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## Begumpet Railway Station redevelopment nears completion

Hyderabad: The works related to redevelopment of the Begumpet Railway Station, being taken up as a part of the 'Naya Bharat Naya Station' initiative of Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS) of Railway Ministry, is underway at a brisk pace. As on date, about 90 per cent of the development work has been completed. This includes entry ramps and Foot over Bridge among others. The facilities for train travellers planned at the redeveloped station include removing unwanted structures, improved lighting, better-circulating area, upgraded parking space, Divyangjan-friendly infrastructure, environment-friendly building using green energy, etc. Union Minister of Coal and Mines, G. Kishan Reddy on Saturday visited the Begumpet railway station and reviewed the redevelopment works. He was accompanied by South Central Railway (SCR) General Manager Arun Kumar Jain and other senior Railway officials.

## Two held with marijuana worth Rs. 28.5 lakh at Secunderabad railway station

Hyderabad: The Government Railway Police (GRP) along with the Railway Protection Force (RPF) busted an interstate drug peddling racket being operated between Odisha and Maharashtra via Hyderabad and arrested two persons for drug peddling at the Secunderabad railway station on Friday. The arrested persons are Sushant Kumar Swain (23), a private employee from Odisha and Karan Iyappan Shetty (26), a cab driver from Maharashtra. The absconding suspect is Jeevan alias Ajay from Mumbai and native of Odisha. According to the police, Jeevan, who earlier worked as a makeup assistant for TV artists in Mumbai developed habit of consuming marijuana and alcohol.

## CM Revanth warns of stern actions against social media



Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has expressed anger over the posts coming out on social media. During a discussion on the motion of thanks following the Governor's address in the Assembly on Saturday, the Chief Minister warned that strict action would be taken if limits were crossed. "Observe the language being used on social media. Individuals are making comments about family members and children without restraint. We are putting up with this behavior due to our roles in public life, but if it persists, it will hinder

everyone's freedom. If similar posts were made about your mother or sister, would you remain quiet? Should boundaries be crossed, we will no longer remain silent. How can anyone record and share videos of girls? If you identify as a journalist, provide an explanation. If anyone attempts to disguise themselves, I will confront them decisively," he stated emphatically. The Chief Minister also noted that the culture on social media has become completely toxic. Issuing warning to the Opposition leader, K Chandrashekar Rao, the Chief Minister said that KCR

should tell his people to stop all this nonsense. "If they cross the line, I will not remain silent. If they say whatever they want, I will not stay quiet. They think that they can get bail by going to court. If needed, we will amend the law. This is a strange trend. KCR should teach his people some sense. If such posts continue, I will ensure strict action," The Chief Minister further stated that the media organisations should take responsibility and cooperate with the government for controlling the social media. "There is a need of discussion on social media regulations. It should be stopped this recklessness. If no solutions are provided, society itself will take action. If needed, we will bring a law in the Legislative Assembly. This is not just my concern; it is everyone's concern. Everyone should cooperate. Along with self-regulation, there must be constitutional regulation as well," the Chief Minister said. (NSS)

## PM Narendra Modi to visit Sri Lanka in April



GNS News Agency, March 15

Colombo: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive in Sri Lanka early next month to finalise agreements reached during President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to Delhi last year, a minister said on Saturday. Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath made the statement while responding to a question on budget allocation debate in the parliament here.

"We have maintained a close relationship with our neighbour India. Our first diplomatic visit was to India, where we reached several agreements on bilateral cooperation," Herath said. "Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive here early April," he added.

Herath said that during PM Modi's visit, several new memoranda of understandings will be signed, in addition to the opening of the Sampur solar power station. In 2023, the state power entity Ceylon Electricity Board and India's NTPC agreed to build a 135 MW solar power plant in Sampur town of eastern Trincomalee district. Herath said the National People's Power (NPP) government's goodwill policy towards India has resulted in many benefits to the island nation, including several ongoing Indian projects. "We will remain neutral in our foreign policy without taking any sides while working to maintain national interest," Herath said. This will be PM Modi's fourth visit to the island nation since 2015.

## BRS party is now in mortuary: CM Revanth

Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has stood by his comment regarding the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) party being in a state akin to a mortuary, asserting its accuracy and insisting that there is no issue with his statement. During a discussion on the motion of thanks following the Governor's address in the Assembly on Saturday, Revanth Reddy explained that his remarks about the mortuary were specifically directed at the BRS party and not intended as a slight against KCR. The Chief Minister expressed that he would never demean former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and expressed his hope that KCR would live a long life and continue to be in the opposition. Revanth Reddy also mentioned that he has made 32 trips to Delhi over the past 15 months and would be willing to go there 300 times if necessary. He underscored the importance of the state government fostering a positive relationship with the central government, describing the Prime Minister as a figure akin to an elder brother for any



gathered all the details regarding the incident that occurred in Dubai. "I will disclose everything when BRS MLA KT Rama Rao is present in the Assembly," he noted. The Chief Minister further referenced a recent report from the Union government indicating a drop in unemployment in Telangana from 22.9% to 18.1%. Revanth Reddy declared that the state is undergoing a comprehensive overhaul of its education system, with plans to establish integrated residential schools in 100 constituencies. "My administration is undertaking these initiatives solely to improve the education of underprivileged children. In addition to this, a new Osmania Hospital building

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## KCR neglected Telangana's rights in Krishna waters: CM Revanth

Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has accused former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and former Minister Harish Rao of bowing to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, effectively signing away Telangana's rights to the Krishna river waters. In a debate on the motion of thanks following the Governor's address to the Assembly on Saturday, the Chief Minister remarked that during KCR's tenure as a Union Minister, the capacity of the Pothreddypadu head regulator was expanded.



He raised doubts about KCR's claim that water would be drawn from the Srisailem backwaters. Revanth Reddy pointed out that a 20 km section of the SLBC tunnel was completed while the state was united, but since KCR assumed power, there has been no attention given to that project. KCR lacks the courage to attend the Assembly because he would face ques-

tions. If he does show up, I am prepared to discuss the issues surrounding Krishna waters and expose his errors. Should it be shown that I made a mistake during this discussion, I will publicly apologize to KCR and the BRS leaders in the Assembly," stated Revanth Reddy. He accused the BRS government of consistently neglecting the needs of Telangana State regarding the Krishna River waters. Revanth Reddy also mentioned that in 2022, Jagannathan Reddy, the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, was invited to Pragathi Bhavan where he received a warm welcome

The Chief Minister raised concerns about the alleged illegal daily supply of 10 TMC of water to Andhra Pradesh from Pothreddypadu, Mallyala, Muchumuri, and through Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation via Srisailem backwaters.

