, Jio Financial Services Ltd (JFS), and ITC Ltd have delivered mixed returns in July ahead of the Union Budget 2024.

Among the 20 BSE500 stocks with the highest number of individual investors (up to Rs 2 lakh), half outperformed the Sensex's 2.7% rise this month, while the other half underperformed, with seven stocks delivering negative returns, reported Business Today.

Yes Bank, with the highest number of retail investors as of June 30 (62.11 lakh), delivered an 8.69% return in July. With 46.46 lakh retail investors as of March 31, Tata Steel saw its shares fall by 4.39% this month. Vodafone Idea Ltd, which had 46.41 lakh investors as of June 30, fell by 9%



despite recent tariff hikes by telecom operators, including VIL.

Tata Motors, with 45.30 lakh retail investors, rose by 3.6% this month, beating the Sensex's return. Indian Railway Finance Corporation Ltd (IRCTC) climbed 18% in July.

According to Fisdor Research, the Budget may include announcements aimed at expanding and modernising railway infrastructure, such as new lines, station redevelopment, and the

introduction of modern trains, potentially benefiting IRCTC. Tata Power, a retail favourite, fell by 2.4%, while Suzlon Energy climbed 4.7%. JFS declined by 6% in July. JM Financial anticipates that the Budget may include enhanced incentives for renewable energy, given the 500 GW target by 2030, which could benefit Tata Power and Suzlon Energy. JFS's decline was attributed to a 5.81% year-on-year dip in its consolidated profit for the June quarter, at Rs 312.63 crore. ITC delivered a solid 10% return amid expectations that there would be no changes to cigarette/tobacco-related taxes in the Budget. Prabhudas Lilladher (PL) increased its weight behind ITC by 50 basis points, anticipating a benign cigarette taxation environment, revival in FMCG and paperboard profitability from the second half of FY25, and value unlocking from the hotel demerger.

## Infosys plans to hire 15,000-20,000 freshers in FY25

**NEW DELHI.** Infosys chief financial officer (CFO), Jayesh Sanghrajka, during the press briefing for the announcement of Q1 results, said that the IT firm is looking to hire 15,000-20,000 freshers for FY25. "We are looking to hire 15,000-20,000 freshers this year depending on how we see the growth," said Sanghrajka.

He said that the IT giant has moved to an agile hiring base in the last few quarters. "We hire freshers from on and off the campus. This quarter we had a 2000 persons net decline, which was lower than the previous quarters. Our utilisation is already at 85 percent, so we have little headroom now left. As we start seeing growth we will look at hiring," said the Infosys CFO. The announcement from Infosys to hire freshers offers hope to recent and soon-to-be college graduates after a year of declining IT job opportunities. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) plans to hire approximately 40,000 new graduates in FY25, having already onboarded about 11,000 trainees in Q1.

In Q1, Infosys saw a reduction in its workforce by 1,908, marking the sixth straight quarter of headcount decline. In contrast, TCS added a net total of 5,452 employees. However, the total headcount for TCS fell by 1,759 compared to the March period. HCLTech also experienced a sequential decline, with a reduction of 8,080 employees in Q1 FY25. LTIMindtree stood out

## Major banks like SBI, Axis Bank conduct UPI credit line trial: NPCI Chairman

**A UPI credit line is essentially a pre-approved loan available to customers who have a bank account linked to their UPI account.**

**NEW DELHI.** Some of the banks, including ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, State Bank of India (SBI), and Punjab National Bank, have already begun utilizing the UPI credit line product on a pilot basis, Ajay Kumar Chaudhary, Chairman of the National Payments Corporation of India said Thursday on the sidelines of an event organised by trade body ASSOCHAM. Many more banks are also in the process of implementing this, as per Chaudhary. "UPI credit line is currently primarily being offered by banks to individuals. There

is significant excitement surrounding the UPI credit line, with notable growth in this area. NPCI is actively working to raise awareness



about this," Chaudhary stated. A UPI credit line is essentially a pre-approved loan available to customers who have a bank account linked to their UPI account. This credit facility may offer various products from different banks participating in the UPI platform. It is more or less like a credit card payment, under which, a

user can make the repayment of a loan with interest at a later date. To get this facility, the users of UPI will have to apply to the banks. There are many

benefits of borrowing through UPI credit lines, as it is more flexible and there is no need to carry a physical card. In addition to this, there is also no requirement for POS or swipe machines to facilitate credit transactions. Regarding the increasing financial frauds, Chaudhary highlighted that significant efforts are underway to combat and prevent such fraudulent activities. "Multiple work is being done by RBI as well as other regulators on fraud detection side. NPCI is also working on payment side to leverage AI/ML to facilitate understanding of pattern and help banks in identification of frauds," he stated.



as an exception, adding about 284 employees sequentially in Q1. Shares of Infosys surged by 5% to a new all-time high of Rs 1,843 on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) after its Q1 results beat market expectations. Several brokerages have adjusted their target prices for the stock upward. The Bengaluru-based IT giant reported a consolidated Profit After Tax (PAT) of Rs 6,368 crore for the quarter ending June 30, 2024, reflecting a 7% year-on-year increase. It also increased its revenue guidance for FY25.

## Paytm Q1 results: Net loss widens to Rs 839 crore, revenue falls 36%

**Paytm Q1 results: The company's net loss widened to Rs 839 crore and its revenue fell 36% year-on-year to Rs 1,502 crore.**

**New Delhi.** Financial services firm One 97 Communications, which operates payments and financial services distribution company Paytm, reported a significant increase in its consolidated loss for the June quarter, rising to Rs 838.9 crore compared to Rs 357 crore in the same quarter of the previous financial year. Paytm's Q1 revenue also saw a decline, falling to Rs 1,502 crore, down 36% year-on-year from Rs 2,342 crore in Q1 FY24. The company said that the recent disruptions it faced was behind its



weak performance in the first quarter of FY25. The company assured that revenue and profitability will improve, with growth in merchant payment operating metrics including GMV, accelerated merchant reactivation and growing merchant base, along with continued focus on cost optimisation. Paytm announced its intention to focus on market leadership through merchant payment innovations, including the

introduction of new devices and the aggregation of various merchant discount rate (MDR)-bearing payment instruments. The company also plans to allocate additional resources to its insurance and mutual fund distribution segments, which present significant monetization opportunities. Paytm spokesperson said, "We are seeing a rebound in our merchant operating metrics and stability in our consumer

base, demonstrating our path to recovery. This also indicates the continued confidence of our merchant partners and consumers on our platform, and we are grateful for the trust of our stakeholders."

"With Q1 illustrating the full impact of recent disruptions, we are confident in our trajectory towards sustained growth going forward," the spokesperson added.

In a regulatory filing, Paytm said, "In Q1 FY 2025, the company reported a revenue of Rs 1,502 crore and EBITDA before ESOP of Rs (545) crore, which is in line with guidance provided. We expect revenue and profitability to improve going forward." The company also shared details about its aim to save Rs 400-500 crore annually on employee costs. "As part of our goal to save Rs 400-500 crore annually on employee costs, we have achieved a 9% reduction QoQ. However, excluding employee costs, our indirect costs have increased due to certain one-time expenses (details in the following sections). We expect these costs to reduce in the coming quarters. We remain committed to be disciplined around our overall cost structure," the company said.



