

Delhi's 'urban oasis': 90-acre Lodhi Garden turns 90

NEW DELHI: Home to centuries-old tombs and some of the most exotic plants and bird species, Delhi's iconic Lodhi Garden -- often described as the 'best urban oasis in Asia' -- turned 90 on Thursday.

The horticultural delight, nestled in the heart of the national capital, bordering the posh Lodhi Estate and upscale Khan Market, was opened on April 9, 1936, as 'The Lady Willingdon Park', named after the then Vicereine of India.

Virtually acting as the lungs of Delhi, the wide green space, spread over 90 acres, is a top favourite of many for morning and evening walks, as also for joggers, or those looking just for some quieter moments away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

This garden was laid out after shifting what was then the village of Khairpur, on the outskirts of New Delhi.

At 1911 Delhi Durbar, the British had announced shifting of their imperial capital in India from Calcutta (now Kolkata) to Delhi, and a new capital city -- later named New Delhi -- was built, which was



formally inaugurated on February 13, 1931, by the then Viceroy Lord Irwin.

With its beautiful flora and fauna, the Lodhi Garden is also a top choice of many picnickers and tourists, both domestic and foreign.

Besides, scattered monuments, a variety of plants and trees can be found here, such as neem, jamun, royal bottle palm, bamboo, eucalyptus and numerous birds, including parakeets, mynahs, kingfishers, babblers, and hornbills.

"The garden happens to contain

an unusually rich variety of architectural styles, ranging from Sayyid and Lodi to Mughal. The present landscaping was done by American architect Joseph Allen Stein (in 1968), and modified by a group of Japanese landscape designers," according to INTACH.

Incidentally, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), a Delhi-based non-profit body that works for the preservation of unprotected heritage in the country, is located in the vicinity of the garden.

Purnima Datt, head of the HECS (Heritage Education and Communication Service) department at INTACH headquarters, says the garden is "our close neighbour" and also virtually a "living classroom for students" as it is an abode of so many species of plants, trees and birds, butterflies and other fauna.

"INTACH and Lodhi Garden have a very symbiotic relationship. For us, we see it every time we go to work, and we have so many fond memories associated with it. Either visiting it purely for a stroll or for doing heritage walks, every time the experience is amazing, just to be there in such an open space right in the heart of the city," she told PTL. Datt said teams of INTACH have also done some conservation work in the garden in the past, and a pamphlet documenting the garden was published several years ago. INTACH's HECS is dedicated to spreading awareness, especially among young people, about India's natural, built and cultural heritage -- its natural environment, historical buildings, living traditions and artistic beauty.

High voter turnout in Assam assembly polls 'not ordinary, historic': Himanta

GUWAHATI: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the high turnout in Thursday's assembly election was not "ordinary but historic".

Sarma said the result of this election is "already visible -- in the hope, pride, and happiness on the faces of our people".

Polling for all 126 assembly constituencies, held in a single phase, ended at 5 pm on Thursday, with an estimated voter turnout of 84.42 per cent, which was expected to rise further.

"What we set out to do was not merely fight an election, but to turn it into a movement -- a movement to protect our civilisational values, our culture, and our land," Sarma said in a post on X.

"Today, for the first time,



our people have come out in unprecedented numbers -- voting shoulder to shoulder, matching and even surpassing our opponents in turnout. In many polling booths, participation is crossing 95 per cent. This is not ordinary. This is historic," he asserted.

The CM said Assam has risen above language and caste, and "our people have voted with one clear resolve

-- to protect our land, our identity, and our culture from illegal infiltration and demographic aggression".

"This is not just an election. This is a watershed moment in Assam's history," he said.

Sarma added that the message is loud and clear: "Assam will not surrender, Assam will fight, Assam will survive, Assam will endure."

Lalbagcha Raja Ganesh Mandal seeks dismissal of complaint filed with Human Rights Commission

MUMBAI: The Lalbagcha Raja Sarvajani Ganeshotsav Mandal here has urged the Maharashtra Human Rights Commission to dismiss a complaint filed against it over the alleged ill-treatment faced by common devotees seeking 'Darshan' during the Ganesh festival.