Revanth Reddy said that KCR took a salary of Rs. 57.84 lakh as an MLA, but he has come to the Assembly only twice so far, failing to fulfill his responsibility as the opposition leader in Telangana. The Chief Minister alleged that former chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao has written a death sentence for the farmers of South Telangana. (NSS)

## BRS party is now in mortuary: CM Revanth

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sitions, not for individuals," he stated. In the Assembly, the Chief Minister addressed the death of producer Kedar, mentioning that he had gathered all the details regarding the incident that occurred in Dubai. "I will disclose everything when BRS MLA KT Rama Rao is present in the Assembly," he noted. The Chief Minister further referenced a recent report from the Union government indicating a drop in unemployment in Telangana from 22.9% to 18.1%. Revanth Reddy declared that the state is undergoing a comprehensive overhaul of its education system, with plans to establish integrated residential schools in 100 constituencies. "My administration is undertaking these initiatives solely to improve the education of underprivileged children. In addition to this, a new Osmania Hospital building will be constructed at a cost of Rs. 300 crores," he stated. (NSS)

This is not a people's rule: KTR

Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): BRS party working president and former minister KTR fired salvos on the State government when there were reports in the media that it had incurred debts of Rs 50,000 crore within 15 months of coming to power. "We don't know what is the financial situation? The Congress party has boasted that it will create wealth and distribute it to the people. There was no wind in the last 15 months of the Congress' rule," he said. He also said the Congress government had officially admitted that it had taken a loan of Rs 50,000 crore at an average rate of Rs 10,000 crore per month. However, he alleged that there was no loan waiver for farmers in the State, no rythu bharsa for farmers, no payment of farmer insurance premium, no irrigation water, no purchase of crops and no bonus of Rs 500 per quintal of grains.. (NSS)

## Bhatti refutes false remarks on loan waiver

Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka has strongly refuted false information given by BRS leaders on loan waiver to farmers. Responding to questions raised by BRS MLA Palla Rajeswar Reddy in the Assembly on Saturday, Bhatti Vikramarka said that Congress government did not put loan waiver pending for six years like BRS government and waived the farmers' loans. Giving detailed response, Bhatti Vikramarka said that in Janagaoon constituency represented by Palla Rajeswar Reddy, the BRS government in its five years tenure from 2018, waived Rs. 124 crore, while Congress government waived loans worth Rs 263 crores in just three months in Gajwel Assembly segment, the BRS government waived Rs 104.3 crores during its tenure and Congress government waived Rs 237.33 crore. Again in Siddipet, the BRS government waived Rs 96.62 crore from 2018 over a period of five years, the Congress government waived Rs 177.91 crore farm loans in Siddipet. He further stated that while BRS government waived Rs 101.76 crore in Sircilla, Congress government waived Rs 175.84 crore within three months. The Deputy Chief Minister said that the data related to farmers' loan waiver and Rythu Bharsa will be displayed even on the Legislative Assembly premises. "Information about every welfare scheme along with statistics will be given to MLAs, village-wise information already displayed on the flexis. Not only details about farmers' loan waiver scheme, information will also be shared about bonus given on fine variety of paddy, free RTC bus travel for women, free power given upto 200 units," Bhatti said. Asserting that the Congress government did not re-



sort to mere propaganda like BRS leaders without doing the work, Bhatti Vikramarka went on to point out that Congress government has appointed Vice Chancellors to 12 Universities that were totally neglected during the tenure of the BRS government. For the first time a Dalit VC was appointed for the over 100 year old Osmania University. "Did you ever visit Women's University in the heart of the city? The Congress government not only named it after great leader Chakali Iamma and released Rs 15 crore for repairs," Vikramarka said. The government issued orders for construction of buildings at a cost of Rs 540 buildings. This is how the Chief Minister, State government showed their commitment to the people of Telangana, he said. Referring to the Young India International Schools, Bhatti Vikramarka said never before such schools, each in an extent of 20 acres with all amenities like digital boards, cricket, football grounds, residential quarters for teaching staff were planned and being constructed.

TDP-led govt will transform Andhra into top State: CM

Tanuku: Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday said that his government in Andhra Pradesh will take the responsibility of transforming Andhra Pradesh into the top State of the country over the next 23 years.

Addressing a village meeting, the Chief Minister said, "It is the onus of the TDP government to make Andhra Pradesh number one in the country in the next 23 years. We will lay the foundation and take up programmes carefully," said Naidu.

## Explosion outside Thakur Dwara temple in Amritsar



While no one was hurt in the incident, it has caused panic among the residents in the Khandwala area of Amritsar.

GNS News Agency, March 15

"An explosion took place outside a temple in Amritsar, damaging its walls and shattering its window panes," officials said on Saturday (March 15, 2025). While no one was hurt in the incident, it has caused panic among the residents in the Khandwala area of Amritsar. CCTV footage of the incident shows two unidentified persons coming to

the Thakur Dwara temple on a motorcycle. After waiting for a few seconds, one of them throws some explosive material towards the temple and then they flee the spot. Amritsar Police Commissioner Gurpreet Singh Bhullar said police were informed about the incident around 2 a.m. by the temple priest. He said he and other senior officials reached the spot. Mr. Bhullar said police teams were trying to trace the men involved in the blast and added that they would soon be nabbed. A forensic team has collected samples from the spot, he said, adding that further investigation was underway. Notably, there have been many incidents of explosions targeting police posts in Amritsar and Gurdaspur in the past four months.

# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### Pak in grip of terror

Notorious for sponsoring cross-border terrorism over the decades, Pakistan is now itself struggling to rein in terrorist groups. There has been an alarming surge in terror attacks on Pakistani soil in recent months, with the Jaffer Express hijacking in Balochistan being among the most audacious. The security forces killed all the hijackers, who belonged to the proscribed Balochistan Liberation Army, and rescued the majority of the train passengers, but the multi-agency operation is unlikely to deter separatists who are seeking independence for their mineral-rich province. The brazen targeting of Army, police and intelligence personnel by militants is clearly aimed at undermining the authority of the Shehbaz Sharif-led government and the military establishment. Raising the bogey of the 'foreign hand', President Asif Ali Zardari has said that the authorities are aware of the external support and funding being received by terrorists to inflict human and financial losses on Pakistan. The allusion is to India and Afghanistan, two neighbours with which Islamabad's relations are either in deep freeze or going from bad to worse. At stake are Pakistan's ties with its all-weather ally, China. Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, figures prominently in the Chinese scheme of things. It accounts for a significant part of Beijing's \$65-billion investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which falls under President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road initiative. Prioritising Chinese interests, Pakistan has failed to allay Baloch concerns about rampant exploitation of the province's resources. This has emboldened insurgents to target Chinese citizens and projects as well. Pakistan's Kashmir fixation has blinded it to its own problems. If the beleaguered nation wants to be seen as a victim rather than a perpetrator of terrorism, it must reach out to aggrieved groups and stop blaming foreign players. It should also ensure that its territory is not used for plotting cross-border terror attacks.