# Global IT outage hits flight ops in India, airlines urge fliers to reach early

**A disruption in Microsoft's cloud services hit booking and check-in services of several airlines, including IndiGo, Akasa Airlines and SpiceJet.**

**New Delhi:** A major disruption in Microsoft's cloud services led to widespread flight delays in India on Friday, with Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Pune and Mumbai airports facing the maximum brunt. Not only airlines, businesses, including banks, telecom companies, TV and radio broadcasters were affected after blue screen of death error screens were seen on Windows workstations across the globe. The outage hit booking and check-in services of several airlines, including Air India, IndiGo, Akasa Airlines and SpiceJet. Several airlines resorted to manual check-in and boarding processes at the airports and requested passengers to reach the airport early. While Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport reported an average delay of 51 minutes, Delhi's IGI Airport saw its services being delayed by nearly 40 minutes. Air India said its systems were "impacted temporarily"



due to the Microsoft outage resulting in delays. Budget airline SpiceJet said it was facing a technical issue in providing updates on flights. "Our team is actively working to resolve this issue," the airline posted on X. Akasa Airlines said some of its online services would be temporarily unavailable at the Mumbai and Delhi airports. "Due to infrastructure issues with our service

provider, some of our online services, including booking, check-in and manage booking services will be temporarily unavailable," it said. IndiGo also warned passengers of experiencing slower check-ins and longer queues. "Our systems across the network are impacted by an ongoing issue with Microsoft Azure, which has resulted in increased wait times at our contact centres and airports," IndiGo tweeted. Sources said the Ministry of Civil Aviation has instructed airlines to inform passengers via SMS about check-in delays or cancellation of flights. The DGCA, however, said no decision on grounding of flights have been taken. The airport authorities are working on an on-ground management plan due to the influx of passengers. **LONG QUEUES, ANGRY PASSENGERS AT AIRPORTS** The incident left several passengers in the

lurch, with some complaining that they were not able to check in their luggage for the past one hour. "Indigo servers are down. For the past hour, no one has been able to check in baggage or get boarding passes at Bangalore terminal 1," one passenger posted on X. A stranded passenger at Goa airport said he received a boarding pass after standing in queue for two hours. "My flight was from Goa to Delhi and there was a delay due to server issues. They gave us a boarding pass, made by hand, with our names spelt wrong," he told PTI. Several passengers took to social media to post images of handwritten boarding passes. Microsoft reported ongoing problems with the Azure cloud and Microsoft 365 services. The outage also impacted flights around the world, especially the United States. Frontier Airlines grounded flights for over two hours due to issues with Microsoft's services. It resumed operations later. US' Allegiant Air also faced disruptions as the airline reported issues with bookings.

## After UP, Haridwar Police orders eatery owners to display names for Kanwar Yatra

**New Delhi:** Hours after the Uttar Pradesh government on Friday ordered all eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route to display the names of their owners, the Haridwar Police too has passed a similar order. In an order, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Haridwar said it was mandatory for all shopkeepers to put their names outside their shops during the Kanwar Yatra. "All hotel and dhaba owners are ordered to display their name, QR code, and mobile numbers outside their outlets. Action would be taken against violators, and their outlets



would be removed," the order by SSP, Pramod Singh Dopal, read.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday ordered all eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route to display the names of their owners. The decision comes a day after the Uttar Pradesh Police in Muzaffarnagar revoked its orders, making it "voluntary" for eateries to display the owners' names, following backlash from the Opposition parties. As per the directive, every food shop or cart owner will have to put the owner's name on the board. The Chief Minister stated that the decision had been taken to preserve the sanctity of Kanwar pilgrims.

## Government Lists 6 New Bills For Upcoming Parliament Session. Details Here

**New Delhi:** The Centre has listed six new bills for introduction, including the one which seeks to replace the 90-year-old Aircraft Act, to provide enabling provisions for ease of doing business in the aviation sector, in the upcoming Parliament session beginning Monday, besides the Finance Bill, the government has also listed 'The Disaster



Management (Amendment) Bill' for introduction, consideration and passing. The proposed legislation aims to bring more clarity and convergence in the roles of different organisations working in the field of disaster management, a Lok Sabha bulletin issued Thursday said.

The Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidheyak, 2024 seeks to replace the Aircraft Act of 1934 to provide enabling provisions for ease of doing business in the civil aviation sector. The session beginning July 22 will conclude on August 12. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget on Tuesday, July 23. Other bills listed for introduction and passage during the session are the Boilers Bill to replace the pre-Independence era law, the Coffee (Promotion and Development) Bill and the Rubber (Promotion and Development) Bill. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has also constituted the Business Advisory Committee (BAC), which decides the parliamentary agenda. The committee chaired by the Speaker has Sudip Bandyopadhyay (TMC), P P Chaudhary (BJP), Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu (TDP), Nishikant Dubey (BJP), Gaurav Gogoi (Congress), Sanjay Jaiswal (BJP), Dilleshwar Kamait (JD-U), Bhartruhari Mahtab (BJP), Dayanidhi Maran (DMK), Baijyant Panda (BJP), Arvind Sawant (Shiv Sena-UBT), Kodikunnil Suresh (Congress), Anurag Thakur (BJP) and Lalji Verma (SP) as members.

## Tantrik in Odisha pierces woman's head with 18 needles for treatment, arrested

**New Delhi:** A tantrik in Odisha's Balangir district was arrested on charges of piercing multiple needles into the head of a 19-year-old woman, on the pretext of treating her for a medical condition. The woman was admitted to a hospital after the incident came to light. According to the details, the woman, along with her parents, had approached the tantrik to get herself cured.

The woman had been suffering from a health condition for the past four years. Despite seeking medical treatment, her

condition could not be improved, prompting her family to seek help from a tantrik. During one of the sessions,



the accused tantrik, identified as Santosh Rana, took the woman inside a room. He brought her out after an hour.

Later, the woman's parents detected needles inside her head after noticing her continued discomfort. The woman's father said he removed eight needles inside the head of her daughter.

She was then taken to a hospital, where a CT scan was performed, which revealed the woman had 10 more needles pierced in her head. The woman's father said she had fallen unconscious during the tantrik's session and hence did not know about the piercings. A complaint in this regard was received by the police, after which the tantrik was arrested. More investigations into the case were underway.