The famous Ganesh Mandal in central Mumbai attracts lakhs of devotees including film stars and politicians during the 10-day festival every year.

Two city-based lawyers filed a complaint with the Commission in 2025, taking exception to the special treatment given to VIPs.

Women, children and the elderly were subjected to "malicious behavior" and their rights were violated, the complainants claimed.

Ordinary devotees faced misconduct and criminal activity in the

serpentine queues for Darshan, including theft of mobile phones and other valuables, alleged the complaint, filed by advocates Ashish Rai and Pankaj Mishra.

The Ganesh Mandal in its reply submitted before the commission on Wednesday argued that the complaint was filed in August 2025, but it referred to grievances dating back to 2023 and 2024. Hence, it was legally barred due to the delay as per the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.

Security arrangements for VIPs and dignitaries are decided by the Mumbai Police and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, and they are meant to facilitate smooth movement for all devotees, it said.

Further, no individual devotee corroborated the allegations of "mis-handling" or "misbehaviour", the reply said,

adding that the allegations were "evasive and non-specific".

The complaint should be dismissed with "heavy costs", the Mandal said.

The police, in their response, said that the Lalbag area where the Ganesh Mandal erects its pandal during the festival turns into one of the most densely populated religious sites in the world during the 10-day festival. In 2025 alone, a staggering 1.5 to 2 million devotees visited the Mandal's Ganesh pandal, they said.

As to the allegations of ordinary devotees facing misbehaviour or even assaults, the police said that nine Non-Cognizable (NC) offenses were registered, and appropriate legal action was taken.

The matter will be next heard by the Human Rights Commission on July 7.

Faridabad police arrest six for insurance fraud through 'fake' call centre in Delhi

FARIDABAD: The Faridabad police said on Thursday they busted operations of a fake call centre and arrested six people for allegedly defrauding people by offering a bonus on an insurance policy.

The call centre was being run from a rented accommodation in Tilak Nagar, Delhi.

According to police, a resident of Trikha colony in Ballabhgarh, lodged a complaint at the Cyber Police Station here, stating that he had a policy with Future Generali Insurance Solutions. On September 3 last year, he received a call from someone claiming to be from the company's verification department. The caller allegedly said he could offer a bonus of Rs 93,525 if the policyholder purchased a dummy policy and paid Rs 36,000.

The complainant accepted the offer and made the

payment into an account based on the details provided, he told police.

After this, he received repeated calls from individuals claiming to be the employees of the insurance company, who allegedly extorted a total of Rs 7,70,630 from him in the name of pre-maturing the policy. Based on this complaint, a case was registered at the police station under relevant sections of the law.

A cyber police team traced the call centre to Tilak Nagar in Delhi during investigation and arrested the six accused on Tuesday night, officials said.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Mohammad Aslam Raza, Rohit Kumar, Mukesh Gupta, Shubham, and Rahul, residents of Delhi and Sachin Mittal, a resident of Sonapat in Haryana, police said.

"During interrogation, it was revealed that the call

centre in Tilak Nagar was being operated by Aslam, Rohit, and Sachin. They had rented two floors of a building," a police spokesperson said.

At the time of the incident, however, they were running the call centre in Delhi's Subhash Nagar, according to the official.s

"Rohit, Aslam, and Sachin called the complainant and defrauded him of his money. The other three accused, Mukesh, Rahul, and Shubham, worked as callers on a salary at the centre. Aslam, Rohit and Sachin together used to obtain account, phone SIM and insurance policy data from others," the spokesperson said.

Accused Mukesh, Rahul and Shubham have been sent to jail while Aslam, Rohit and Sachin have been remanded to five days' police custody and are being questioned, the official added.

Upset over police inaction after daughter's death, man sets himself ablaze in Raj

JAIPUR: A man allegedly attempted self-immolation outside the office of the Superintendent of Police in Rajasthan's Ajmer on Thursday over "inaction" by the police following his daughter's death, police said.

Police personnel at the scene intervened in time and stopped him. He was then rushed to JLN Hospital for treatment.

The man said that his daughter died by suicide in November 2025 after being harassed by a youth, and claimed that no action had been taken despite repeated complaints.

