

FAIR REPORT

THE DAWN OF A FEARLESS PEN

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Modi’s Punjab Push: ₹5,400-Crore Jalandhar Package, 75 Railway Stations Unveiled as BJP Eyes 2027

■ FAIR REPORT
JALANDHAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to make a politically significant visit to Punjab on Friday, unveiling infrastructure projects worth more than 5,400 crore in Jalandhar as part of a wider 26,800-crore development package spanning Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh. Though lasting barely 90 minutes, the visit is expected to carry implications far beyond governance, with Punjab’s 2027 Assembly elections already looming on the political horizon.

At the heart of the programme is the inauguration of 75 redeveloped railway stations across India under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, an ambitious railway modernisation initiative aimed at transforming stations into multimodal, passenger-friendly transport hubs while preserving regional architectural identity. Developed at an estimated cost of 1,570 crore, the stations embody the government’s “Vikas Bhi, Virsat Bhi” vision—combining infrastructure expansion



with cultural preservation. Punjab figures prominently in the rollout. Four stations—Jalandhar Cantonment, S.A.S. Nagar (Mohali), Sri Muktsar Sahib and Sri Anandpur Sahib—have undergone comprehensive redevelopment. The Jalandhar Cantonment station, revamped at a cost of around 125 crore, now features an air-conditioned concourse, modern waiting areas, digital passenger information systems, escalators, lifts, enhanced accessibility and environmentally sustainable infrastructure. The railway package extends beyond station upgrades. Modi will also dedicate projects aimed at

strengthening connectivity to Sri Anandpur Sahib and Maa Chintpurni Temple, while launching the Amritsar–Varanasi rail service, linking two of India’s most significant religious and cultural centres. Additionally, the Daulatpur Chowk–Kartoli rail line, constructed at a cost of nearly 830 crore under the Nangal Dam–Talwara–Mukerian rail corridor, will be inaugurated, improving regional mobility and economic integration. The Prime Minister’s itinerary has been carefully structured. After landing at the Punjab Armed Police grounds in Jalandhar, he will proceed to Jalandhar Cantonment railway sta-

tion, where he is scheduled to flag off the Sant Ravidas Express, virtually inaugurating the 75 redeveloped stations nationwide, and address BJP workers. The sequence reflects the BJP’s strategy of blending infrastructure delivery with political mobilisation. The timing of the visit is equally significant. With Punjab expected to vote in early 2027, the BJP is seeking to expand its footprint in a state where it has historically struggled independently after the end of its alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal. In remarks ahead of the visit, Modi asserted that Punjab is looking towards the BJP with renewed hope, promising de-

velopment-led governance, investment and improved quality of life. Security arrangements underscore the visit’s importance. Punjab Police, led by the Director General of Police, have conducted extensive reviews at the venue, while the district administration has declared a temporary no-flying zone over parts of Jalandhar. Yet, beyond the ceremonial ribbon-cuttings, the political test remains formidable. Punjab’s electorate has become increasingly discerning after years of agrarian protests, economic challenges and shifting political alliances. While infrastructure investments strengthen the Centre’s development narrative, electoral success will ultimately depend on whether these projects translate into visible improvements in employment, connectivity and public confidence before voters head to the ballot box. For the BJP, Friday’s visit is more than an infrastructure showcase—it is an early signal that the battle for Punjab in 2027 has already begun.



CHARIOTS OF FAITH ROLL

■ FAIR REPORT
PURI

Braving inter-mittent rain and high humidity, more than 10 lakh devotees converged on the pilgrim town of Puri to witness the world-famous Rath Yatra of Lord Jagan-nath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra Thursday. Devotees lined the Grand Road from early morning to witness the Pahandi procession and take part in pulling the three majestic chariots. Despite the inclement weather, the spiritual fervour remained undiminished as chants of “Jai Jagannath” and “Haribol” echoed across the town. However, the festivities were marred by an inordinate delay in Lord Jagan-nath’s Pahandi. Although the ritual began at 9.00 am,



about 30 minutes ahead of schedule, it concluded only around 2.30 pm more than two hours behind the expected timeline. According to senior servitors, the delay occurred after Lord Jagannath’s giant tahia (floral headgear) slipped and broke during the procession. Despite repeated attempts, it could not be restored, forcing the servitors to carry the deity without the traditional headgear. The absence of

the tahia and Lord Jagan-nath’s customary rhythmic gallop one of the most captivating moments of the Pahandi disappointed devotees who had waited for hours in the rain for a glimpse of the deity. When Lord Jagannath finally emerged from the Lion’s Gate, devotees were surprised to see the deity adorned only with Tulsi leaves instead of the customary tahia. However, the crowd responded with immense devotion. Earlier in the day, servitors performed customary rituals, including Mangal Arati,

From Campus Land to Capital Protest: The Timeline Behind Sonam Wangchuk’s Latest Agitation