## "Fashion Parade Going On?" Chief Justice Pulls Up Lawyer Without Neckband

**New Delhi:** Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud today gave a dressing down to a lawyer for turning up in the courtroom without his band. Neckbands are a part of lawyers' attire, along with their black coats. The advocate raised a matter related to a demolition case and said it was "urgent". The Chief Justice of India, however, was unimpressed by his attire. "Send an email. But where is your band? Is this some fashion parade going on?" he asked, Bar and Bench reported. When the advocate said he was "in a rush", the Chief Justice replied sternly. "Sorry, cannot hear if you are not in proper attire." The Bar Council of India rules lay down the dress code for advocates appearing in court. "Advocates appearing in the Supreme Court, High Courts, Subordinate Courts, Tribunals or Authorities shall

wear the following as part of their dress, which shall be sober and dignified"

1. ADVOCATES: A black buttoned up coat, chapkan, achkan, black sherwani



and white bands with Advocates' Gowns. (b) A black open breast coat, white shirt, white collar, stiff or soft, and white bands with Advocates' Gowns. In either case wear long

trousers (white, black striped or grey) Dhoti excluding jeans. Provided further that in courts other than the Supreme Court, High Courts, District Courts, Sessions Courts or City Civil Courts, a black tie may be worn instead of bands," it says.

The rules also lay down a dress code for women advocates: (a) Black full sleeve jacket or blouse, white collar stiff or soft, with white bands and Advocates' Gowns. White blouse, with or without collar, with white bands and with a black open breast coat. Or (b) sarees or long skirts (white or black or any mellow or subdued colour without any print or design) or flare (white, black or black striped or grey) or Punjabi dress Churidar Kurta or Salwar-Kurta with or without dupatta (white or black) or traditional dress with black coat and bands.

## Massive Microsoft outage hits flights, banks, stock exchanges, broadcasters

**New Delhi:** A massive Microsoft outage unleashed havoc on computer systems across the world, grounding flights and crippling banks, stock exchanges, payment systems and emergency services. Microsoft, in a tweet, said that "Multiple services are continuing to see improvements in availability as our mitigation actions progress". The outage is possibly due to the failure of CrowdStrike Falcon, a cybersecurity platform that provides security solutions for Microsoft Windows. The disruptions continued hours after Microsoft said it was fixing the issue. In India, the outage caused widespread disruptions in flight operations, payment systems, and trading, among other services. Flight delays were reported across airports, leading to long queues. The outage affected booking and check-in services for several airlines, including IndiGo, Akasa Airlines, and SpiceJet. The central government, taking cognisance of



the cyber outage, stated that it is in discussions with Microsoft to resolve the issue. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is likely to issue an advisory on the outage.

### MAJOR AIRLINE DISRUPTIONS

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines announced that the outage made it "impossible" to handle flights. "KLM has also been affected by the global computer outage, making it impossible to handle flights. ... We are working hard to resolve the problem. For

now, we are forced to suspend most of the operation," the airline said. Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, one of Europe's busiest hubs, was affected by the global outage. "The outage has an impact on flights flying from and to Schiphol," a spokesperson said. rlin Airport halted all flights due to a technical fault. The airport operator said in a post on social media that check-ins were delayed due to the error. In the US, several major airlines, including American Airlines, Delta, and United, reportedly grounded all flights.

Authorities in Spain reported a "computer incident" at all its airports, while Ryanair, Europe's largest airline by passenger numbers, warned passengers of potential disruptions that would affect "all airlines operating across the network". Flyers at Edinburgh Airport in Britain were unable to use automated boarding pass scanners, and monitors at security displayed a message saying "server offline." Turkish Airlines was also experiencing problems

with ticketing, check-in, and reservation processes due to a global technical issue in information systems.

### STOCK EXCHANGES HIT

Operations of stock exchanges in various countries were disrupted by the outage. Services at the London Stock Exchange were affected. Several brokerage firms also faced technical outages, including Nuvama, Edelweiss, and Motilal Oswal. Traders reported disruptions in their operations in India.

### NEWS BROADCASTERS DOWN

The outage also hit news services across the globe. Britain's Sky News, one of the country's major television news channels, said they were unable to broadcast. "Sky News have not been able to broadcast live TV this morning, currently telling viewers that we apologise for the interruption," the broadcaster's executive chairman David Rhodes said on X. News agency Associated Press also faced service disruption in news delivery.

## Dibrugarh Express derailment: Special train leaves for Assam, toll rises to 4

**New Delhi:** Rescue operations at the site near Uttar Pradesh's Gonda where eight coaches of the Chandigarh-Dibrugarh Express train derailed have been completed, and a special train left for Assam with 600 passengers. At least four passengers were killed and over 30 were injured after the train derailed between Motiganj and Jhilahi railway stations on Thursday. Soon after the derailment of the train, ambulances and medical teams were rushed to the spot even as bad weather hindered the rescue operations for a while.

The driver claimed he heard the "sound of a blast" before the derailment, news agency PTI reported while citing an official. The deceased has been identified as Saroj Kumar Singh (31), a resident of Araria in Bihar, Rahul (38) from Chandigarh, while the two are unidentified people.

### Top points on Chandigarh-Dibrugarh Express derailment

A special train with 600 passengers of the Chandigarh-Dibrugarh Express, which derailed on Thursday, has left for Assam, an official told news agency PTI. The train departed from Mankapur, Uttar Pradesh.

The Centre has announced an ex-gratia of Rs 10 lakh for the family of the deceased, Rs 2.5 lakh for those who suffered grievous injuries, and Rs 50,000 for those with minor injuries. In the aftermath of the derailment, the Railways Ministry has initiated a high-level probe into the incident. Chief Public Relations Officer, North Eastern Railway, Pankaj Singh, stated that the probe would verify the driver's claims that a minor explosion occurred before the derailment. A commissioner of railway safety has also been ordered to look into the matter.

Following the derailment, the Congress on Thursday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to take responsibility for the "significant lapses". It also urged the rapid installation of the Kavach anti-collision system on all railway routes.

After the incident, passengers came out of the emergency windows and doors of the sleeper coaches. In the AC coaches, passengers broke the window panes and pulled out those injured or stuck. The passengers had to wade through knee-deep water in the fields on either side of the track to reach the nearby approach road.

## NEWS BOX

## Had God on my side: Donald Trump recounts assassination bid in first speech

**World** Former United States President Donald Trump took centre stage at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee. While accepting the Republican Party's presidential nomination, he stated, "Tonight, with faith and devotion, I proudly accept your nomination for President of the United States." Recalling the assassination attempt, Donald Trump stated that he survived it by divine intervention. "I had God on my side," he stated. It was Donald Trump's first speech since 20-year-old Thomas Mathew Crooks took a shot at him, wounding one of his ears, during a rally last weekend. "I am not supposed to be here tonight — not supposed to be here," Donald Trump stated, while the crowd roared back. "Yes, you are." As he walks to the podium to deliver his acceptance speech, "God Bless the USA," a live patriotic song performed by Lee Greenwood fills the air, gradually building the intensity. The 78-year-old Republican leader stated that his supporters raised 6.3 million US dollars for the victims of the shooting incident in Pennsylvania. Trump also observed a moment of silence for Corey Comperatore, a 50-year-old firefighter and father of two, who died in the shooting at the Pennsylvania rally. The usually combative president adopted an unusually sombre, almost whispering tone as he cautioned against demonising political opponents. Trump warned against vilifying rivals and criminalising dissent. He then portrayed himself as the victim of politically motivated charges. "If Democrats want to unify our country, they should drop these partisan witch hunts," he said.

