

Goa nightclub where 25 died in fire was flagged for illegal construction in 2024

New Delhi, Agency: The Goa government has told the legislative assembly that the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub, where 25 persons died in a fire last month, had been flagged for illegal construction by revenue officials in 2024.

Twenty-five persons were killed last month in a fire at the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub, located at Arpora in North Goa.

State Revenue Minister Atanasio Monserrate, in a written reply to the House on Friday, attached documents that show the club was constructed by demolishing the traditional sluice gate inside the salt pan by illegally converting the land.

The original owners of the property, Pradeep Ghadi Amonkar and Sunil Divkar, had filed a complaint before the Bardez taluka mamlatdar (revenue officer) on December 21, 2023.

The complaint was filed against the then Maizon Lake View Resort (later named as the Birch by Romeo Lane after it was leased out to brothers Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra).

The complainants had signed an agreement for sale with Surinder Khosla, the proprietor of the resort.

Their complaint specifically mentioned that there was a construction without the conversion of land and without the change of zone.

It alleged that there was construction in the tenanted land and the "traditional sluice gate was demolished."

The complaint also pointed out that the establishment was "discharging sewage into the Baga river".

The documents, tabled by the minister, also showed that the complainants had specifically mentioned that the discotheque (nightclub) was



being operated in an "unsafe structure which could cause a major tragedy."

The complaint also mentioned that there was "mis-utilisation of open spaces in contravention to the building by-laws."

Responding to the complaint, the Bardez mamlatdar had asked Arpora-Nagoa panchayat talathi to

The talathi had listed out that 4,000 sqm area was earmarked for parking, 7,500 sqm for construction of shops, 7,250 sqm for landscaping and water sports, another 3,600 sqm for landscaping in the property's western part, and in the centre of the property where the salt pan existed, there were two structures of 2,000 and 1,400 sqm each, where the controversial nightclub cum restaurant was located.

"The party (Khosla) says he has all the documents but did not produce (them) even after being given several opportunities for almost two months," as per the documents tabled by Monserrate to a question by Goa Forward Party MLA Vijai Sardesai.

The winter session of the state assembly was held from January 12 to 16.

Mumbai mayor polls likely on January 28 Army launches 3rd Bailey bridge in SL following Ditwah cyclone

Voting, reservation and selection process explained

Mumbai, Agency: The next Mumbai mayor will be elected through a vote by corporators in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) House, with the candidate securing the highest number of votes declared mayor.

The election is expected to be held on January 28, 2026, during a special meeting convened by the municipal administration, civic sources said.

The Mayor will be elected through voting by corporators in the house. "Whoever gets the maximum number of votes is declared the Mayor and deputy Mayor," said an official.

While it is not mandatory for the party with the highest number of corporators to secure the Mayor's



post, past trends show that the party with a clear majority usually managed to claim the prestigious position. The last Mayor was Kishori Pednekar of the Shiv Sena, who won the election this time as well.

According to sources, the Urban Development Department will hold a lot-

tery next week to decide the reservation category of the mayor's post—such as general, women or reserved classes. The mayoral election will be held some days after the lottery, placing the election firmly towards the last week of January. How Mumbai mayor is elected

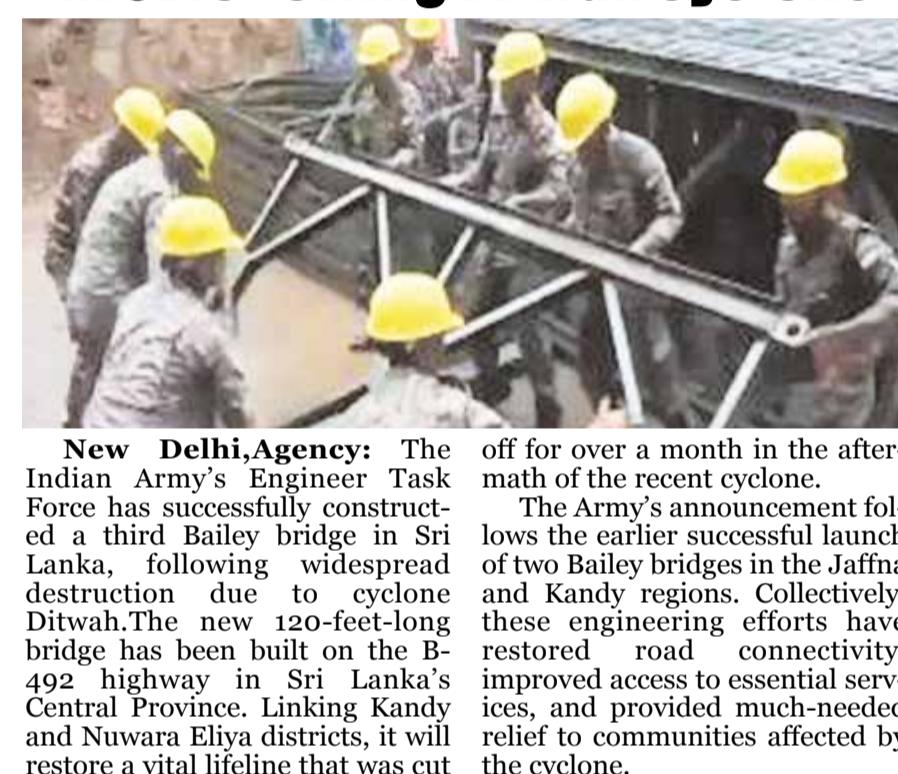
The process begins with

the Urban Development Department conducting a lottery to decide the reservation of the mayor's post. Once the category is announced, eligible corporators file their nominations. The election is then held at a special meeting of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). All elected corporators vote, and the candidate who secures a simple majority—more than half of the House strength—is elected mayor.

