

IN BRIEF



**Stop sale of Johnson's baby shampoo: NCPCR**

**NEW DELHI**  
The apex child rights body has asked all States to stop sale of Johnson's baby shampoo after its sample was found to be of substandard quality. The directive from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights to the chief secretaries of all States came after the drug testing laboratory in Jaipur confirmed the presence of formaldehyde in the product. **PTI**

**Two policemen killed in Naxal attack in Bijapur**

**RAIPUR**  
Two police personnel were killed and a villager was injured on Saturday when suspected Naxals opened fire on them in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, the police said. The incident took place when the two policemen and the villager were going to a nearby village. Constable Arvind Minj and assistant constable Sukku Habka died on the spot. **PTI**

**10 dead as bus falls into 200-ft gorge in Chamba**

**SHIMLA**  
A private bus fell into a 200-foot-deep gorge near the Panchpula bridge in Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district on Saturday, killing at least 10 passengers. Officials said several more were injured. The accident took place near Banikhet in Dalhousie sub-division. The bus was travelling from Dalhousie to Pathankot in Punjab. Rescue operations were on, said Chamba SP Monica Bhutunguru. **PTI**

**Eight hurt after fight over pen in Assam**

**GUWAHATI**  
Two families in central Assam's Nagaon district fought over a pen, leaving eight people seriously injured. Among those injured are three women. Police said the incident at Kaliadinga village between two Class 6 students — both girls — of Kaliadinga High Madrasa was over a pen. One accused the other of stealing her pen, which led to a full fledged fight between the two families, the police said.

# Gujarat govt. to back potato farmers in PepsiCo fight

Congress's Ahmed Patel says Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority should have intervened

**MAHESH LANGA  
PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI**

With protests coming from all ends of the political spectrum, the Gujarat government has decided to back four potato farmers in their fight against PepsiCo's ₹4.2 crore lawsuit against them for allegedly infringing its rights by growing the potato used in Lays chips.

A senior official told *The Hindu* that the State government will join the ongoing legal case on the side of the farmers, just hours after senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel slammed PepsiCo and said the State "shouldn't keep its eyes shut".

"We will be joining in the matter as a party to support farmers," a top government official said, refusing to be

identified. He added that the decision to support farmers in the matter was taken at the highest level in order to protect the interests of the farmers.

Gujarat produces 33 lakh tonnes from its 1.21 lakh hectares planted with the potato crop, with Banaskantha recently pipping Uttar Pradesh's Agra to become the country's largest potato producing district.

Senior Congress leader from Gujarat Ahmed Patel said it was a "wake-up call" for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. "Why have they been sleeping for so long when an MNC is taking our farmers to court? The Centre is yet to take any action, the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority



**Good yield:** Gujarat produces 33 lakh tonnes from its 1.21 lakh hectares planted with the potato crop. **FILE PHOTO**

should have intervened," he told *The Hindu*, adding that this case could have widespread implications for other farmers across the country.

He pointed out that farmers are already facing losses and struggling in a drought

situation. "Farmers will grow as the market dictates. Foreign companies cannot dictate what our farmers must or mustn't cultivate. In the Congress manifesto, we have promised a *kisan* (farmer) budget. We are not

against corporates, but farmers' interests must take priority," he said.

Political pressure from all corners has been on the rise, with farmers' groups affiliated to the ruling BJP, including the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, as well as those linked to the Left parties, threatening a boycott of Pepsi products and demanding government intervention.

**Offer to settle**

PepsiCo has already offered to settle the case out of court in the wake of boycott calls, which have spread to global social media. However, the company is still insisting that the farmers stop using its registered variety of potato and surrender their existing stocks, or join its corporate farming programme which

involves an exclusive buy-back clause. The farmers are considering the offer. The case next comes up for hearing in an Ahmedabad civil court on June 12.

**Farmers' rights**

While the company has invoked the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001 to claim infringement of its rights, farmers groups point out that the Act specifically allows the Indian farmer "to save, use, sow, resow, exchange, share or sell his farm produce including seed of a variety protected under this Act" so long as he does not sell "branded seed".

Farmers groups have also demanded that the Centre intervene in the matter and bear the farmers' legal costs.

# Air India passengers stranded as tech glitch hits operations

155 flights delayed globally as airline fails to offer check-in facility to passengers

**JAGRITI CHANDRA  
NEW DELHI**

Thousands of Air India passengers were stranded across the airline's domestic and international network early on Saturday morning due to a server issue that lasted for six hours. The problem resulted in the airline not being able to check-in passengers and issue their boarding passes, which delayed 155 flights.

The problem occurred at 3 a.m. on Saturday when the server that had undergone maintenance could not be put back into operation due to a glitch, explained the airline's Chairman and Managing Director (C&MD) Ashwani Lohani at a press conference. The problem was rectified at 8.45 a.m.

"Till 10 a.m., 85 flights were delayed. There will be a ripple effect on our flight operations throughout the day," Mr. Lohani said.

A spokesperson later said that 75 more flights would be impacted until 8.30 p.m. on



**Wings clipped:** Air India flight passengers stranded at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on Saturday. **PTI**

Saturday. The Air India Group, which also includes subsidiaries Air India Express and Alliance Air, operates 674 flights daily.

Air India's software solution is provided by SITA, a global airline IT services major, which provides Air India check-in and baggage tracking technology, among other services. Air India was the only airline affected by the server issue. The CMD added that international flights

would not see a delay of more than 10-15 minutes, but the real brunt would be borne by domestic flights. Passengers taking a connecting flight domestically before taking an international flight may have some difficulties, but the airline was providing free re-scheduling as well as hotel accommodation.