"In that spirit of unity, the Democratic Party should immediately stop weaponising the justice system and labelling their political opponent as an enemy of democracy. Especially since that is not true. In fact, I am the one saving democracy for the people of our country," he added.

## Drone attack triggers blast near US Embassy in Israel's Tel Aviv, 1 killed

**Rome** A Milan court has ordered a journalist to pay Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni damages of 5,000 euros (\$5,465) for making fun of her in a social media post, news agency ANSA and other local media reported.

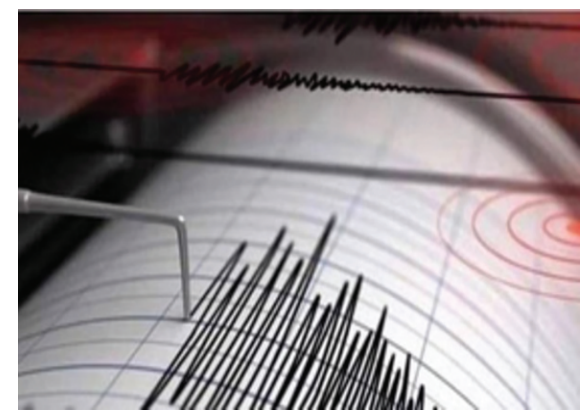
The journalist, Giulia Cortese, was also given a suspended fine of 1,200 euros for a jibe on Twitter, now named X, in Oct. 2021 about Meloni's height, that was defined as "body shaming". In a response to a Reuters story on the verdict, Cortese wrote on X on Thursday: "Italy's government has a serious problem with freedom of expression and journalistic dissent." Meloni had launched legal action against the journalist after the two women clashed on social media three years ago.

Meloni, whose far-right Brothers of Italy party was in opposition at the time, took exception when Cortese published a mocked-up photo of her with a picture of the late fascist leader Benito Mussolini in the background.

Cortese responded with further tweets including one that translates as "you don't scare me, Giorgia Meloni. After all, you're only 1.2 metres (4 feet) tall. I can't even see you." Meloni's height is given as between 1.58 m and 1.6m on various media websites. Cortese can appeal against the sentence, and Meloni's lawyer said the prime minister would donate to charity any damages she eventually receives.

## Powerful 7.4-magnitude quake strikes north Chile near Argentine border

**SANTIAGO.** A magnitude 7.4 earthquake struck northern Chile near its border with Argentina late Thursday, the U.S. Geological Survey reported, shaking homes and causing power outages. There were no immediate reports of injuries or major damage. The quake's epicenter was 45 kilometers (28 miles) southeast of San Pedro de Atacama, Chile, a tourist hub on the edge of the northern desert. The tremor had a depth of 117 kilometers (72 miles), according to the USGS, which likely lessened the intensity of the shaking. The deeper an earthquake when it strikes, the less destructive a jolt it will cause at the surface. Chilean President Gabriel Boric said his government was closely examining the area but "so far there are no reports of injuries or major damage."



The quake did not activate a tsunami alarm. Footage spread online of rocks tumbling onto a highway connecting the cities of Calama to Tocopilla, east of the epicenter and local authorities reported road blocks in the area.

The shaking from deeper earthquakes tend to be felt across a wider swath of earth, experts say.

Thursday's quake rumbled across six provinces — Tarapacá, Antofagasta, Atacama, Coquimbo, Arica and Parinacota — Chile's emergency service said. At least a dozen aftershocks have jolted the surface since.

"Despite its remarkable size, and the large number of fallen objects, it is not considered a major intensity earthquake," researchers at the non-governmental Chilean Geoscience Network reported, citing "some minor shocks to infrastructure" but no fallen buildings. "It was not difficult for residents to stand up," it said. Chile is located in the so-called "Ring of Fire" in the Pacific that is uniquely vulnerable to earthquakes. Chileans still have painful memories of a magnitude 8.8 earthquake in 2010 that spawned a tsunami and killed 526 people. The Geoscience Network said that Thursday's quake was the most intense to strike Chile since 2016, when a 7.6-magnitude earthquake struck the south of the country.

## Biden's chances of winning 'diminished', Obama told Democrats: Report

**US President Joe Biden should seriously reconsider his re-election bid as his chances of winning the November 5 election have "greatly diminished", former US President Barack Obama told Democrats privately, The Washington Post reported.**



spoke to Biden, who served as his vice president from 2009 to 2017, only once since his disastrous presidential debate against former US President Donald Trump last month, according to The Washington Post. Biden's debate performance was marked by frequent slip-ups and appeared to lose his train of thought, sparking concerns among the Democrats over his age and mental fitness to serve another term. Some of them, including US Representative Adam Schiff,

have publicly called on Biden to withdraw from the presidential race in favour of another candidate, though the President has remained adamant, saying he was fit to run again and defeat Trump. Obama has been clear in his conversations with the Democrats that it is up to Biden to decide his candidacy. The Washington Post reported. He has stated that his concern was to protect Biden and his legacy and has decided against pushing the thought that he alone can

**World** Former US President Barack Obama has told Democrats that President Joe Biden's chances of winning the November 5 election have "greatly diminished" and believes that the 81-year-old leader should seriously reconsider his re-election bid, The Washington Post reported, citing multiple people involved in the matter. Obama

## Joe Biden 'seriously considering' exit from US presidential race: Reports

**World** Amid a strong push from Democrats at the highest levels to rethink his election bid, US President Joe Biden is weighing whether to step out of the presidential race. A decision on the matter is likely to be made by this weekend, according to reports.

The latest turn of events comes as party heavyweights, including former President Barack Obama and former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, express concerns, amplifying the calls for Biden's exit, which began after his poor debate performance against former President Donald Trump, the Republican nominee. Sources who spoke to Reuters said, "His soul searching is actually happening. I know that for a fact," and stressed, "He's thinking about this very seriously". Another source from the Democratic Party noted, "It feels like it's a matter of ... when, not if," while Democratic Senator Chris Coons of Delaware, a close Biden ally, told the media that Biden will be "resting and reflecting" this weekend as he recovers



from Covid. The 81-year-old is currently under quarantine at his home in Delaware as he battles a Covid infection. Obama has conveyed to allies that Biden needs to consider the viability of his campaign, according to the Associated Press. But the former president has also made clear that the decision is one Biden needs to make. Nancy Pelosi has also reportedly argued that Biden can't likely defeat Trump. According to the Washington Post, Pelosi thinks that Biden can be convinced soon to exit the race. Several Democratic Senators and Governors openly called for Biden to be removed

from the election bid.

A New York Times report, which cited several people close to the president, stated that Biden has begun to accept that he may not be able to win the November 5 election. The Times quoted a source as saying that "reality is setting in," and that it would not be a surprise if Biden made an announcement soon endorsing Vice President Kamala Harris as his replacement. Multiple reports also said that Democratic leaders in the House and Senate—Hakeem Jeffries and Chuck Schumer—have told Biden directly that he will not only lose the White House but also endanger their effort to win back the House. Senator John Hickenlooper noted that Biden is "working towards" what is best for the United States, though he refrained from demanding the President's exit from the race. "Joe Biden has always put the country first. He's done what's best for America ... I think he'll keep doing so," Hickenlooper said in a telephone interview late Wednesday. "He's working towards that."