■ FAIR REPORT
NEW DELHI

Every protest carries a history. The latest hunger strike by environmentalist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk in Delhi is no exception. At the centre of renewed political debate is the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh (HIAL), an ambitious education project that has become intertwined with questions over land allotment, compliance and governance. According to documents and claims circulating in the public domain, nearly 60 hectares of land were allotted to HIAL in 2018, subject to conditions that included payment of approximately 14 crore within one year and completion of construction within two years. Authorities have maintained that these



conditions were not fulfilled within the stipulated period and that outstanding dues had accumulated, leading to the cancellation of the allotment. Supporters of HIAL, however, have argued that the institution faced administrative and procedural hurdles and have questioned the government’s handling of the matter. The dispute has since expanded beyond a land issue into a broader political movement. Ladakh has witnessed prolonged demonstrations over demands relating to constitutional safeguards, governance and local representa-

tion. During periods of unrest, clashes between protesters and security personnel resulted in casualties and injuries, further intensifying public sentiment. Now, Wangchuk has once again brought the issue to the national stage through a hunger strike in Delhi, seeking to draw attention to Ladakh’s unresolved demands and what he describes as the need to protect the region’s identity, ecology and democratic rights. The competing narratives remain sharply divided. For the administration, the controversy centres on compliance with the terms of a public land allotment. For Wangchuk and his supporters, it reflects a larger struggle over Ladakh’s future and the relationship between development, governance and public accountability. The headlines capture the latest protest.

‘Replace Dharmendra Pradhan with Sonam Wangchuk’: Kejriwal’s Jibe Escalates Education Politics

NEW DELHI: The politics surrounding India’s education system took a dramatic turn after Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal publicly demanded that Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resign and be replaced by education reformer Sonam Wangchuk. Addressing supporters, Kejriwal launched a sharp attack on the Centre’s handling of education, saying, “I have a proposal. Dharmendra Pradhan should resign, and Sonam Wangchuk should be made the Education Minister of the country. I suggest to the Prime Minister—remove Dharmendra Pradhan and appoint Sonam Wangchuk as the Union Education Minister.” The remarks came amid heightened political activity around student issues and public protests,

ISRO’s Silent Exodus: When “People Come, People Go” Isn’t Good Enough

■ FAIR REPORT
HEMRAJTIKAMCHAND

Union Minister Jitendra Singh’s response to the exodus of scientists from ISRO is, in its own way, revealing. Asked about a wave of departures, his answer amounted to a shrug: people leave, people join, there’s a large workforce, no cause for controversy. It is the kind of line meant to close a debate rather than open one. But the numbers the government itself has placed on record tell a starker story than the minister’s studied calm allows for. More than 100 scientists have quit ISRO in recent months, several of them from missions the country has staked its space ambitions on. Among the departed: the LVM3 project director, the SpaDeX project director, and Aditya Rallapalli, who helped engineer the data validation behind Chandrayaan-3’s lu-



nar landing sequence. These are not junior functionaries drifting off for greener pastures. They are the institutional memory of India’s most celebrated scientific enterprise, walking out precisely as Gaganyaan, further Chandrayaan missions, an Indian space station by 2035, and a crewed Moon landing by 2040 sit on the agency’s plate. The government’s response has not been introspection but restriction. An internal Department of Space memo dated July 14 has directed ISRO centre heads to stop accepting voluntary retirement or resigna-

tion requests from Group ‘A’ scientific personnel tied to Gaganyaan and other flagship missions — effectively freezing the exit door until Delhi decides otherwise. It is a striking admission by implication: if attrition were truly business-as-usual, no memo would be needed to plug it. This is where Jitendra Singh’s reassurance collides with his own government’s actions. You cannot simultaneously tell Parliament and the press that turnover is normal and unremarkable, while quietly ordering directors not to let anyone with the wrong project tag leave. The bureau-

cratic scramble to lock the gates gives away what the minister’s talking points try to paper over: this is not routine churn, it is retention panic. Nor is the underlying cause a mystery, however much the government prefers to change the subject. Parliament’s own data from February shows ISRO short of sanctioned strength by over 1,600 scientific and technical posts and nearly 1,000 administrative ones. A booming private space sector — flush with venture capital and offering packages the public exchequer cannot match — has given India’s scientists options that simply did not exist a decade ago. Add to that two consecutive PSLV failures between May 2025 and January 2026, and the picture is one of an agency under strain on multiple fronts at once, not merely riding out natural attrition.

Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan Shares Warm Moment with MLA Shrichand Kriplani at Rajasthan Assembly Event

The Vice President warmly invited former MP and Nimbahera MLA Shrichand Kriplani during the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly

■ FAIR REPORT
JAIPUR

A memorable moment was witnessed during the closing ceremony of the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Rajasthan Legisla-

tive Assembly, when Vice President of India C.P. Radhakrishnan warmly greeted former MP and Nimbahera MLA Shrichand Kriplani. As soon as he noticed Kriplani among the gathering, the Vice President invited him over, and the two shared a brief but warm interaction, recalling memories from Kriplani’s parliamentary days. The programme was organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Ra-



jasthan Branch as part of the Vidhayi Gaurav Yatra, bringing together present and former legislators from across the state. During the concluding session, the Vice President stepped down from the stage to honour senior former MLA Pandit Ramkishan. At that moment, he saw Shrichand Kriplani in the audience, greeted him warmly and called him closer. The two spent a few minutes talking and remembering their earlier

parliamentary association. After the meeting, Kriplani said he was deeply touched by the Vice President’s simplicity, humility and warm nature. He said that despite holding one of the country’s highest constitutional offices, C.P. Radhakrishnan remains approachable and values his long-standing relationships with fellow public representatives. The interaction became one of the highlights of the event and was appreciated

by those present. It reflected the mutual respect and cordial relationship shared by senior public representatives. Shrichand Kriplani is regarded as a senior political leader from the Mewar region. Having served both as an MLA and a Member of Parliament, he is known for his long public life and active role in public service. His meeting with the Vice President added a special touch to the historic Assembly celebration.

Man shoots girlfriend before killing self in Burari rented room

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

A man identified as Nikhil shot his girlfriend, Shubhangi, dead and then turned the weapon on himself in a rented room in Delhi's Burari area on Thursday. The police discovered the bodies when Shubhangi's younger sister returned from work at around 3:30 pm to find both lying on the floor in a pool of blood, and the investigation so far points toward a possible suicide pact.

The couple had been living together in the rented accommodation in the Kamalpur area of Burari for approximately one month. Shubhangi was a native of Uttar Pradesh, while Nikhil was from Haryana and had separately been residing in north Delhi before the two began sharing the rented room.

Police said the two had been in a relationship for the past few months. A senior police officer told reporters



that the preliminary investigation suggests the deaths may have occurred under mutual understanding.

"Prima facie, it seems that this was a suicide pact and was done under mutual understanding. We are waiting for the crime and forensic teams for further details," the officer said.

No suicide note was recovered from the room. However, Nikhil had reportedly sent messages to members of his family shortly before the incident. Police are waiting for both families to arrive in Delhi

before proceeding further. The bodies were found by Shubhangi's younger sister, who lived in the same rented accommodation. When she returned home from work around 3:30 pm, she found both lying dead on the floor with blood spread across the room.

Police received a PCR call about the discovery and rushed to the spot. The Burari police station team, CATS, and the crime team are present at the scene. The crime scene is being examined in detail. The bodies have been sent for post-

mortem, and further legal proceedings have been initiated.

Investigators are currently working to ascertain the exact sequence of events: whether Nikhil shot Shubhangi first and then took his own life, or whether the two had made prior arrangements for what happened in that room. The absence of a note complicates the reconstruction, though the messages Nikhil sent to his family in the period immediately before the deaths are being examined as part of the investigation.

Reports indicate that Nikhil was unemployed at the time of the incident. The question of what drove the two to this point, whether it was financial strain, pressures on the relationship, family opposition, or a combination of these, is a central part of what investigators will try to establish through interviews with both families and examination of the couple's phone records and communications.

Govt begins process to empanel third party auditors for issuing fire safety certificates

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government has started the process for registering third-party auditors for issuing fire safety certificates to the owners and occupiers of buildings and premises at rates ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹5 lakh.

The Delhi Fire Service (DFS) of the government, in a notice issued on Thursday, invited applications for registration and empanelment of fire safety auditors (third party) with the DFS principal director. According to the DFS Amendment Rules, 2025, notified by the Home Department last month, there will be three levels (L-1, L-2, L-3) of fire safety auditors based on their qualification and experience.

Presently, the DFS issues fire safety certificates in the city. However, the third-party auditors are being brought in the backdrop of three major fire tragedies in recent months, including the hotel inferno in the Hauz Rani area in South Delhi that claimed 22 lives in June.



The professional qualifications required for registration include BE or BTech (Fire Safety), sub-officer course from National Fire Service College, Nagpur, BE, BTech or B Arch in Civil, Mechanical or Electronics or Architecture, PG Diploma in Fire and Life Safety Audit among others.

Experience in fire prevention and safety ranging from 1-10 years will also be a mandatory qualification. The L-1 and L-2 level auditors will be authorised to issue fire safety certificates to buildings or occupancies lower than 15 metres in height.

The highest level of auditors (L-3) will be authorised for all buildings and occupancies, say the rules.

The registration and empanelment of fire safety auditors will be valid for a period of three years. The fee for registration will be ₹10,000 (L-1), ₹20,000 (L-2) and ₹30,000 for L-3.

If any non-compliance or deviation from the required fire prevention and fire safety measures or any falsification by the auditor is reported by the fire officers after inspection, they will be issued show-cause notices.

The penalty amount will be ₹2 lakh (L-1), ₹5 lakh (L-2) and ₹10 lakh (L-3) in case of violation by the auditors. They will also be liable to be blacklisted and deregistered from the DFS panel without issuance of any further notice, if penalty remains unpaid.

According to the DFS Amendment Rules, 2025, the owner or occupier of a building or premises will engage a fire safety auditor from the empanelled list on the DFS portal. The engaged auditor will conduct a thorough inspection of the premises or building or occupancy, including fire prevention and fire safety measures, and submit a detailed inspection report and issue a fire safety certificate and declaration to the owner or occupier.