### Cancer specialist creates Guinness world record



Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): A breast cancer specialist at the KIMS Hospital Dr Raghuram today achieved a Guinness World Record. In light of the record, viewership of the awareness program on the breast cancer conducted by him on YouTube. On the occasion, he was congratulated by former Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu.

Venkaiah attended the event organized at KIMS Hospital as chief guest, where Dr Raghuram received the Guinness book of World Record certificate from him. Speaking on the occasion, Venkaiah praised the efforts of the KIMS Hospital doctors in raising awareness about the breast cancer. If detected in the early stage, this cancer can be treated using advanced medical methods. Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness among the public. Dr Raghuram's role in educating hundreds of people simultaneously is significant. Utilizing social media, which is often used for entertainment, to raise awareness about health issues faced by women is a positive development. It is commendable to have the desire to educate even people in remote areas about diseases. In the current scenario, for people to protect their health, they must maintain physical fitness, mental peace, and control their dietary habits. Only then will the chances of falling ill be reduced. The people of India have the responsibility to prioritize their mother tongue," said Venkaiah Naidu. Dr Raghuram expressed his happiness about achieving a place in the Guinness Book of World Records. He mentioned that on the occasion of International Women's Day, an awareness program was conducted with Brahma Kumaris in Mount Abu, which was viewed by 11,000 people on YouTube. He stated that awareness programs are being conducted under the Usha Lakshmi Breast Cancer Center. He emphasized that if this disease is detected in the early stage, one can escape the threat of cancer. He advised all women over 40 to undergo screening to avoid breast cancer. He shared that his mother also suffered from this disease and that he is working to raise awareness among the public in her inspiration. The event was attended by KIMS Hospitals MD Bhaskar Rao, Margadarshi MD Shailaja Kiran, World Record representative Rishi Nath, and others. (NSS)

### MM Keeravani set for grand 'Naa Tour' concert in Hyderabad with 83-artist orchestra

GNS News Agency, March 15

Mumbai: Oscar-winning legendary music composer and lyricist M.M. Keeravani, for the first time in 20 years, is set to take center stage in Hyderabad for a grand live concert called the "Naa Tour," featuring his first-ever 83-artist orchestra on March 22. Keeravani says he is expecting a "diverse crowd of music lovers, spanning all ages, at this live show." "To ensure everyone is engaged, I have hand-picked 30 playlists, a mix of Telugu and Hindi, based on feedback from fans about their favorite songs they would love to hear live." This concert will feature a curated selection of fan-favourite songs and iconic tracks from Keeravani's 35-year musical legacy. "A transition of beloved classics and fresh hits from 1990 to 2025 — from retro to modern, devotional songs to energetic item numbers." "There are even some never-before-heard tracks that I have recently produced, which I am confident will resonate with all age groups," said Keeravani, who won the Oscar for Best Original Song and the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song for the track "Naatu Naatu" from the film "RRR". In a special gesture, Chiranjeevi and SS Rajamouli recently shared their Keeravani playlists on X, adding excitement to the event, while Chiranjeevi asked for "Bangaru Kodi Petta", Rajamouli talked about experiencing Keeravani perform the OSTs of their favorite films.

### Ekadantha Sanskrit School Launches Second Level of Online Sanskrit Fundamental Course in Hyd



Hyderabad :With the divine blessings of Puja Swamiji Sri Dayananda Saraswati, Ekadantha - The School of Ancient Indian Studies, under the aegis of the Indian Ancient Education Institution, inaugurated the second level of the Ekadantha Sanskrit Fundamental Course today at the Brahma Vidya Kutir, Hyderabad.

This significant event was conducted by Puja Swami Sri Tattvavidananda Saraswati. In an effort to bring traditional Indian education closer to everyone, Ekadantha offers the opportunity to learn the Sanskrit language for free. The first level comprised 15 lessons, and nearly 2,000 students completed this course online via the ekadantha.in website. The second level consists of 31 lessons, which will help deepen

knowledge in the Sanskrit language. After completing each level, students will also have assignments. Anyone interested in learning Sanskrit can register for free on the Ekadantha website to study the language. Puja Swami Sri Tattvavidananda Saraswati specially blessed the students who completed the first level. On this occasion, he stated, "Learning Sanskrit is not just about mastering a language; it is about unlocking the profound wisdom of our ancient texts. I encourage everyone to embrace this beautiful language to connect with our cultural roots." The event was attended by Ekadantha Founder & Director Mr. M.V. Satish Kumar, Chief Acharya of Ekadantha Mrs. C.H. Sadguna, S. Dayanand, S. Krupanand, and the Ekadantha teaching faculty.

### Wishing for KCR's death is wrong : Harish Rao

Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Former Minister Harish Rao today stated that wishing for the death of former CM the separate Telangana state KCR, who risked his life for Telangana, by CM Revanth Reddy was wrong. He mentioned that KCR, who served as Chief Minister for ten years, was wished death by Revanth Reddy and added that they m boycotted the Chief Minister's speech in the assembly today due to the same reason .

In a chit-chat with the media in the assembly, Harish Rao accused the Congress party of being responsible for the injustice done to the Telangana state regarding Krishna waters. He criticized state Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy for speaking blatant lies in the assembly and alleged that Due to Congress's negligence, 299 TMCs of water were allocated. He stated that there are no projects that consume more than 299 TMCs of water. He explained that the temporary allocation of 299 TMCs of water was due to the inability of the congress governments to construct projects in Telangana. He criticized the Congress for not building the projects. He questioned as to why IAS officer Rahul Bojja and ENC Anil went to Delhi and returned with an agreement. He accused Uttam Kumar Reddy of keeping quiet for positions while fighting for Pothreddipadu project. "Our history is one of sacrifice, while Uttam Kumar Reddy's is one of betrayal," he claimed. He mentioned that the Telangana Congress leaders did not oppose the Pothreddipadu issue even for a day. He stated that while they sacrificed six ministerial positions for Telangana,



Minster Uttam went to have lunch with CM Chandrababu and returned to commit injustice to Telangana regarding the Krishna river water. He accused Uttam Kumar Reddy of betrayal for facilitating the emptying of Srisaillam. He asserted that if Uttam Kumar Reddy has a history of betrayal, the BRS has a history of sacrifice. He noted that former CM KCR secured Section 3, bringing 573 TMCs of water. He stated that it was the BRS that obtained a stay order on the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Project. He blamed the Congress for the crops drying up in Nalgonda district . He recalled that in the past, they provided water for a third crop in Andhra by flooding Huzurnagar. He stated that they saved the displaced people of Pulichintala by providing hundreds of crores of rupees. (NSS)