## Riots break out in UK's Leeds, bus set on fire, police car overturned

**World** A bus was set on fire and a police car was overturned as unrest broke out in a neighbourhood in the UK's Leeds on Thursday in what police described as a "serious disorder incident". Residents in Leeds have been urged to stay at home and a large number of police have been deployed to Harehills. No injuries have been reported so far. The chaos was linked to children being taken into care by government agents in Luxor Street in the Harehills area, The Guardian reported.

Eyewitnesses said some people in the community responded by setting fires and "throwing stones". As the unrest gained momentum, the agency workers and the children were taken

"to a safe place", police told the UK's Sky News.



UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said she was left "appalled" by the "shocking scenes" of unrest and said she was being regularly updated about the situation. She thanked the West

Yorkshire Police for their response.

"I am appalled at the shocking scenes and attacks on police vehicles and public transport in Leeds tonight. Disorder of this nature has no place in our society. My thanks go to West Yorkshire police for their response. I am being kept regularly updated," she tweeted. Councillor Salma Arif, for Gipton and Harehills, posted a video in which she was seen with a police officer and advised people to remain at home. Update: Message from Councillor Salma Arif and Inspector Nicholls. Councillors are aware of an ongoing incident in Harehills. Please avoid the area if at all possible," she tweeted.

## Yemen's Houthi rebels launch air attack on Tel Aviv; one dead, at least 10 injured

**TEL AVIV.** An explosion rumbled through the streets of central Tel Aviv early Friday morning after an apparent drone strike caused shards of shrapnel to rain down, injuring at least 10 people and leaving one dead, authorities said. Israel's military said that they were reviewing the explosion and increasing air patrols after the incident, which its initial inquiries determined was caused by "an aerial target." It was not immediately clear how the strike evaded Israel's air defenses or how Israel might respond.

Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai called the attack a drone strike on the social media platform X, though the military has not yet specified the nature of the attack. Yemen's Houthis have repeatedly launched drones and missiles toward Israel throughout the nine-month-long war, in sympathy with Hamas. But until Friday, all were intercepted by either Israel or Western allies with forces stationed in the region. The strike hit hours after Israel's military confirmed one of its airstrikes had killed a Hezbollah commander and other militants in southern Lebanon. Israel has so far not made attacks on the Houthis, allowing its allies instead to take the lead as it focuses its efforts on the war in Gaza and ongoing



fighting with Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group. It comes as international mediators continue to hold out hope for a cease-fire agreement, pushing Israel and Hamas toward a phased deal that would halt fighting and free about 120 hostages held by the militant group in Gaza. The prospects a deal could improve as Israeli leaders signal their operation underway

in Rafah is close to finished. However, fears of potential escalation resurfaced on Thursday after Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, visited Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site on Thursday to pray for the return of Israeli hostages, he said, "without a reckless deal, without surrendering." Local police in Tel Aviv said that the Friday

influence the President's decision-making process. Earlier, Biden said he would consider quitting the race only if doctors told him that he had been diagnosed with some "medical condition", in his clearest indication to end his campaign following his debate performance on June 27. Meanwhile, Biden on Wednesday tested positive for Covid-19 while on the campaign trail in Las Vegas. He is self-isolating at the Delaware beach house after experiencing mild symptoms, the White House said. It was not clear for how long the illness would keep Biden out from campaigning. The US President has been defiant in the face of the calls to quit the race, telling one interviewer that only the "Lord Almighty" could persuade him to go. Some 40 per cent of Democratic-registered voters said Biden should drop his re-election bid, in a Reuters/Ipsos poll concluded on Tuesday. Some 65 per cent of independent registered voters agreed with them. Some 58 per cent of Democratic-registered voters told the poll they believed Biden is too old to work in government - 70 per cent of independent registered voters agreed.

## Bangladesh protests: 39 killed, protesters set state broadcaster's building ablaze

**World** Widespread violence gripped Bangladesh after relentless clashes between student protesters, security officials, and pro-government student activists over a quota system for government jobs. At least 39 people died in the violence, with Thursday becoming the most violent day.

Police and protesters armed with sticks and rocks clashed across the country, including in the capital, Dhaka, as the students tried to shut down transportation across Bangladesh.

undreds of people were injured as police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to break up groups of protesters, who torched vehicles, police posts and other establishments.

## BANGLADESH TURMOIL: LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

Streets looked deserted in Bangladesh's Dhaka on Friday following the violent protests on Thursday. Bangladesh TV news channels are not transmitting on Friday, news agency Reuters reported. Communication services were widely disrupted in Bangladesh on Friday, with authorities cutting some mobile services on Thursday to try to quell the unrest but the disruption spread across the country. According to outage monitor NetBlocks, Bangladesh was plunged into a "near-total" internet shutdown as night fell. Telephone calls from overseas were mostly not getting connected and calls through the internet could not be completed.

On Thursday, the student protesters set fire to the state broadcaster's building a day after the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, appeared on the network seeking to calm the clashes. Several police posts, vehicles and other establishments were also torched. Multiple Awami League officers were also attacked by the students. The protesters are demanding that the Sheikh Hasina government stop setting aside 30 per cent of government jobs for the families of people who fought in the 1971 war of independence from Pakistan. The agitation, fueled by high unemployment, is the biggest since Prime Minister Hasina was reelected earlier this year. The protests began late last month. However, it escalated on Monday when student activists at Dhaka University clashed with police and counter-protesters backed by the ruling Awami League. The protesters argue that the quota system is framed to benefit the supporters of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, which led the independence movement. They call it a discriminatory system and want to replace it with a merit-based system. Though the Bangladesh government scrapped these quotas in 2018, a High Court reinstated them later.

The Bangladesh Supreme Court, on August 7, is set to hear the government's appeal against the High Court's order reinstating the quota, which was abolished by the government in 2018.

blast sounded at around 3:10 a.m., reverberating to nearby cities and physically injuring at least 10 people. Tel Aviv District Commander Peretz Amar said officers could not locate the point of contact, suggesting the explosion occurred in the air. "The force of the explosion caused damage that is not great but is spread over a large area. At the moment we don't know what the object was," Amar said. Israel possesses a multilayered aerial defense system, capable of intercepting threats ranging from long-range ballistic missiles to drones and short-range missiles. These systems have intercepted thousands of projectiles throughout the war. But officials warn they are not 100% effective, and the systems appear to have struggled against small and hard-to-detect attack drones. It was not known which, if any, system was deployed. Like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis are backed by Israel's arch enemy, Iran. Israel for the most part also has avoided a direct confrontation with Iran throughout the war. Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles at Israel during a single incident in April in response to Israel's alleged assassination of a pair of Iranian generals in Syria at the time.