The auditors will be permitted to charge the owner or occupier of a building or premises for the services provided by them. The fees will range from ₹10,000-₹50,000 in the case of L-1 auditors, ₹35,000-₹90,000 L-2 auditors, and ₹63,000-₹5 lakh L-3 auditors.

Female BLO alleges abuse during SIR exercise; police arrest four

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

Four persons have been arrested for allegedly abusing and obstructing a booth-level officer (BLO) while she was conducting the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in Delhi's Chandni Mahal area earlier this month, police said on Thursday.

According to police, the incident took place on July 5 at Fatak Telian in the Chandni Mahal area when the complainant, a postgraduate teacher (special education) deployed as a BLO, was conducting SIR-related work.

In her complaint, the teacher alleged that one of the accused placed the BLO register on her lap and signed it despite her objection. She further alleged that several persons present at the spot abused her, refused to accept SIR forms and behaved in a manner that humiliated her and prevented her from carrying out her official duties.

The matter came to the notice of police on July 15



after the complainant approached the Additional District Magistrate (ADM), Old Delhi. Police said the complainant informed them that the delay in reporting the incident was due to consultations with her senior officers regarding the appropriate course of action.

"On the complaint of a PGT (special education teacher) and Booth Level Officer (BLO), a case has been registered at the Chandni Mahal Police Station regarding an incident that allegedly occurred on July 5 during the SIR exercise at Fatak Telian. After verification of the complaint and examination of the available material, a prima facie case was found to be made out. Accordingly, an FIR was registered, and all the

accused persons named in the complaint have been arrested in accordance with the law," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Rohit Rajbir Singh said.

An FIR has been registered under Sections 221 (obstructing a public servant), 132 (assault or criminal force to deter a public servant), 79, 74 and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

The arrested accused have been identified as Mohammad Sabreen (44), Ateeq ur Rehman (58), Mohammad Asif (50) and Mohammad Aftab (44), all residents of the Turkman Gate area.

The arrests come amid growing concerns over the working conditions of officials engaged in the SIR exercise. Previously, The Pioneer had reported on the strenuous and prolonged work hours being put in by booth-level officers (BLOs) deployed for the SIR drive, with many flagging the demanding nature of the assignment. Police said further investigation is underway.

CM Rekha performs Chhera Pahara at Rohini Jagannath Rath Yatra

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday participated in the 21st Annual Lord Jagannath Rath Yatra at the Lord Jagannath Temple in Rohini. On the occasion, she offered prayers to Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Goddess Subhadra and performed the traditional Chhera Pahara ritual by ceremonially sweeping the path in front of the chariot before also attending a second Rath Yatra celebration organised by the Shiv Mandir Jagannath Darbar, Saini Dharamshala Samiti, in Shalimar Bagh. North West Delhi MP Yogendra Chandolia, Delhi Cabinet Minister Ravinder Indraj Singh, representatives of social organisations, and a large number of devotees attended the Rohini event.

Speaking at the Rohini ceremony, the Chief Minister said the Rath Yatra is not merely a religious celebration but a symbol of the great tradition of service, devotion, and public welfare. She said the custom



of sweeping in front of the chariot carries the message that public service and humility are the true hallmarks of leadership.

She said it was a matter of immense joy and privilege to participate in the grand Rath Yatra and, as the representative of the state, to have the opportunity to serve by performing the ceremonial sweeping before the Lord's chariot.

She prayed that with the blessings of Lord Jagannath, Delhi continues to move on the path of development and that every resident of the capital is blessed with happiness, prosperity, and well-being.

She said such religious and cultural events not only

keep India's rich traditions alive but also strengthen social unity and mutual harmony.

At the Shalimar Bagh event, the Chief Minister joined devotees in offering prayers at the Shri Jagannath Rath Yatra organised by the Saini Dharamshala Samiti.

The Chhera Pahara is one of the most significant rituals associated with the Jagannath Rath Yatra tradition. It involves the sweeping of the chariot's path with a golden broom by the most senior dignitary present, symbolising the equality of all before the divine and the idea that even those in the highest positions of power are servants before the Lord.

Centre clears PARIVARTAN guidelines to replace old trucks, buses in NCR

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has approved the operational guidelines for the PARIVARTAN scheme, clearing the way for the replacement of old and highly polluting trucks and buses across the National Capital Region with cleaner Bharat Stage VI-compliant and electric vehicles.

The scheme, officially titled Programme for Accelerated Renewal and Incentivization of Vehicle Assets for

Reducing Transport Air Pollution and Network Emissions, is aimed at reducing vehicular emissions and improving air quality in Delhi and the surrounding NCR region. The Union Cabinet had approved the scheme on June 3 with a total financial outlay of ₹9,585 crore, including ₹5,041 crore as Central Government support.