### Telangana people looking to Brs party because of Congress party falts promises, Telangana brs founder, freedom fighter Amc director balesh stated

In Indian chronicle, March 15, mdk. "In the Medak district centre of toopran town AMC director balesh stated to entire congress party falts promises will be geaved to the Telangana people, and also electricity department lot of suffering to the poor people, and also Congress party totally fail into the enter government, no Kalyana Lakshmi, shaadi Mubarak, no Mahalaxmi scheme, if de will provide free bus totally game plan the government will less expresses, more deluxe buses no more use of womens it is lot of suffering, employment womens, Ritu Bharosa also totally fraud, definitely next election brs sure will be back bounes, Medak MC director one of the BRS founder Telangana freedom fighter balesh said to the media the bangaru Telangana came only Telangana jaati pita KCR sir, no one can beat him. "[7:05 pm, 15/3/2025] Pedamma: There was no firing in Warangal Kammala temple festival. " Warangal CP 'Sun Preet Singh' Warangal, March 15, Indian Chronicle: "Warangal Police Commissioner 'Sun Preet Singh' said there was no firing at Gimbavli village of warangal dist.. On the occasion of the Warangal district kammala sri laxmi narsimha swamy temple festival, some people have been excited to move in a series of waves in the Girinibavi village area and are not in the process of going to the police in order to go ahead with the police only happened. There



was no police firing in the incident. In some propaganda afternoon, the incident has been shot in the wrong news, causing people to worry about. Warangal Police Commissioner 'Sun Preet Singh' has warned that criminal action will be taken ag...??

### Loyola Academy, St. Francis emerge champions in GM Sampath Kumar Annual Basketball League

GNS News Agency, March 15

HYDERABAD: Loyola Academy (Alwal) and St. Francis Degree College (Begumpet) won the men's and women's titles respectively in the GM Sampath Kumar Annual Basketball League Championship at YMCA Secunderabad here on Friday. In the men's final, Loyola defeated Nizam Basketball Academy 93-69 while St. Francis women recorded a hard-fought 38-36 win against YMCA Secunderabad in the other final. For the men's winning team, Majid (26), Steve (21) were the lead scorers with Vivek (14) and Vignesh (12) giving them good support. For the losers, Charan (22) was the lead scorer. In the women's final, YMCA started well with Lasya using her height to good ef-

fect scoring from the paint and aided with two three-pointers from Jahnavi, raced to a 20 - 3 lead at the end of the first quarter.

In the second quarter, Sristi and Rekha scored a three-pointer apiece to reduce the lead to 20 - 13 in favour of YMCA. After the lemon break, St. Francis switched to man to man defence to restrict YMCA to just two points. But in a dramatic turn-around scored 13 points through Parinista and Rekha to reduce the lead further as YMCA led 29 - 26 at the end of the third quarter.

Within minutes of the last quarter, scores were level 29 - 29, thereafter the match went neck to neck. With just 30 seconds left, scores were level 36 - 36 when Abigail of

### Jai Makthal Trust Champions Mudumal Menhirs' Journey to UNESCO World Heritage Status

Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): The Jai Makthal Trust, under the visionary leadership of its president Sundeep Kumar Makthala, has achieved a significant milestone with the inclusion of the 3,500-year-old Mudumal Menhirs in UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage Sites. This marks a proud moment not only for Telangana but also for India's rich cultural legacy. The Trust's relentless efforts in preserving and promoting this ancient megalithic site have played a crucial role in bringing international attention to its historical and archaeological importance.

Sundeep Kumar Makthala expressed his gratitude and determination, stating, "It's time to celebrate this incredible achievement; however, we must remain cautious and more focused until we achieve our ultimate goal of securing the UNESCO World Heritage status. The journey ahead is challenging, and it demands greater dedication and collective effort." Inspired by the success of the Kakatiya Heritage Trust's efforts in securing UNESCO recognition for the Ramappa Temple, the Jai Makthal Trust adopted a strategic approach to the conservation and promotion of the Mudumal Menhirs. The Trust actively engaged with both state and central government officials, presenting detailed reports and memorandums to the then Union Tourism Minister G. Kishan Reddy and former Telangana Tourism Minister V. Srinivas Goud. Their support laid the foundation for this remarkable achievement. (NSS)

### Two-week ITEC-Training Program for 26 Journalists ends at MCRHRD



Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): The Two-week ITEC-Training Program for 26 Journalists and Media Professionals from Guyana, Tanzania, Suriname, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, which has been sponsored by the ITEC Division of Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and conducted by Dr MCR HRD Institute of Telangana, came to an end today.

Dr Shashank Goel, IAS, Director General, Dr MCR HRD Institute & E.O.Spl Chief Secretary to Government of Telangana, said Media Professionals, from across the world, are the watchdogs, the voice of the voiceless, and the bridge between governments and the people and, therefore, hold a unique and powerful position in society.

Dr Shashank Goel, stated that technology, driven by artificial intelligence, has revolutionized media in multifaceted ways, and thereby playing a crucial role in streamlining news production, data-driven reporting, and faster content generation. He added that Social Media has also transformed news dissemination, audience engagement, and grassroots reporting. He called upon the Media professionals to not only embrace technology but also to understand its ethical implications in order to ensure that journalism's core values remain intact. "The future of Journalism belongs to those who can seamlessly integrate technology while upholding the highest standards of core values of Journalism, that is, truth, fairness, impartiality, and ethics", he pointed out. "In this rapidly evolving media landscape, the role of media is more critical than ever. It is, therefore, of pertinent importance for the Media Professionals to keep their skills sets current and up-to-date by adopting a proactive approach to continuous learning and professional development", Dr Shashank Goel, IAS highlighted. Dr Madhavi Ravulapati, Course Director, Professor (incharge) & Head, CLP said a unique fusion of class room sessions and multiple visits to a number of eminent Media Houses and also to places of historical and cultural importance empowered the Media Professionals to understand issues relating to Media in their true and total frame of reference. She conducted the session and proposed a vote of thanks. (NSS)

### There was no firing in Warangal Kammala temple festival.

"Warangal CP 'Sun Preet Singh'

Warangal, March 15, Indian Chronicle: "Warangal Police Commissioner 'Sun Preet Singh' said there was no firing at Gimbavli village of warangal dist.. On the occasion of the Warangal district kammala sri laxmi narsimha swamy temple festival, some people have been excited to move in a series of waves in the Girinibavi village area and are not in the process of going to the police in order to go ahead with the police only happened.