## NEWS BOX

**Nordea Open: How 'aggressive' Rafael Nadal scripted incredible comeback vs Norrie**

**New Delhi** Rafael Nadal said that he needed to be "aggressive" at certain stages in the Nordea Open 2024 quarterfinal match against Cameron Norrie. On Thursday, Nadal, who is playing in Bastad as a wildcard, defeated his fifth seeded opponent 6-4, 6-4 and made his way through to the semi-final of the clay-court tournament where he will lock horns with Argentina's Mariano Navone.

Nadal had it easy in the first set against Norrie, but found the going tough in the second. Going 1-4 down in the second, it seemed that the match would go into the deciding set. However, Nadal roared back and won five games in a row to seal the fate of the match in straight sets. The 37-year-old made his return to competitive tennis since last playing in the opening round of the French Open back in May. "Great feelings. It's been a while without playing on tour since Roland Garros.



To have the chance to compete well against a great player like Cameron... these are great feelings. I played good tennis for moments. For moments I needed to play more aggressive. That's part of the journey today," Nadal said after the match.

**Rafael Nadal looking for improvements**

With his win over Norrie, Nadal also qualified for the semis of a clay-court event for the first time since the French Open back in 2022. "I haven't been competing very often. Matches and victories like today help to be in rhythm the whole match and put the pressure on the opponent during the whole match. That's something I need to improve today. Because I haven't played enough," Nadal added. Nadal is currently gearing up to play in the Paris Olympics 2024, to be held from July 26. He has also been named in the entry list for the US Open later this year.

**India always enjoy playing vs Pakistan: Harmanpreet Kaur before epic Asia Cup clash**

**New Delhi.** Harmanpreet Kaur said that she was looking forward to India facing Pakistan in the upcoming Women's Asia Cup clash on Friday, July 19. Day 1 of the tournament will witness the marquee clash unfold at the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium in Dambulla. India have a healthy 11-3 head-to-head record against Pakistan in WT20Is with their most recent win coming in the 2023 T20 World Cup at the Newlands in Cape Town. Harmanpreet said that while it's important to focus on playing against Pakistan, the Women in Blue need to strategise for the other matches as well. Apart from Pakistan, India also have Nepal and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in their group. "We always enjoy playing against Pakistan but each and every team is important. Whenever we go and play, we always want to play good cricket, and we will follow the same method," Harmanpreet said in the pre-match press conference.

**'Each and every game is important'**

The Indian skipper said that the Asia Cup is the right platform for Team India to prepare for the T20 World Cup to be held later this year in Bangladesh. "This tournament is very important for all of us because we give equal respect to this tournament and want to improve at the Asian as well as at the world level. So our focus will remain the same as we prepare for the T20 World Cup or any other World Cup. Each and every game is important for us and we will try to give our best," Harmanpreet said.

**Harshit Rana credits Gautam Gambhir after ODI call-up: He changed my mindset**

**New Delhi** Fast bowler Harshit Rana credited Gautam Gambhir after earning his maiden ODI call-up for the tour of Sri Lanka. The speedster was a part of the Indian squad for the first two T20Is against Zimbabwe earlier this month, but did not get a chance to play. He was named in the ODI squad along with Arshdeep Singh, Khaleel Ahmed and Mohammed Siraj. Rana expressed gratitude to his father, personal coach and Gambhir for shaping his career. It was under Gambhir's mentorship that Rana performed exceptionally for KKR in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024. Rana picked up 19 wickets from 13 games and helped the Knight Riders lift the trophy for the third time after 2012 and 2014. Rana thanked Gambhir for never losing faith in him and backing him to win matches.

"Tu match jeetake aayega"

"If I have to name three people whom I am indebted to in this beautiful journey of mine, then it is my father, for his efforts, my personal coach Amit Bhandari sir (former India and Delhi pacer) and above everyone else, Gauti bhaiyya (Gautam Gambhir)," Rana told PTI. "If my outlook towards the game has changed, a lot of it has got to do with Gauti bhaiyya's presence in the KKR dressing room and how he changed my mindset. At the elite level, you require skills but more than skills you require the heart to handle the pressure. Gauti bhaiyya would always tell me 'Mere ko tere pe trust hai. Tu match jeetake aayega'. (I trust you, you can win the match)," he added. Rana has played only 14 List A matches where he has taken 22 wickets at an economy rate of 5.54 with a couple of 4-wicket hauls to his name.

# Tennis ball cricket, IPL: Axar Patel reveals reason behind success in T20 WC

**Axar Patel talks about his success in the T20I format****Axar Patel credits IPL and tennis ball cricket for his development****Axar Patel is being seen as the next big all-rounder after Jadeja**

**New Delhi** All-rounder Axar Patel was one of the brightest sparks for India in the T20I World Cup 2024. Axar contributed in all three departments of the game in the tournament and was India's saviour every time the team got into trouble. With the bat, Axar dug India out in the final of the tournament. With the ball, Axar derailed defending champions England in the semi-final and in the field, Axar's catch against Mitchell Marsh in Super 8s vs Australia changed the complexion of the game. With Ravindra Jadeja calling time in the T20I format, Axar is being looked at as the long-time replacement for the all-rounder. After his successful T20 World Cup campaign, Axar, in an interview, revealed how playing



tennis ball cricket and the Indian Premier League helped him handle pressure in the ICC tournament.

**'Worked on expanding my hitting area'**

Speaking to Cricbuzz, Axar revealed that his background in tennis ball cricket prepared him to hit shots against every kind of ball. The batter said that while he learned better technique with the seasoned ball, it was tennis ball cricket that shaped his mentality with the bat. "Playing tennis ball cricket had

an impact on my hitting ability because, in that format, you can hit almost every ball for a six or a four, especially in short 10-12 over games. It also influenced my shot selection. Initially, I would predominantly hit the ball to the leg side. However, when I transitioned to season ball cricket, I realised the importance of playing with the swing and not just slogging every ball. I worked on expanding my hitting areas, focusing on playing straight and avoiding cross-batted

shots," Axar said. "Tennis ball cricket also taught me how to handle pressure. Growing up, I often found myself in pressure situations, which made me more stable and stronger mentally. I learned to stay calm and think positively, which has been invaluable in my career," he further added.

**'I was nervous against Pakistan'**

Axar was sent up the order against Pakistan in the terrible New York pitch in the group stages of the game. While Axar did not play a deep innings in that game, the batter said that the sudden change prepared him for facing anything in the tournament. "Against Pakistan I was sent up the order. Before the match, I was told that I may have to bat early if there are early wickets. At that time I was nervous. In the nets, I did not practise with the new ball and suddenly I was having to play in PowerPlay. My IPL experience came in handy and it made me feel positive. For Delhi Capitals, I batted a few times in the PowerPlay overs and played a few crucial knocks too," Axar said. "That helped me understand what to do in those situations. I had to be positive and not worry about who would be bowling to me. I was not trying to overthink. And I knew that I had the game to play according to the situation. I just wanted to stay in the present."