With the guidelines now in place, the programme is ready for implementation. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will execute the scheme, while



funding will be routed through the National Capital Region Planning Board. The

government said this reflects a coordinated regional strategy to tackle air pollution

caused by commercial vehicles. The scheme offers multiple financial incentives to encourage owners to replace ageing commercial vehicles. These include concessions on motor vehicle tax, waiver of registration fees, a five per cent interest subsidy on vehicle loans, and a minimum eight per cent discount from vehicle manufacturers on eligible new vehicles.

Owners replacing diesel and CNG vehicles will also receive monthly fuel voucher support, while

those opting for electric vehicles will be eligible for one-time financial assistance. The scheme also provides incentives linked to Certificate of Deposit trading.

To support early implementation, the governments of Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan have issued notifications granting motor vehicle tax concessions for ten years and waiving registration fees for eligible replacement vehicles purchased under the scheme.

DDA generates ₹1,020 cr through housing sales

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) generated a revenue of ₹1,020 crore through housing sales in the first quarter of the current financial year. The DDA revenue marked a steep rise from the previous financial year, when the sales were recorded at ₹462 crore, according to a statement issued by the authority.

"Driven by robust demand for housing across all categories, DDA sold 1,284 flats during the quarter while generating Rs. 1,020 crore in revenue. Sub-city Narela emerged as the biggest contributor to this success, with 1,153 flats sold during the quarter, accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the total sales, which shows the increasing attractiveness of Narela as a preferred residential destination," the DDA said. In 2025-26, the DDA generated ₹462 crore in revenue.

The rise in revenue is the result of continuous focus on reimagining the sub-cities developed by the DDA, on the part of Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu, which has resulted in the Authority recording strong housing sales in the first quarter of the financial year 2026-27.



"Narela has emerged as the biggest contributor to this success, with 1,153 flats sold during the quarter, accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the total sales, which shows the increasing attractiveness of Narela as a preferred residential destination," the DDA said. This growth is being supported by DDA's continuous infrastructure development efforts, including key projects such as the Urban Extension Road-II (UER-II) and the

upcoming Rithala-Narela-Kundli Metro corridor, which are significantly improving connectivity.

The sales were achieved through DDA's ongoing housing schemes, namely DDA Karmayogi Awaas Yojana, DDA Nagrik Awaas Yojana, and DDA Towering Heights, East Delhi Hub, Karkardooma (FCFS), offering housing options across different income groups. These schemes have been extended till July 31, 2026, on first come first serve basis, and since the schemes are completely online, buyers can purchase flats sitting at their homes.

"These schemes have been extended till July 31, 2026, on a first come, first served basis, and since the schemes are completely online, buyers can purchase flats sitting at their home. During this quarter, 336 economically weaker section, 322 low-income group, 435 middle-income group and 191 high-income group flats were sold. The middle-income group category accounted for the highest share at 34 per cent.

The EWS category in Narela witnessed an almost complete sell-out, underscoring the strong trust of people in DDA-constructed homes and demand for affordable housing in the area.

Delhi zoo plans modern reptile house

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

The Delhi zoo will upgrade its existing Reptile House into a modern, immersive facility with advanced temperature regulation systems, improved environmental controls and enhanced visitor interpretation facilities as part of its forthcoming modernisation plan.

The proposed upgrade also includes the acquisition of additional reptile species, with a focus on animal welfare, conservation breeding, research, education and improving the visitor experience. Zoo Director Sanjeet Kumar said on World Snake Day.

The zoo currently houses six species of snakes, comprising 26 adult snakes and three hatchlings, in scientifically managed enclosures, he said. The zoo has introduced several measures over the past year to improve



snake husbandry and welfare, including the installation of UV lighting systems, temperature and humidity monitoring equipment, environmental enrichment inside the Reptile House, coco peat bedding and artificial incubation of snake eggs using scientific protocols, the director said.

These efforts have resulted in the successful hatching of three Indian cobra hatchlings. Eggs of rat snakes are currently under artificial incubation, he said.

As part of the forthcoming modernisation plan of the National Zoological Park, the existing Reptile House is proposed to be upgraded into a modern, immersive facility equipped with advanced thermoregulatory systems, improved environmental controls and enhanced visitor interpretation facilities, he said.

The plan also envisages the acquisition of additional reptile species with a continued focus on animal welfare, conservation

breeding, research, education and an enriched visitor experience.

As part of the World Snake Day celebrations, the zoo organised an expert lecture on snake biology, conservation and safe handling for its permanent staff, followed by a hands-on reptile management training programme for assistant keepers, multi-tasking staff and reptile care personnel.

The training was conducted in collaboration with Wildlife SOS, whose experts demonstrated scientific methods of reptile care, husbandry and safe handling practices, according to the official. He said that to raise awareness among visitors, the zoo also organised a snake-themed doodle activity for children and a quiz competition highlighting the ecological importance of snakes and their role in maintaining ecosystem balance.

Another TMC Rajya Sabha MP resigns, quits Mamata camp

FAIR REPORT Kolkata

In yet another jolt to the Mamata Banerjee camp of the Trinamool Congress noted Bengali actress and MP Rukmini (Koel) Mullick on Thursday resigned from the Rajya Sabha.