### CHANGE OF NAME

I, TAHERUDDIN S/O IMAMUDDIN (old name) born on 06-12-1977 at Adilabad earlier was Holding Passport No. B2667235 DT: 30-08-2000 hereby changing my Name and henceforth in future I would be known as MOHAMMAD TAHERUDDIN S/O IMAMUDDIN (new name) H.No. 1-2-47, Ravindranagar, Adilabad -504001, Telangana State.

DECLARANT.  
MOHAMMAD TAHERUDDIN  
S/O IMAMUDDIN

Place: Adilabad  
Date : 17-03-2025

## Artificial Intelligence (AI) based education in Govt Primary Schools



in elementary public schools will be used to facilitate the use of artificial intelligence. The Collector inaugurated the teaching of education with artificial intelligence set up at the Jelly Mandala Parishad Primary School in Warangal district on Saturday. On this occasion, the students examined the standards of Telugu and English on the computer.

The collector has examined the numerical concepts, additions, deductions, multiplications and the standards of students in the math. Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said.. the state government has taken steps to teach education in govt public school with artificial intelligence to provide technology.

Warangal, March 15, Indian Chronicle: "AI has been educated in govt public schools. Under the pilot project, the education pro-

gram was launched AI education at 11 elementary school in the warangal district on Saturday. The collector inaugurated the teaching

by AI at the Chernerapet Mandala Primary School in Warangal district. District Collector Dr Satya Saradha said that artificial intelligence

## Congress failed to fulfil promises: BRS MLA Palla



Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): BRS party MLA Palla Rajeshwar Reddy today criticized that there was no direction and purpose in the Governor's speech. He spoke in the Assembly on a discussion on the thanksgiving motion to the address of the Governor.

Speaking on the occasion, he stated that the Congress party had not fulfilled its promises. He criticized that only 10 percent of the promises were being implemented. He claimed that the Congress government was acting arro-

gantly and accused that cases had also been filed against journalists in the State. He stated that the existence of Telangana was under attack due to Congress party's rule. In response to Reddy's comments, Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka said he should speak after knowing the facts. He explained that for the first time, a Dalit Vice-Chancellor had been appointed to Osmania University, which has a history of a hundred years. He mentioned that he expected Palla Rajeshwar Reddy, who runs educational institutions, to provide advice on the issue of the development of the education sector. He pointed out that it was not right to say that the Chief Minister does not have time to review the education department.

He questioned whether the previous CM had ever visited the Women's University? He reminded that the university had been named after the brave woman Chakali Ailamma. He mentioned that a large number of jobs had been created in the education sector. In this context, Palla Rajeshwar Reddy stated that the KCR government had appointed more than 30 Vice-Chancellors from 2014 to 2023. He questioned as to why 1,058 schools had been shut down in Telangana so far and why had 200,000 students dropped out of their schools? "We should stop exaggerating after making some small changes. The KRMB is functioning just as AP CM Chandrababu said. The Chief Minister Revanth Reddy should fight for what is right for the State, he added. (NSS)

## Violence mars Holi celebrations in parts of Uttar Pradesh, over a dozen injured

GNS News Agency, March 15

Lucknow , Holi celebrations in parts of Uttar Pradesh were marred by incidents of violence, resulting in injuries to over a dozen people and highlighting existing social tensions. Clashes erupted over forced application of colours, caste-based disputes, and drunken altercations, leading to arrests and heightened security measures.

In Mathura district, a confrontation between upper-caste men and Dalit residents in Bati village in Jait area of the district resulted in injuries to 8 to 10 people. Station House Officer of Jait Police station, Ashwini Kumar said, "Two men from an upper-caste community attempted to forcibly apply 'gula' on people from Dalit community, leading to tensions and minor skirmishes. Eight people were injured and nine individuals have been arrested. Further investigation is underway."

In Farrukhabad district, six people, including a woman, were injured after miscreants allegedly opened fire on Dalit people heading to perform Holi rituals. Additional Superintendent of Police Dr Sanjay Kumar told PTI on Saturday, citing the report filed, that Jitendra and Pappu came to Anil Kumar's house in Bibipur village in Kamalganj area on Friday and started abusing him. "Later in the evening when Anil's family members were going to perform Holi rituals, Shivam Katiyar, Som Katiyar, Jitendra and Pappu open fired," the officer said. He said the injured have been admitted to a hospital and the accused have been arrested. A case has been lodged under relevant sections. In Kaushambi district, two sons of a local Nagar Panchayat chairman al-



legedly assaulted a sub-inspector and tore his uniform in an inebriated state. Circle Officer of the area, Awdhesh Kumar said, "The incident occurred following an altercation between sub-inspector Anand Swarup Prajapati, Satyendra Kushwaha and Abhishek Kushwaha."

The two accused have been arrested and investigation in the matter is underway, the CO said. In Sant Kabir Nagar district, several huts were burned to ashes in Kari village following a dispute over music played during Holi celebrations.

Additional Superintendent of Police said, "A clash erupted after a group demanded a change in the music, leading to a fire that consumed multiple huts." "Four people were injured, and police have registered a case against the accused, though no arrests have been made so far," he said. This article was generated from an automated news agency feed without modifications to text.

## Seethakka expresses concern over misuse of social media platforms



Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Minister for Panchayat Raj Seethakka has expressed concern over misuse of social media platforms and their influence on personal lives. During a conversation with reporters at the Assembly on Saturday, the Minister shared that social media has caused her significant distress, particularly due to instances

where her photos were misused, leading to emotional turmoil. Certain social media posts not only demoralised me, but also hindered my political path," she stated. The Minister pointed out that it is challenging for women to advance in politics, and even when they achieve a certain status, some individuals intentionally create obstacles through social media. She further claimed that the BRS party is utilising social media as a platform for spreading misinformation, asserting that false propaganda outweighs genuine news. "I have consistently utilised social media for positive initiatives, but this has now turned into an issue for me. Even with the extensive service I provided during the pandemic, the criticism directed at me persists. The negative impact on families and personal lives through social media is escalating. It's essential to address and combat the spread of misinformation, such as body shaming and digitally altered images," Seethakka emphasised. She urged that social media should be harnessed for beneficial goals rather than harmful ones. (NSS)

## Congress will get justice for Telangana in Krishna water sharing: Uttam



Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Minister for Irrigation and Civil Supplies N. Uttam Kumar Reddy reaffirmed the Congress government's commitment to protecting the state's rightful share of Krishna River water, exposing the previous BRS government's failures in securing Telangana's interests. Intervening during the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the Governor's Address in the Assembly on Saturday, he accused the BRS regime of surrendering Telangana's water rights to Andhra Pradesh and allowing illegal withdrawals to continue unchecked. The Minister pointed out that the allocation of Krishna River water remains unjust, with Andhra Pradesh receiving 512 TMC while Telangana gets only 299 TMC, despite the latter's larger catchment area, drought-prone regions, and agricultural needs. He criticised the previous BRS government for not contesting this unfair division and revealed how the previous administration's inaction led to Telangana's loss.