He said his daughter, who was pursuing ITI studies, informed her mother that a youth had harassed her on her birthday, November 25, 2025.

The family counselled the accused the following day, but on November 28, she hanged herself at home, he claimed.

The man claimed that he had approached Alwar Gate police station and the Superintendent of Police twice earlier, but no action was taken.

He demanded strict action against the accused and said he had no right to live if he could not secure justice for his daughter.

Superintendent of Police Harshvardhan Agarwala said the matter is being investigated.

"We are examining why the man attempted suicide and the allegations made by him. Necessary directions have been issued for a probe," he said.

Woman held for killing niece in Odisha's Ganjam

BERHAMPUR: Police on Thursday arrested a woman for allegedly killing her nine-year-old niece in Odisha's Ganjam district, officials said. The incident took place at Laxmanapalli, near Chhamunda village, under Jagannath Prasad police station limits of the district on Wednesday.

The victim's mother alleged that after committing the murder, the woman wrapped the body in a plastic sheet and dumped it in an abandoned latrine room, located in the backside of her home.

The police recovered the body on

Wednesday late evening and said the preliminary investigation has revealed that the woman killed the nine-year-old girl out of jealousy, as she has no children, even after three years of marriage. The accused was identified as Bidyabharati (26), wife of Ganesh Moharana, a resident of Laxmanapalli, the police said.

According to the police, the deceased, a resident of Kanakuturu village near Buguda in Ganjam district, was staying in Bhubaneswar along with her mother and a sister for the last several years. On Wednesday, the

woman and her two daughters came to her brother's home for a medical check-up. The woman, along with her brother, went to her residence at Kanakuturu for some medical issues, a police officer said. After returning home, they did not find their daughter, even though they searched for her intensively and informed the police. During the search, the police found the body from the abandoned latrine. After taking their food, two sisters went to play with their friends near the house at about 10.30 am. The deceased again came home at

about 1.30 pm and asked her aunt (the accused) for food. Since she was angry and jealous of her mother, she throttled the girl with a cloth when no one was in the home, Ganjam SP Suvendu Patra said. During the interrogation, the accused woman confessed to the crime. She was also angry with her husband for allegedly not taking her for a medical checkup for her pregnancy issue, whereas he has taken his sister (deceased's mother) for a medical checkup, said Bhanjanagar sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Deepak Kumar Mishra.

Five cops booked for facilitating release of drug lord's passport

CHANDIGARH: Five police personnel in Punjab's Tarn Taran have been booked for allegedly facilitating the release of the impounded passport of an international drug lord wanted by the US' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), officials said on Thursday.

Shehnaz Singh alias Shawn Bhinder, a native of Mandiala village in Batala, was arrested last March during the state government's anti-drug drive 'Yudh Nashian Virudh'. Following his arrest, Bhinder's passport was impounded by the Regional Passport Office in Amritsar on police's request.

Bhinder was granted bail by the Punjab and Haryana High Court in October 2025 and is feared to have fled the country following the release of his passport.

Tarn Taran Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Surendra Lamba on Thursday said five police personnel have been booked for facilitating the release of Bhinder's passport by issuing a no objection certificate (NOC) and preparing a biased report.

Lamba said following a probe into the lapse, a preliminary inquiry by the superintendent of police (headquarter) fixed the responsibility of the five police personnel.

An FIR has been registered against the Inspector Prabhjit Singh, Assistant-Sub Inspector (ASI) Lakhwinder Singh, ASI Gurwinder Singh, Head Constable Harkanwal Singh and Constable Dharminder Singh.

According to sources, all five are currently absconding.

During the investigation, role of other police personnel will also be examined, the SSP said, adding that a detailed investigation will be taken up led by a SP rank officer.

Strict action will be taken against any police personnel found involved in facilitating the release of the drug lord's passport, Lamba said, adding, Inspector Prabhjit Singh and ASI Lakhwinder Singh had been suspended earlier.

Bhinder is wanted by the FBI in connection with one of the largest drug busts in the US. On February 26, 2025, the agency seized 391 kg methamphetamine, 109 kg cocaine, four sophisticated weapons and vehicles in the US, arresting six of Bhinder's associates.