She was elected to the Upper House little more than four months ago — just before the Bengal Assembly elections along with singer-politician Babul Supriyo, former Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar, and senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy.

Her resignation comes barely a day after senior leader and one of the founding members and sitting MLA of the party Madan Mitra quit left Banerjee to join the rebel group of MLAs led by Opposition Leader Ritabrata Bhattacharya.

Firing speculations was Mullick's brief meeting with senior Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav in whose residence former TMC MPs led by Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar had met during when they broke away from the parent party to join the



MP Rukmini (Koel) Mullick

Nationalist Citizens' Party of India thitherto an obscure outfit.

Koel is the daughter of Bengali actor Ranjit Mullick who has a number of li films to his credit.

Though there was no report on what transpired from Thursday's talks and though the Mullick household in Kolkata remained tightlipped about the actress' future plan of

action talks were ripe that she could soon join the BJP. The Thursday's development also comes on the heels of her three party colleagues Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, Susmita Dev and Prakash Chik Baraik quitting as the TMC Rajya Sabha MPs and joining the BJP to file fresh nomination for the Upper House for which elections will be held next week.

Koel's quitting the TMC membership and her Rajya Sabha seat barely days ahead of the Monsoon Session. After Mullick's departure TMC's strength in the Upper House comes down to 9.

On Mallick's resignation Bengal BJP president Samik Bhattacharya said that TMC had become a thing of the past and there was no point talking about it. "Such things are common with the Trinamool Congress... they are finished... these things will keep on happening... so there is hardly any point dwelling on who is quitting and who is not," he said adding "no law of political science would be able to save the beleaguered faction of TMC led by the former Chief Minister."

Mamata on defections: I will bounce back

FAIR REPORT Kolkata



Amid ongoing "betrayals" and with more of her vintage colleagues continuing to defect from her faction of the Trinamool Congress, former Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday expressed rage and also betrayed signs of capitulation even as she said, the rebels might take away the name (of her party) or its symbol but the spirit inside her would never die down and that she would revive her outfit and stand up to her cause once again.

"I heard that one of our MPs have resigned today against this backdrop I ask all those who want to leave, leave now... I will start from scratch again," a visibly livid Mamata Banerjee said. Enraged at "defections engineered by those in power with the help of the central agencies" but also sounding emotional Banerjee said, "those who have luggage and baggage and those who are afraid of persecution may

leave under pressure but I will continue to fight."

Offering apology "for selecting wrong candidates who defect under pressure," the former Chief Minister said, "I bounced back in 1998 and raised a new party... I bounced back in 2004 when we were reduced to a single MP status... I have bounced back on several occasions and I will bounce back once again and raise the outfit once again.

Banerjee also slammed the breakaway faction wondering why they were not going to express solidarity with fasting Sonam Wangchuk instead of "dancing to the tunes of the powers that are using ED, CBI to engineer defection in the TMC."

India's highest commercial lilium field launched in Leh at 3,265 metres

FAIR REPORT Jammu

The development of India's highest commercial Lilium cultivation field has commenced at Choglamsar in Leh, marking the launch of a first-of-its-kind floriculture initiative of this scale in Ladakh.

The project aims to create new livelihood opportunities for local communities through commercial floriculture.

Over the past three days, more than 50,000 premium Lilium bulbs have already been planted in the field, with the first blooms expected in the first week of September.

Lilium is one of the world's most sought-after cut flowers, prized for its exceptional ornamental value and long shelf life. It is widely used in the floral industry and hospitality sector, with premium varieties currently priced between ₹150 and ₹200 per stem in domestic retail markets.

Spread across 93,000 square metres on the banks of the River Sindhu (Indus), the Choglamsar

Flower Field is being developed as one of the largest organised high-altitude floriculture parks in the country.

It is located at an altitude of nearly 3,265 metres, surpassing India's current highest flower field at Mana in Uttarakhand, which sits at 3,200 metres.

The project is being implemented with scientific and technical support from the CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (CSIR-IHBT), Palampur.

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena laid the foundation stone for the Choglamsar Flower Field on 22 June 2026.

The initiative seeks to produce premium Lilium flowers and buds that command high prices in both national and international markets, thereby creating a sustainable new source of income for Ladakh's farming community through self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives.

This project aligns with the Union Minister of Home Affairs and



Cooperation, Amit Shah's vision of "Sahkar se Samridhhi," which focuses on strengthening cooperatives to generate sustainable local employment and enhance the income of local communities, especially women and farmers.

Conceived by Lieutenant Governor Saxena, the project aims

to position Ladakh as an emerging centre for premium floriculture while providing access to high-value domestic and international flower markets.

The flower field is also expected to become a new recreational destination for tourists. In the first year, the Agriculture Department will

develop the flower field and, at the time of blooming, hand it over to selected Self-Help Groups and cooperative societies. The department will continue to support the SHGs and cooperatives in marketing the flowers in national and international markets to ensure maximum returns. From the following year onwards, the cooperatives will independently undertake commercial cultivation, harvesting, and value addition of Lilium flowers.