As the crisis unfolded, several passengers posted photos of overcrowded air-

ports, such as those at Delhi and Mumbai, and shared their ordeal on social media.

"Systems have crashed and all flights are delayed. Not a good thing in a market that's already stretched for capacity," tweeted actor Gul Panag.

#AirIndia has got its servers down and we are stranded at #SydneyAirport. It's been more than 3 hours. Disappointed," tweeted Sumit Joshi.

# Data theft bid hits Ayushman Bharat

State governments told to be alert

**BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI**

Ayushman Bharat, the government run health insurance programme, on Saturday confirmed that there had been an attempted security breach.

"There have been attempts to get illegal access to large medical data including sensitive personal information," said Dr. Indu Bhushan, CEO Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.

Alerted about the intrusion 48 hours ago, the National Health Authority — which administers the programme — has now written to all State governments alerting them about the threat and warning that no sensitive data be shared.

Describing the nature of the attempted breach, Dr. Bhushan said contact had been made with Ayushman Bharat employees urging them to leak sensitive information on the available health profiles of those covered by the scheme.

With more than 3 crore

e-cards issued countrywide to individuals covered under the scheme and over 21 lakh hospital admissions, worth ₹2,820 crore, having been approved, the scheme is one of the world's largest state-run health insurance programmes, according to the government.

Health data is extremely sensitive and of great value to commercial and pharmaceutical companies.

"We have this data enveloped in multiple layers of security which is tough to penetrate," explained Dr. Bhushan.

"We also have a stringent access system for those within Ayushman Bharat and we were alerted, almost immediately, when the breach was attempted," he said.

The authority is now also seeking assistance from the public to help ensure that the programme stays cybersecure and that patient data and records are not compromised in any manner.

# Police start probe after death of Jet Airways employee

**AKANKSHA SAXENA  
MUMBAI**

A Jet Airways employee allegedly committed suicide at his Nalasopara residence on Friday afternoon. The Tulinj police have initiated inquiries into the incident.

The police said Shailesh Kumar Singh was a senior technician with the ground support department of the airline and was suffering

from cancer for the last three years.

"Mr. Singh was being treated at a local hospital and was brought back home around 6 a.m. on Friday. He was complaining of severe pain in the stomach at that time and around 1.30 p.m., he was found to have killed himself," an officer with the Palghar police said.

The officer added that Mr.

Singh was rushed to the Alliance Hospital in Nalasopara where he was declared dead before admission.

The Tulinj police were subsequently informed and a team was sent to make inquiries with his family. The police also visited the Sai Pooja Apartment in Oswal Nagari, where Mr. Singh used to stay, to make enquiries with neighbours. "No

suicide note has been found so far. We have registered an accidental death report in connection with the incident," Inspector Daniel Ben from Tulinj police station said. Mr. Singh is survived by his wife, two sons and two daughters. One of his sons is also working in Jet Airways and the recent suspension of operations by the airline, coupled with his father's

long-standing illness, had put severe financial strain on the family, said a source close to the family.

Jet Airways is in doldrums and has not paid its staff of over 22,000 people the salaries of March. The salaries of April are due in a few days.

*Suicide helplines in Mumbai: 022-24131212; 022-25521111.*

# Submit report on any adverse reaction to pelvic mesh, J&J told

Emulate USFDA in banning product, govt. requested

**BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI**

Days after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) banned surgical pelvic meshes — used to support the abnormal descent of the pelvis in women — following reports of adverse reactions, the Union Health Ministry has written to pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson seeking information on the import, sale and stock of the product in the past three years.

"We have also requested for information/report on any adverse reactions," said a senior health official.

The Ministry is also looking at the fact that the company's licence to import it expired in March 2019 and it hasn't come up for renewal yet.

While the Indian manufacturers claim that they aren't making vaginal mesh, an official added that other international mesh makers — Boston Scientific and Coloplast — were not registered

**It is distressing when overseas manufacturers continue to sell in India suspect quality products**

**RAJIV NATH  
Coordinator, IMDI**

for the import of mesh in India.

Seeking an immediate ban on the use of the product, Rajiv Nath, forum coordinator of the Indian Medical Device Industry, said: "Our regulators approve import of notified medical devices on the basis of the USFDA and other such regulatory approval so when these countries ban specific devices, Indian regulators too need to automatically cancel import licences and impose the same restrictions. It is distressing when these reputed overseas manufacturers continue to sell in India suspect quality batches of products that they have recalled or been asked to recall by their regu-

latory authority abroad."

Explained Malini Aisola, health researcher, co-convenor of the All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN): "As per AIDAN's analysis, a number of mesh products for use in hernia repair, urinary incontinence and prolapse repair have been approved in India. Given the horrific adverse events associated with the pelvic mesh in Western countries which has led to the ban, the Indian regulatory body must take immediate measures to protect patients — by initiating local investigations and issuing show cause notices on the way to ordering mandatory withdrawal of these products."

She added that it was tragically ironic that the Indian regulator willingly relies on the decisions of foreign regulatory authorities to grant companies access to the market, but was reluctant to act on the decisions of those same agencies to protect patient safety.

# CBI books former official for graft

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has booked the former Official Liquidator of Delhi-based Super Bazar for alleged misappropriation of funds and other irregularities.

A First Information Report (FIR) has been registered against A.K. Misra, based on a complaint by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.

Mr. Misra, the then Chief Director (Co-operation) in the Ministry of Agriculture, was appointed as Official Liquidator of Super Bazar in July 2002. He superannuated as Chief Director in January 2017. However, he held full charge of the post of Official Liquidator till March 2018. His tenure was further extended till May 2018.

It is alleged that even after demitting office, Mr. Misra issued a cheque for ₹35 crore in favour of Writers & Publishers Limited, which had been selected to review Super Bazar.