Uttam Kumar Reddy blamed the previous BRS regime for enabling Andhra Pradesh to float tenders for the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme (RLIS) by delaying the Apex Council meeting, which could have challenged the project. Similarly, he asked under whose regime, Andhra Pradesh increased its irrigation capacities. "The BRS government failed to take legal or political action, allowing AP to continue excessive withdrawals," he said. The Minister said the Congress government is now taking corrective measures, including the installation of telemetry instruments at Nagarjuna Sagar and Srisailem Dams to monitor water levels and prevent unauthorised diversions by Andhra Pradesh. Uttam Kumar Reddy said he remained deeply committed to protecting Telangana's water rights. "Unlike the previous government, we have reopened the Krishna water dispute and will fight to secure justice for Telangana," he added. (NSS)

## Secunderabad's Drithi Kesari aims to raise the bar, be more consistent, make it to seniors team

HYDERABAD: For someone who watched India win the Women's (under-19) T-20 World Cup in Kuala Lumpur having not played a single match, the 19-year-old Drithi Kesari is clearly in the mood to be out there in the thick of it - making it to the seniors team soon. Drithi, the off-spinner who has finished the league engagements as the highest wicket-taker in the league phase (knock-out will be held in Guwahati next week) of the BCCI Women's (under-23).

## Kishan Reddy visits Begumpet Rly station, reviews phase-I redevelopment works

Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Union Minister for Coal and Mines G. Kishan Reddy visited Begumpet Railway Station on Saturday and reviewed the Phase-I redevelopment works as part of Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. He was accompanied by Arun Kumar Jain, General Manager, SCR; Bhartesh Kumar Jain, Divisional Railway Manager, Secunderabad Division and other senior Railway officials.

Kishan Reddy inspected the Phase-I works of Begumpet Amrit Station redevelopment works including the new station building with improved façade, platform surface improvements, 12 M wide Foot Over Bridge, escalators, lifts, booking counters, signages, waiting hall and so on. Addressing media personnel at the station later, the Union Minister stated that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Rail development in Telangana State is undergoing a fundamental change. He informed that 90% of the Begumpet Station redevelopment works have been completed and the station will soon be dedicated to the Nation. He stated that the station is being upgraded on par with airport like standards with an expenditure of Rs 38 crore in a phased manner. The new Begumpet Amrit Station will be entirely run by All Women Staff, he said.

He also informed that Telangana State has been given a Railway budget allocation of Rs 5,337 crore for the financial year 2025-26. He stated that an amount of Rs 39,300 crore is being invested for various Railway projects in the State, including electrification of new lines, doubling, tripling and so on. He informed that the Railway network of Telangana is now 100% electrified. The Union Minister in-



formed that 'KAVACH' Research Institute will soon be set up at Secunderabad. He stated the indigenously developed Kavach technology will be installed across the Nation's network. He stated that 40 Railway stations in Telangana are being redeveloped under ABSS and the works are progressing swiftly. Earlier, SCR General Manager Arun Kumar Jain briefed the media on progress of work and salient features of the Begumpet Amrit station project. He stated that the Begumpet Railway station is being developed as eco-friendly green Railway station. It will be equipped with water recycling plant to cater the needs of greenery at the station. (NSS)

## Lift suspension of Jagadish Reddy from assembly: Harish Rao



Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Former minister and BRS party MLA T. Harish Rao today urged Assembly speaker G. Prasad Kumar to lift the suspension from their party MLA Jagadish Reddy.

Addressing the house during a discussion on thanksgiving motion to governor's address, he mentioned that Jagadish Reddy did not address the Speaker in a disrespectful manner or by using in singular pronouns and added

that he expressed his immense respect for the Speaker and clarified that there were no ulterior motives. He stated that if the microphone had been given to Jagadish Reddy before the suspension to speak on the issue, he would have had the opportunity to speak and give explanation of his comments. He reminded that their party leaders and MLAs should adhere to the assembly traditions, as their leader KCR often emphasized on several occasions. Harish Rao requested Speaker Prasad Kumar to reconsider the suspension of Jagadish Reddy in front of the assembly. However, before the session began, Harish Rao, along with the party MLAs Sudhir Reddy, Talasani Srinivas Yadav, Madhavaram Krishna Rao, Sabitha Indra Reddy, and K.P. Vivekananda met with the Speaker. The BRS party MLAs requested the Speaker to lift the suspension of former minister Jagadish Reddy from the House. They pointed out that Jagadish Reddy did not speak anywhere in singular terms against the Speaker and stated that this suspension was unjust and illegal. They asserted that assembly traditions were not violated anywhere and urged the Speaker to lift the suspension on Jagadish Reddy. (NSS)

## Uttam secures major victory for Telangana as EAC blocks clearance for RLIS

Hyderabad, March 15 (NSS): Minister for Irrigation and Civil Supplies N Uttam Kumar Reddy has achieved a major victory for Telangana by convincing the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) to recommend blocking environmental clearance (EC) for the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme (RLIS) of Andhra Pradesh. The Telangana government has been continuously putting efforts at every level and every forum to halt RLIS, making strong representations at the National Green Tribunal (NGT), MoEF&CC, the Supreme Court, Krishna River Management Board (KRMB), and KWDI-II. Uttam Kumar Reddy has been at the forefront of this battle, personally taking up the issue with the Union Environment Minister, warning that Andhra Pradesh's unilateral execution of RLIS would severely impact Telangana's rightful share of Krishna River water. In a significant development, the EAC, in its 25th meeting on February 27, ruled that Andhra Pradesh must restore the RLIS site to its pre-construction stage before applying for environmental clearance.

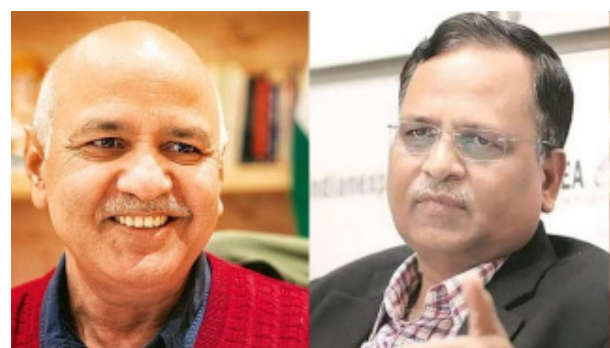
The committee, while reviewing a case related to RLIS and its compliance with an NGT order, concluded that Andhra Pradesh had violated environmental norms and must roll back all work beyond the initial planning stage before proceeding further. The ruling emphasised that Andhra Pradesh must submit an affidavit confirming that no construction had been carried out beyond the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR) and provide photographic evidence, restoration details, and a timeline of corrective actions. The committee warned that any false or misleading information would invite legal action under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and



the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. The Telangana team, led by Uttam Kumar Reddy, has been unwavering in its opposition to RLIS, citing violation of environmental laws and inter-state water sharing norms. Telangana has consistently argued that RLIS is an illegal project that diverts Krishna waters without approval from the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) or the Apex Council. The latest EAC ruling has been hailed as a crucial legal and environmental victory for Telangana, as it reinforces the state's position that RLIS is an illegal project that cannot be allowed to proceed.