Local farmers are already receiving structured training in scientific floriculture, modern cultivation practices, and business aspects of floriculture. Ladakh offers ideal agro-climatic conditions for Lilium cultivation. The bulbs thrive in cold conditions, between minus 4°C and 4°C, making them naturally suited to the region's high-altitude environment. A major advantage is that the bulbs begin to multiply naturally after three years, significantly boosting future production and farmers' returns without additional investment.

Nation Focus



PM MODI SPEAKS TO QATAR AMIR, CONDOLES FATHER'S DEMISE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and conveyed his heartfelt condolences on the passing of the Father Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani.

The prime minister also said the departed leader's enduring legacy will continue to guide the two countries for further strengthening the strategic partnership. The Father Amir died on July 12 at the age of 74. Following his death, the central Government had declared one-day national mourning on July 13 as a mark of respect, with the national flag flown at half-mast throughout the country.

"Spoke with HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Amir of Qatar and conveyed heartfelt condolences on the passing of HH the Father Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. (PTI)



ANDHRA PRADESH ACHIEVES FULL DIGITISATION OF SIR FORMS: CE

Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer Vivek Yadav on Thursday said the Election Commission has achieved '100 percent digitization' of Enumeration Forms distributed to more than 4.16 crore electors across the state under the SIR of the electoral roll.

The enumeration period of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral roll began on June 15 in the southern state and was extended by 10 days until July 24. According to the latest daily bulletin on the SIR shared today, Yadav said enumeration forms were distributed to all the electors - 4.16 lakh in total.

Out of the total number of forms distributed, he said 4.16 lakh were digitised, indicating that 1,484 are still pending, though the CEO said 100 percent digitisation has been achieved. (PTI)

Captain Viridi murder trial stalled; family writes to PM Modi

FAIR REPORT New Delhi

Nearly two decades after the brutal murder of retired Merchant Navy officer Captain Manmohan Singh Viridi, his family has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking urgent intervention to expedite the extradition of prime accused Hussain Shattaf from the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The prolonged delay has brought the trial to a virtual standstill, denying justice to the victim's kin.

In a formal representation addressed to the Prime Minister's Office, Captain Manjit Singh Viridi (Retd.), the victim's brother and original complainant, highlighted the family's continued suffering and urged the Centre to fast-track Shattaf's return to India.

"I write this representation with utmost respect as the original complainant in a serious criminal case," Capt. Viridi stated, referring to FIR number 46 of 2006 registered at Lonavala City Police Station.

The case is now registered as Sessions Case number 5 of 2024 before the Sessions Court at Wadgaon Maval.

The appeal comes months after the Union Government initiated extradition proceedings against Shattaf through diplomatic channels with the UAE.

The family's frustration stems from repeated legal hurdles.

The Supreme Court, in its order dated May 18, 2023, in Criminal Appeal number 1399 of 2023, revived the murder trial by setting aside the Bombay High Court's order that had discharged the accused.

Despite this, proceedings have remained frozen because Shattaf has



failed to appear before the trial court.

"Despite the pendency of a serious criminal trial, the accused has not appeared physically before the Trial Court and continues to evade the process of law. Due to this conduct, the family of the victim continues to suffer injustice since the murder of Captain Viridi," the representation noted.

In a subsequent order dated November 20, 2025, the Bombay High Court recorded that the Maharashtra Home Department had forwarded an extradition proposal to the Ministry of Home Affairs on October 31, 2025, and that the matter was pending with the Centre.

Capt. Viridi pointed out that the continued absence of the accused has caused "grave prejudice" to the family. He noted that he is now a "super senior

citizen" yet remains committed to pursuing justice

The representation also drew attention to India's successful extradition of several other fugitives from the UAE in recent times.

"More than five accused persons have recently been extradited from the UAE," it stated, questioning why similar urgency has not been shown in Shattaf's case despite multiple pending criminal proceedings against him, including charges of forgery and use of fake documents.

Hussain Shattaf faces charges of murder under the Indian Penal Code along with other serious offences registered by Mumbai Police.

He allegedly fled India after being charged in the 2006 case and has been residing in the UAE. Interpol has issued a Red Corner Notice against him.

Captain Manmohan Singh Viridi was murdered in Lonavala, Maharashtra, in 2006. According to the police, Shattaf and others were involved in the crime. The trial has seen multiple twists, including discharge orders that were later overturned by the Supreme Court.

The Ministry of External Affairs has confirmed that India has formally requested Shattaf's extradition through diplomatic channels.

The victim's family is now pinning hopes on Prime Minister Modi's intervention to break the deadlock.

In their plea, the family has requested the Prime Minister's Office to issue necessary directions to concerned ministries so that Hussain Shattaf can be extradited and produced before the competent court at the earliest, bringing an end to what they describe as a long denial of justice.

MP Waqf Board Chairman Sanwar Patel slams critics over appointments

FAIR REPORT

Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Waqf Board Chairman Dr Sanwar Patel has broken his silence over the controversy surrounding the appointment of two non-Muslim members to the Board and the subsequent meeting with Bhopal's Shahar Qazi and Shahar Mufti, dismissing criticism as politically motivated and aimed at misleading the community.