## Paris Olympics: Swimmer Srihari Nataraj eyes semi-final spot after lucky break

**New Delhi.** Swimmer Srihari Nataraj has set his goals clear for the Paris Olympics 2024. The 23-year-old said that he has a great chance of advancing to the semi-final if he manages to go past his personal best timing of 53.77 seconds in 100m backstroke that he achieved back in 2021. Nataraj failed to attain direct qualification for the quadrennial event, starting July 26. He got through via the Universality Quota, where countries recommend their two highest-ranked swimmers for the Olympics.

"I just have a goal towards trying to get a personal best. And I think if I make a personal best, it puts me in a good spot to be in the semifinals," Nataraj told PTI. Nataraj has been in impressive form after he won 10 medals in the National Games in 2023. Since



performing as a 16-year-old since 2017, the Indian swimmer has taken rapid strides in his career. "I just needed time off to rest because my 2023 season was crazy and so hectic with so many races. I think if I didn't take any time off, my body would have broken down by now. And it could have led

to an injury or I would have lost the drive to train. My body was under so much stress. I kind of just needed a few weeks off just to let my body rest," Nataraj said.

**Annoying and disappointing'**

Nataraj, however, was not happy, after he could not directly qualify for the Olympics. Nevertheless, he has focused on training hard and kept his fingers crossed.

"It was annoying and disappointing that I didn't get the qualifying time because I had been training really well. But I'm not really bothered about what happened," Nataraj added. Nataraj did not have the best of outing when he took part in the Tokyo Olympics, where he finished 27th. Along with Nataraj, the other Indian swimmer in Paris is Dhimidhi Desinghu, who will take part in the women's 200m freestyle.

## Manchester United sign teenage French defender Leny Yoro on five-year contract

**New Delhi.** Manchester United have signed 18-year-old French defender Leny Yoro from Lille on a five-year contract, the Premier League club announced on Thursday, as they bid to shore up their defence. Sources say United agreed a 62 million euro (\$67.56 million) fee for Yoro, who has played 60 games for Lille. The centre-back, who made 41 appearances last term, was named in the Ligue 1 team of the season after helping Lille finish fourth and secure a Champions League qualifying spot. Yoro has been chased by several top European clubs, with Real Madrid one of the teams linked to the player. He will be a welcome addition to a back line that has been riddled with injuries and has seen Raphael Varane depart.

"Leny is one of the most exciting young defenders in world football; he possesses every attribute needed to develop into a top-class centre-back," United sporting



director Dan Ashworth said in a statement. "Having had such an excellent start to his career, we are excited to support him in reaching his immense potential here at Manchester United. Perfect place to reach my potential: Leny Yoro. The teenager is the Old Trafford club's second major acquisition after the Netherlands striker Joshua Zirkzee joined for 42.5 million euros on Sunday. "Signing for a club with the stature and ambition of Manchester United so early in

### 18-year-old French defender Leny Yoro has joined French defender Leny Yoro on a 5-year-contract at a reported deal of 62 million euro.

my career is an incredible honour," Yoro said in a statement.

"Since my first conversations with the club, they set out a clear plan for how I can develop in Manchester as part of this exciting project, and showed a lot of care for me and my family.

"I know about the history of young players at Manchester United and feel it can be the perfect place to reach my potential and achieve my ambitions, together with my new teammates," he added.

Yoro was named in Thierry Henry's provisional France squad for the Paris Olympics, but was left out of the final selection.

## Manchester United sell Mason Greenwood to Olympique Marseille

**New Delhi.** Mason Greenwood has finally completed his permanent transfer from Premier League giants Manchester United to French Ligue 1 club Olympique Marseille for a hefty reported fee of 31.6 million euros. Greenwood, who had just completed his loan spell at La Liga side Getafe from United, will now make an attempt to revive his professional career in France, after falling out of sorts with United. The 22-year-old has penned down a five-year deal with Roberto De Zerbi's Marseille.

Greenwood's once promising career took a complete downturn after he faced alleged rape and domestic violence charges by his girlfriend Harriet Robson back in January 2022. Following the allegations and charges, United suspended Greenwood until they carried out a thorough investigation, and he was later loaned out to Getafe. United have finally decided to part ways with the forward, but not without putting a reportedly heavy sell-on clause on his contract with Marseille. With the departure of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang coach



Roberto De Zerbi will be hugely depending on Greenwood once globally recognised attacking prowess to show up again for the French side. However, Greenwood's signing has received a mixed response from the fanbase and even other important figures in France. Really excited for this new chapter. Allez l'OM! @olympique-demarseille" Greenwood said in his Instagram post.

It will be interesting to see whether Greenwood can regain his dream form at his new club, and whether the Olympique Marseille fans approve of their new player.

## Australian hockey player Matt Dawson amputates part of finger for Paris Olympics

### Paris Olympics 2024: Australian hockey player Matt Dawson amputated a part of his finger to take part in the quadrennial event, starting July 26.

**New Delhi** Australian field hockey player Matt Dawson has demonstrated an unparalleled level of commitment to ensure his participation in the upcoming Paris Olympics 2024. The 30-year-old, who already boasts a silver medal from the Tokyo Games, recently faced a daunting decision following a severe injury. Dawson fractured the ring finger on his right hand, casting uncertainty over his ability to compete in Paris. Faced with this predicament, he was presented with two options by his medical

team. He could either allow the finger to heal naturally, a process that posed the risk of not recovering fully in time for the Games, or take the drastic measure of amputating part of the finger to guarantee his readiness. Opting for certainty, Dawson chose the latter. "I didn't have much time to make the decision. I made the decision then I called my wife, and she said, 'I don't want you to make a rash decision,'" he told Australian broadcaster Seven Network. "But I guess I had all the information I needed to make a decision for not only playing in Paris, but for life after and giving myself the best health." In a recent broadcast, the Seven Network aired compelling footage that showcased Australian hockey player Dawson donning a protective black guard over his injured finger. This visual testimony of grit has struck a chord with fans and teammates



alike. "Matt is really committed to playing in Paris." The Australian men's coach was effusive in his praise for Dawson, recognizing his courage and commitment to the game. However, the coach candidly admitted a level of uncertainty about whether he would personally be able to

demonstrate the same valor under similar circumstances. "The best way of recovering from it was to just chop the end of the finger off. So that's what he decided to do. It's not something a coach can decide for a player," coach Colin Batch said. "Full marks to Matt. Obviously he's really committed to playing in Paris. I'm not sure I would have done it, but he's done it, so great." As the Paris 2024 Olympics draw near, the Australian men's field hockey team is gearing up to aim higher and achieve their long-awaited gold medal. Fresh off their impressive performance at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, where they clinched a silver medal after a hard-fought final against Belgium, they are setting their sights on going one better this time.



# Shraddha Kapoor

## Breaks Silence On Marrying Rumoured Boyfriend Rahul Mody: 'Jab Dulhan Banna Hoga...'

After from being a stellar actress, Shraddha Kapoor is also one of those actresses, who has a great sense of humour. While she continues to make great progress in various spheres, her personal life often piques interest. Having said, she recently opened up on her marriage plans, amid dating Rahul Mody. During the trailer launch event of Stree 2, Shraddha who was a complete vision to behold in a gorgeous red and golden saree, was candidly asked, when is she ready to become a dulhan. The actress then gave a witty response, "Woh Stree hai, usse jab dulhan banna hai woh banegi (She is Stree; she will become a bride whenever she feels like)."