This decision is expected to bring major relief to thousands of farmers, particularly in the drought-prone Krishna basin region, who feared that RLIS would severely impact water availability for irrigation. "Telangana will continue its determined legal and policy battle to safeguard its rightful share of Krishna River water and prevent unauthorised projects that could threaten its water security," Uttam Kumar Reddy said. (NSS)

## President approves filing of FIR against AAP's Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain in Rs 1300 crore classroom 'scam'



GNS News Agency, March 15

droupadi murmu, satyendar jain, manish sisodia, The President has given her approval for registering the FIR against Sisodia and Jain in connection with the alleged scam during their tenure as ministers in the Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi government, the sources said. (Express file photos)

President Droupadi Murmu has given her approval for the registration of an FIR against AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain in an alleged scam of Rs 1,300 crore in the construction of classrooms in Delhi government schools, sources said. In 2022, the Delhi government's vigilance directorate recommended a probe into the alleged scam and submitted a report to the chief secretary.

The President has given her approval for registering the FIR against Sisodia and Jain in connection with the alleged scam during their tenure as ministers in the Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi government, the sources said. The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), in a report dated February 17, 2020, highlighted "glaring irregularities" in the construction of over 2,400 classrooms in Delhi government schools by the Public Works Department (PWD).

## Sajad Lone flays J&K reservation policy; says it is a tool to disempower Kashmiri-speaking ethnic group



Figures suggest that the Kashmiri-speaking population who qualified for the JKAS examination was 19% in 2023, 25% in 2022 and 21% in 2021.

GNS News Agency, March 15

J&K People's Conference (JKPC) chief and MLA Sajad Lone on Thursday (March 13, 2025) said the current reservation policy was being used as a tool "to exclude Kashmiri-speaking population from power structure and reorder the social supremacy" in the Union Territory (UT). Speaking in the J&K Assembly, Mr. Lone, who is an MLA from Handwara, said, "Attempts are being made to change the social supremacy by disempowerment. It looks like reordering through the current reservation policy. After 20 years, very few Kashmiri-speaking people will be seen in the Secretariat of J&K." Referring to the Kashmiri-speaking population, comprising Muslims and Hindus, as a "distinct ethnic group", Mr. Lone highlighted the figures that show lower representation of the Kashmiri-speaking population in competitive examinations like J&K Administrative Services (JKAS) in recent years.

"Each passing day, Kashmiri-speaking candidates figure less in the results of competitive examinations. This is not because they are incompetent but because the space was being squeezed. They are being crowded out from the competitive space by virtue of system of reservation, which is totally rigged against them by the current 60% reservation policy," Mr. Lone said. Figures suggest that the Kashmiri-speaking population who qualified for the JKAS examination was 19% in 2023, 25% in 2022 and 21% in 2021. "An internal survey needs to be carried out to check the net loss to Kashmiri-speaking population if this reservation policy did not exist in J&K," Mr. Lone said. The Centre reworked the reservation policy in J&K in the past five years, which grants 20% reservation to Scheduled Tribes (ST), 8% to Scheduled Castes (SC), 10% to Reserved Backward Areas, 8% to Other Backward Classes, 4% to Local Area Candidates/Integrated Borders, 10% to Economically Weaker Section and 10% to children of defence personnel, sports, CDP, PWD etc. The policy pushes open merit to around 40% in admissions and jobs in J&K.

Urging the elected government to rationalise the current reservation policy, Mr. Lone said, "Kashmir region has no SC population. In the Kashmir region, ST population is 40% and in the Jammu region, it is 60%. ST living in the Jammu region are comparatively marginalised and scattered unlike Kashmir region where entire constituencies belong to the ST communities. ST communities should be allowed to compete more within the Jammu region." He said Kashmir being a conflict State should ideally see special measures but "reverse is happening". "For 30 years, discourse from Delhi was 'teach them a lesson' and 'show them this place'. This is a post-dated cheque for disaster. The last 30 years Kashmir region has seen turmoil and violence. Overall mental makeup has gone through a lot. That script was written by enemies and this script is written by us," the JKPC chief said. He said those bureaucrats who drafted the reservation policy will leave J&K "but we will face a social disorder". "If you are going to push merit to the wall and not give them admission in colleges, it will cause disorder that our children will have to face. It is something generational," Mr. Lone said.

## In 7 decades, agriculture's share in Himachal's GSDP falls from 70% to 14%: Economic Survey

GNS News Agency, March 15

Himachal Pradesh's economy, once primarily dependent on agriculture, has undergone a significant transformation over the last seven decades, with a marked shift towards the service and manufacturing sectors in terms of their contribution to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). The agriculture sector's share of the GSDP has declined from 70.37 percent in the financial year (FY) 1950-51 to merely 14.74 percent in FY 2023-24. However, the Economic Survey 2024-25, released on Thursday, highlights that despite this decline, 53.98 percent of the state's population remains engaged in the primary sector for employment. Agriculture, horticulture, and tourism form the backbone of this sector, with agriculture continuing to employ a large portion of the workforce and playing a crucial role in the state's economy.

According to the survey report, "Himachal Pradesh has witnessed a shift from agriculture to industries and services, as the percentage contribution of agriculture to the total GSDP declined from 70.37 per cent in 1950-51 to 35.06 per cent in 1990-91, 17.16 per cent in 2011-12, and 14.74 per cent in FY 2023-24. The share of the secondary and tertiary sectors, which stood at 7.41 per cent and 22.22 per cent, respectively, in 1950-51, increased to 26.50 per cent and 38.44 per cent in 1990-91, 43.81 per cent and 39.03 per cent in 2011-12, and 39.98 percent and 45.28 percent in FY 2023-24." The tertiary sector, or service sector, includes activities such as trade, hotels and restaurants, transport, storage, communication, banking, real estate, and professional services, contributing significantly to the state's Gross State Value Added (GSVA). The secondary sector comprises industries such as textiles, food processing, and chemicals.