If no party has a clear majority, alliances and post-poll negotiations become decisive. Given the present political equations in Mumbai, sources said the possibility of shifting loyalties or realignments during the mayoral race cannot be ruled out.

New Delhi, Agency: The Indian Army's Engineer Task Force has successfully constructed a third Bailey bridge in Sri Lanka, following widespread destruction due to cyclone Ditwah. The new 120-feet-long bridge has been built on the B-492 highway in Sri Lanka's Central Province. Linking Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts, it will restore a vital lifeline that was cut off for over a month in the aftermath of the recent cyclone.

The Army's announcement follows the earlier successful launch of two Bailey bridges in the Jaffna and Kandy regions. Collectively, these engineering efforts have restored road connectivity, improved access to essential services, and provided much-needed relief to communities affected by the cyclone.



Indians start returning from Iran amid protests



New Delhi, Agency: Several Indians, including students, have arrived in New Delhi on board commercial flights from Iran amid widespread protests in the Islamic nation and Tehran's crackdown that has so far killed more than 2,500 persons.

A woman medical student said, "The Internet was not working. So, we didn't exactly know what was happening around the country." The Indian Embassy in Tehran has been reassuring Indian nationals there through available means of communication.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in his weekly media briefing on Friday said, "At present, there are approximately 9,000 of our nationals living in Iran. Most of them are students." Besides, there are sailors, pilgrims and some people who are associated with business and reside there," he said, adding that in view of the recent developments and activities taking place in Iran, the MEA had issued "two to three advisories".

Over 1.3 crore devotees take holy dip on Mauni Amavasya at Sangam in UP's Prayagraj

New Delhi, Agency: More than 1.3 crore devotees took a holy dip in the Ganga and at the Sangam by 8 am on Sunday on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, the main bathing festival of the ongoing Magh Mela here, officials said.

A senior mela administration official said devotees began arriving at the Ganga and Sangam ghats from midnight, braving dense fog, and continued to stream in from all directions through the early morning hours.

Earlier, about 1.03 crore devotees had taken a dip on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, while nearly 85 lakh people bathed in the Ganga and Sangam on Ekadashi.



Divisional Commissioner Saumya Agrawal said reflective tapes have been installed on poles across the mela area to help pilgrims navigate correctly, while civil defence volunteers have been deployed to guide devotees.

She said the Magh Mela

has been spread across 800 hectares and divided into seven sectors. More than 25,000 toilets have been installed in the mela area, and over 3,500 sanitation workers are deployed to maintain cleanliness.

Agrawal added that a tent city has been set up for tourists and pilgrims wish-

ing to observe short-term Kalpvaks (purification rituals), with facilities for meditation and yoga. To ensure smooth movement, services such as bike taxis and golf carts have also been provided. Superintendent of Police (Magh Mela) Neeraj Pandey said over 10,000 police personnel have been deployed across the mela area to ensure security and smooth movement of devotees. For crowd management and traffic regulation, 42 temporary parking zones have been created this year, with a capacity to accommodate over one lakh vehicles. He said a total of 12,100 feet-long bathing ghats have been constructed for the Magh Mela 2025-26, equipped with all essential basic facilities.

Japan to invite 500 AI experts from India by 2030

New Delhi, Agency: Japan plans to invite 500 skilled artificial intelligence (AI) professionals from India by 2030 to promote joint research and innovation, officials said. This comes as a significant boost to technological cooperation between the two nations.

The announcement was made during the 18th Japan-India Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi in New Delhi.

According to officials aware of the matter, the meeting lasted for over two hours and covered a spectrum of bilateral and regional issues.

As part of the newly launched "Japan-India AI Cooperation Initiative", both sides agreed to set up a "Japan-India AI Strategic Dialogue" to facilitate research partnerships, academic exchanges and technological collaboration in the rapidly evolving field.

Motegi, visiting India for the first time in six years, said Tokyo wants to deepen cooperation with New Delhi in advanced technology sectors while contributing to the upcoming AI Impact Summit. India will host the summit next month.

Welcoming Motegi's proposal, Jaishankar termed it a "forward-looking step" in expanding innovation-driven ties.

The two ministers reaffirmed



their commitment to strengthening cooperation across three key pillars – security and defence, economy and innovation, and people-to-people exchanges – under the "Japan-India Joint Vision for the Next Decade".

According to a joint press statement released by the two ministers, both sides agreed to intensify efforts to build resilient supply chains in critical sectors such as semiconductors, clean energy, critical minerals, information and communication technology (ICT), and pharmaceuticals. The two nations also plan to launch a new private-sector dialogue on economic security within the first quarter of 2026.

Motegi and Jaishankar

announced that 2027 will be designated as the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Japan, and plans were in the works for a year-long series of cultural and academic exchanges.

Among key regional issues, the ministers discussed cooperation in ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific, enhancing connectivity in the North East region and maintaining close coordination within the Quad framework involving the United States and Australia. They also exchanged views on global governance reforms, including cooperation at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations (UN) Security Council.