Back in June, Shraddha made her relationship Instagram official with writer Rahul Mody. Shraddha sparked dating rumours with Rahul a few months ago. They have been spotted together on several occasions, including at a wedding this summer.

A source told Hindustan Times earlier this year that Shraddha and Rahul might be making their relationship official anytime soon. "They are not afraid to be photographed with each other, but that doesn't mean they will make their relationship official anytime soon. They are both private people, and want to keep their relationship out of the limelight. They are not afraid to be photographed with each other, but that doesn't mean they will make their relationship official anytime soon. They are both private people, and want to keep their relationship out of the limelight," the source revealed. Meanwhile, Shraddha Kapoor is now gearing up for the release of Stree 2. The actress would be seen sharing screen space with Rajkumar Rao and Pankaj Tripathi. The film is all set to hit the theatres on August 15.



## Heeramandi Star Taha Shah Badussha On Meeting Tom Cruise: 'It Was Incredible'



Actor Taha Shah Badussha was recently in the UK to attend the London Indian Film Festival. His excitement soared when he had the chance to meet Hollywood legend Tom Cruise. Taha shared photos of the memorable encounter on his Instagram, captioning them, "Pinch me! Just met my lifelong idol. The one and only Tom Cruise!" In an interview with Hindustan Times, Taha Shah Badussha recounted his surreal experience meeting Cruise at the festival. He described how he patiently waited until the film ended to approach Cruise who was seated at the other end of the row. Overwhelmed by the experience, he expressed, "It was so incredible how everything just worked out. I was completely in awe. And I wasn't believing that I was so blessed to be meeting 'the' Tom Cruise." During their conversation, the actor shared that they discussed movies and Tom Cruise's current projects for which he was present in London. He further highlighted that he conveyed his admiration to Cruise, acknowledging him as an inspiration.

Speaking more about Cruise, Badussha praised his illustrious career in the entertainment industry. "His career is nothing short of remarkable. He has always led the way and has been a torchbearer in the world of cinema," Badussha told the news portal. Reflecting on Cruise's films like The Rainman, Magnolia, Jerry McGuire, Top Gun and Mission Impossible, he acknowledged how they have profoundly influenced his "perspective on filmmaking and the craft of acting." "I have definitely taken inspiration from him on how to build my filmography. I would love to be as versatile and experimental yet commercial as him," he added.

Badussha also expressed his gratitude for the overwhelming appreciation he received for his portrayal as Tajdar in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's series Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar. "London has truly showered its love on me. The change is very apparent. People all over the city recognised me. It's such a blessing," he shared.

## Exes Janhvi Kapoor, Ishaan Khatter Reunite 6 Years After Debut Film Dhadak, Deets Inside



Janhvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khatter who made their big Bollywood debut back in 2018, are all set to team up for the second time. Almost 6 years later, Janhvi and Ishaan are reuniting for Karan Johar's next film. Helmed by National Award-winning filmmaker Neeraj Ghaywan, the film is all set to go on floors in October 2024.

According to a report in Peepingmoon.com, the upcoming Janhvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khatter film will also star television actor Vishal Jethwa, renowned for his antagonist role in Rani Mukherji's Mardaani 2. The source close to the production house added, "It's a well-written, ensemble-cast drama that Neeraj Ghaywan has been working on for the past two years. Both Janhvi and Ishaan have enormous admiration for the director's work and quickly came aboard the film as it offers them roles that are a complete departure from what they played in Dhadak. They had been itching to collaborate once more since their first movie and are thrilled to have found the perfect reunion recipe in Neeraj's film." Neeraj is directing a new movie starring Janhvi and Ishaan, his first feature film in nine years since his critically acclaimed debut, Masaan. Since then, he has worked on various projects for streaming platforms, including Sacred Games Season 2 and Ajeeb Daastaans. This new film marks his collaboration with Karan Johar, after a previous attempt to work together on a biopic with Alia Bhatt didn't work out. This movie is Janhvi's sixth project with Dharma Productions, following films like Dhadak and Gunjan Saxena. For Ishaan, it's only his second film with the banner. Vishal Jethwa, who previously worked with Yash Raj Films on Mardaani 2 and Tiger 3, is now collaborating with Dharma Productions for the first time. Janhvi Kapoor is now awaiting the release of her highly anticipated gripping thriller Ulajh, scheduled to release in theatres on August 2. Ishaan Khatter on the other hand has two Netflix shows lined up ahead - an international series, The Perfect Couple with Nicole Kidman and Dakota Fanning; and a romantic drama series, titled Royals, with Bhumi Pednekar.

# Sanjeeda Shaikh

## Does Gajagamini Walk In A Backless Dress, Hot Video Goes Viral

Sanjeeda Shaikh has been a popular name in the Indian television industry for long. Recently, she once again proved her mantle as an actor with her stellar performance as Waheeda in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's debut OTT series, Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar. The actress who also likes to keep her fans updated on social media has set the internet on fire with her latest video. On Thursday, Sanjeeda Shaikh took to her Instagram handle and dropped a clip, in which she can be seen sporting a shimmering blue backless dress, as she walks elegantly down the streets. Towards the end of the video, the Heeramandi actress even turns around to acknowledge the camera with a wink.

Sanjeeda's character in Heeramandi is one of the most complex, having been deceived by both her family and fate. Since the series started streaming on Netflix, the audience could not help but praise the actress's nuanced performance. In a recent podcast, Sanjeeda revealed that she had not auditioned for the role of Waheeda. In conversation with Filmygyan, Sanjeeda Shaikh said that she was aware that Sanjay Leela Bhansali was making a show called Heeramandi, and she had a meeting with him. She stated, "It was a brief meeting of 10 minutes, and sir mujhse 10-15 saal pehle mil chuke the, I thought he would not remember about the meeting, but he did, and he was like, You are looking better, looking fresher, and looking happier. And then he asked me not to tell anyone about this meeting." The actress stated that she went home hoping that she would get the role. Sanjeeda recalled, "There was no audition... Sir did not audition, he just called for a look test after 3-4 months of the meeting." She added that when she went for the look test the team started doing prosthetics because the character had a scar on her face, which made her feel like, "wow this is getting intense." She further tried different outfits, and Sanjay Leela Bhansali was taking the look test himself. He asked her to do various elements for her character. The actress stated, "I was doing everything, and suddenly he said, Ye hai meri Waheeda." Heeramandi is set in the 1940s against the backdrop of the struggle for independence. It looks at the cultural reality of a major district in pre-partition India through the eyes of courtesans and nawabs. The series stars Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Richa Chadha, Sanjeeda Sheikh, and Sharmin Segal. The star cast also included Fardeen Khan, Taha Shah, Shekhar Suman, and Adhyayan Suman. The series premiered on Netflix on May 1.