Following the crackdown, Bhinder managed to give a slip to FBI sleuths and clandestinely arrived in India before being nabbed from Ludhiana by state police last year.

After his arrest, the Punjab Police had said Bhinder was a key player in a global narcotics syndicate, smuggling cocaine from Colombia into the USA and Canada.

It was discovered that Bhinder had been operating under the guise of a legitimate transportation business in Canada since 2014 and had allegedly facilitated the movement of drugs from Colombia to the US and Canada via Mexico.

Probe had revealed that Bhinder along with his accomplices were transporting approximately 600 kg of cocaine from Colombia every week.

Public land encroachers to be barred from fighting PRI Polls

SHIMLA: People who have encroached upon government or 'shamlat' land will be barred from contesting the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI) polls, a state official said on Thursday. 'Shamlat' land is village common land which is used by the community. The order has been issued to ensure selection of representatives with a clean and honest image to head panchayats, the official said.

The village head and oth-

er panchayat members accused of corruption will also be barred from contesting the elections. The state has already prohibited the individuals who have been charge-sheeted for involvement in the trafficking of 'chitta' (adulterated heroin) from contesting the PRI polls. The government has begun collating records of such people ahead of the May 31 PRI polls. The Panchayati Raj Department has mandat-

ed securing a no-objection certificate from it before filing nomination papers. According to the Section 122 of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, a person shall be disqualified from being chosen as and for being an office-bearer of a Panchayat if he or any of his family members has encroached upon any land belonging to or taken on lease or requisitioned by or on behalf of, the state government.

Union Min Goyal slams DMK for using 'flimsy excuses' to block Women's Bill

COIMBATORE: Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday slammed the DMK government in Tamil Nadu, accusing it of creating "flimsy excuses" to block the implementation of one third reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

He said that the Centre intends to add additional seats in the Lok Sabha and legislatures to accommodate this reservation without affecting current seats.

"The Congress and DMK are creating all flimsy excuses and are trying to block the Parliament sessions on April 16, 17 and 18, which will ensure one-third reservation without affecting the current seats," Goyal said.

Addressing a press meet here, the senior BJP leader stated that the central government is seeking the support of the DMK and Congress to ensure that women get their rightful due starting from the 2029 elections. Earlier in the day, Chief

Minister M K Stalin alleged that the proposed amendment to ensure 33 per cent reservation for women in the midst of polls in states, including Tamil Nadu, appeared to be yet another political manoeuvre aimed at shaping electoral narratives. Stalin alleged the timing for the proposed amendment led to serious suspicion.

Goyal said that the Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu on April 23 is a fight against the "dynastic rule" of the Stalin family, which he alleged has pushed the state into a severe financial crisis.

He claimed that under the current administration, Tamil Nadu has become one of the weakest financial states in the country with debt levels more than doubling in the last five years.

"Sadly, the DMK government is run by one family. The Stalin family, whether it is Stalin, whether it is Udayanidhi Stalin, whether

it is Kanimozhi, whether it is son-in-law Sabareesan, one family known for corruption, known for bad governance, is responsible for taking Tamil Nadu down," he said.

He also questioned the whereabouts of central funds and state revenues, and alleged that the DMK was focused only on corruption and the interests of a single family.

"We see no development of infrastructure and basic amenities despite the state receiving significant money through central taxes and grants," Goyal said, adding that the state has failed to fulfill 70 per cent of its 505 election promises, including petrol price reductions and education loan waivers.

Highlighting a breakdown in governance, he alleged that the state is currently ruled by land, sand, and liquor mafias. He cited a figure of 8,900 murders over the last five years as evidence of a collapsed law



and order situation and accused the government of using police machinery to intimidate social media influencers and YouTubers who criticise the administration.

The minister specifically pointed to a perceived lack of safety for women and girls in the state.

On the industrial front, Goyal defended the central government's economic policies, noting that India

has entered into nine free trade agreements covering 38 developed nations. He dismissed claims of high raw material costs for MSMEs, asserting that Indian steel prices are among the lowest globally and that engineering exports have hit record growth.

Goyal noted that the industry in the Tirupur belt is so robust that it currently faces a shortage of nearly one lakh workers.