Speaking at a programme in Ujjain, Patel took a sharp swipe at his critics, saying those questioning the meeting on social media were individuals who 'command no respect in public life'.

He clarified that he had personally invited the Shahar Qazi and Shahar Mufti as a mark of respect, adding that honouring religious elders was part of his upbringing.

According to Patel, the two religious leaders appreciated the Board's recent initiatives and advised it to ensure transparent management of Waqf properties while continuing action against corruption.

He said those criticising the meeting should also seek guidance from senior reli-



gious leaders if they wished to work honestly in public life.

Responding to objections over the inclusion of two non-Muslim members in the Waqf Board, Patel said the appointments had been made strictly in accordance with the Waqf Act, 2025.

He stressed that non-Muslim members had been inducted only at the state board level in an expert capacity to contribute administrative and financial expertise.

He clarified that mosques, madrasas, dargahs and local Waqf management committees would continue to be managed exclusively by Muslims, as provided under the new law, rejecting allegations that the religious character of Waqf institu-

tions was being altered.

Patel claimed the Board had taken strong action against illegal encroachments and financial irregularities over the past three to four years, resulting in a significant increase in revenue from Waqf properties. He said that in Bhopal alone, the Board had recovered nearly Rs 29 crore, compared to negligible income from Waqf assets in previous years.

He alleged that opposition to the new Board and the amended law was being fuelled by individuals whose "personal interests and illegal activities" had been affected by the Board's anti-encroachment and anti-corruption measures.

Outlining the Board's vision, Patel said Waqf properties belonged to the com-

munity and were meant for the welfare of economically weaker sections rather than any individual.

He said the Board had launched schemes to support the education of children from poor Muslim families and intended to utilise Waqf income for education and other welfare initiatives.

The controversy erupted after Bhopal's Shahar Qazi Maulana Syed Mushtaq Ali Nadvi and Shahar Mufti Abdul Kalam Qasmi met Patel and presented him with a bouquet following the constitution of the new Waqf Board.

The meeting drew criticism from sections of the Muslim community and several clerics, with protests being held in Bhopal against the inclusion of two non-Muslim members in the Board.

Meanwhile, anticipating a legal challenge after Congress MLA Arif Masood announced plans to move the Supreme Court, the Madhya Pradesh Waqf Board has filed a caveat petition in the Madhya Pradesh High Court, seeking to ensure that no order is passed without first hearing the Board's submissions.

LG Sinha reviews offerings system at Vaishno Devi Shrine amid fake silver row

FAIR REPORT

Jammu

Amid "fake silver" offerings controversy at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji Shrine, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday chaired a high-level meeting with the Members of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board and senior officials, and reviewed the Offerings and Donations Management System.

The meeting was convened after the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in Jammu had directed the Crime

Branch Inquiry Officer on July 13 to produce records related to over ₹550 crore worth of "fake silver" offerings at the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine on the next date of hearing, 29 July 2026.

The order was passed on an application filed by Advocate Deepak Sharma, who had lodged a detailed complaint on 9 May 2026 with the Inspector General of Police, Crime Branch, and SSP, Economic Offences Wing, demanding immediate registration of an FIR and a thorough probe.

The complaint accuses those responsible of serious cognizable offences, criminal conspiracy, cheating, criminal breach of trust, misappropriation, record manipulation, and the possible use of cadmium-laden fake material in place of devotees' silver offerings.

According to a statement issued by the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, during the meeting a comprehensive review of the collection, counting, accounting, safeguarding and utilisation of devotees' offerings was made to ensure



Lt Governor Manoj Sinha offers prayers at the Mata Vaishno Devi temple in Katra, Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday (PTI)

complete transparency, accountability and adherence to established Standard Operating Procedures in the

management of offerings and donations received at the Holy Shrine.

A detailed presentation

was made by the officers of the board highlighting the robust systems and institutional mechanisms put in place for the secure and transparent handling of offerings received through donation boxes, donation counters, online platforms and offerings in the form of precious metals.

The Board, which met under the chairmanship of the Lieutenant Governor, was apprised of verification processes, surveillance mechanisms, banking safeguards and periodic audits that govern every stage of the process.

During the meeting, it was informed that all financial transactions related to offerings and donations are undertaken strictly in conformity with prescribed banking norms, statutory provisions and the guidelines issued by the Government of India from time to time.

The Board also noted the stringent security protocols adopted for handling and storage of the offerings received in the form of precious metal as well as its secure transportation, processing and refinery through reputed

Government-approved institutions including the Reserve Bank of India and India Government Mint, Hyderabad.

After a detailed review, the Board expressed satisfaction over the transparency, accountability and efficiency of the existing arrangements.

The Board also appreciated the comprehensive safeguards and monitoring mechanisms adopted to ensure that the sacred offerings made by devotees are managed with the highest standards of integrity, financial discipline and public trust.