Rishiraj Pathania, a retired officer from the state agriculture department, said, "There are multiple ways to interpret this shift from the primary sector to the secondary and tertiary sectors. While it is true that many people have moved



from agriculture to modern jobs and industries, several professions remain closely tied to the primary sector, particularly agriculture and rural life. For instance, food processing — though categorized under the secondary sector — is deeply linked to agriculture, especially in rural areas of Himachal Pradesh and other hilly states like Uttarakhand." The report further states, "The declining share of agriculture does not diminish its importance to the state's economy, as growth in the primary sector is still influenced by trends in agriculture and horticulture production. Agriculture remains a key contributor to the total domestic product and has a cascading effect on other sectors through input linkages, employment, trade, and transportation. Due to inadequate irrigation facilities, agricultural production continues to depend heavily on timely rainfall and favourable weather conditions." A senior officer from the finance department, requesting anonymity, said, "This shifting trend has multiple implications. First, the younger generation is increasingly uninterested in agriculture as a profession. Second, despite a large share of the population being engaged in agriculture and horticulture, incomes from these sources may be insufficient. This is why subsidies, special schemes, and new technologies are being introduced to support and promote agriculture in the state."

## Bengaluru paying the price for scrapping steel flyover project, says Dy CM Shivakumar

GNS News Agency, March 15

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said on Thursday that Bengaluru was now paying the price of traffic congestion for scrapping the steel bridge project, which had drawn objections over environmental concerns as well as corruption allegations. Shivakumar, who is also the Bengaluru development minister, was responding to a question raised in the Legislative Council by MLC Sudham Das on the steps taken to ease traffic in Bengaluru.

"When K J George was the Bengaluru development minister, he planned a steel bridge on Bellary Road, but there was severe opposition. We are paying a price today for not executing that project," he said, adding that as a result, the government was now exploring alternative solutions like tunnel roads, elevated corridors, and double-decker flyovers to tackle the congestion problem in the city. He added, "We have now planned two tunnel roads—a 17-km stretch from East to West and a 23-km stretch from North to South. We will be calling for tenders for the first phase soon," he said.

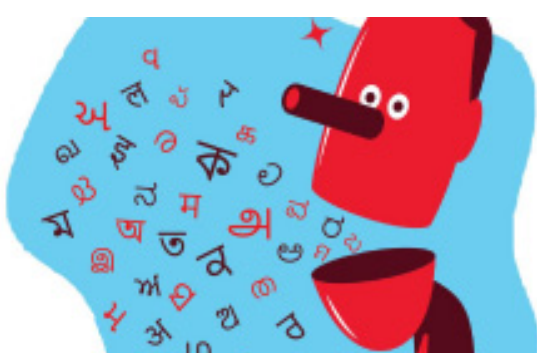
The controversial steel flyover project was aimed at easing traffic congestion on Bellary Road (NH 44), connecting Chalukya Circle to Hebbal. The Rs 1,791-crore project was a 6.9 km six-lane elevated corridor that was aimed at providing a traffic signal-free corridor. However, the project was met with severe criticism from activists and residents over environmental concerns, in view of the chopping of 800 trees the project would have necessitated. The project was scrapped following massive protests and the BJP's allegations of corruption. Soon after coming to power in 2023, Shivakumar had said he would not buckle under pressure from residents' groups and activists like before, in an apparent jibe at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. "I have taken up the responsibility of Bengaluru seriously. Bengaluru is not a planned city like New Delhi. Only areas like Jayanagara,



Indiranagara, and Malleshwara are planned layouts. The PRR project would have reduced traffic woes of the city to a large extent, but it was not executed," he said in the Council on Thursday. "PRR (Peripheral Ring Road) would have cost Rs 3,000-4,000 crore if it was executed then, but today it costs Rs 26,000 crore. We are going to execute PRR by taking a loan from Hudco," he said. "We are planning to build double-decker flyovers wherever the new metro lines are coming up. The BBMP and BMRCL will bear the cost equally. It costs Rs 120 crore to build one kilometre of a double-decker flyover. We have given a grant of Rs 9,000 crore for this project.

We are also planning to build 300 km of 50-ft wide buffer roads along the storm-water drains to ease traffic as well. Rs 3,000 crore has been earmarked for this. We are also planning to build roads by issuing TDRs. A notification has been issued for the 7.8 km road from Hebbal to Hennur. A total of 320 km of new roads are being built in Bengaluru," Shivakumar explained. "We have allocated Rs 9,000 crore for white-topping of 1,682 km of roads. We have taken a loan of Rs 2,000 crore from the World Bank to build 850-km-long storm-water drains. Of the 850 km, a 480-km stretch is completed," he added.

## Tamil Nadu should implement 14-language formula



GNS News Agency, March 15

I am an eminent North Indian intellectual and a permanently aspiring politician. I have an opinion on everything, especially issues on which I am not qualified to speak. I like to give lectures, especially to people who have no interest in my opinions. I can afford to do so because I have connections, I have influence, and I know how to use ChatGPT. I am also very humble. For all these reasons, I want Tamil Nadu politicians to follow my advice on how many languages they should teach in their government schools. I speak two languages (both of them softly). They are Hindi and English. It is true I don't know Tamil. But I love Tamil. Tamil culture is amazing, just like Hindi culture. Brilliant guy, your Thiruvalluvar. So here is my humble submission: junk your 2-language formula. Be more ambitious. Think bigger.

As I have explained in many wonderful videos on my social media channel (do subscribe, if you haven't already), children have an unlimited capacity to learn several different languages simultaneously. Therefore, restricting them to two languages is a terrible idea. True, a 3-language formula is not much of an improvement over a 2-language formula. According to a new paper published in the Harvard-Cambridge Journal of Advanced Mathematics, it turns out that 'three', numerically speaking, is only one more than two. In other words, a 3-language formula would force children to learn only one language more than a 2-language formula would. This is a travesty in a country renowned for its linguistic diversity and lack of public investment in education. Ideally, the poorer a country, and the worse the condition of its government schools, the greater should be the

## 2 Delhi airport employees steal \$2,500 from US citizen, arrested

GNS News Agency, March 15

The Delhi Police have arrested two employees of the Delhi Airport for stealing \$2,500 from a passenger's bag. The accused, identified as Gaurav Kumar, 38, and Prakash Chand, 59, work in the Lost and Found department at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport. A case was registered under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Section 303(2) (theft) after a complaint was filed by the passenger, Roshan Patel, a US citizen and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card holder.

Patel had arrived in Delhi from the United States on September 11, 2024, and realised that her green camouflage bag, containing \$2,500 and other personal belongings, was missing. The bag was later recovered and deposited at the Lost & Found department by Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel, but upon retrieval, the cash was found missing, said the police on Thursday. A police team meticulously analysed CCTV footage from various cameras at the airport. The footage confirmed that the bag was not tampered with at the terminal, compelling the police to shift the focus of the investigation to the Lost and Found department staff. After thorough interrogation of the department staff, suspicion eventually fell on Kumar and Chand, who initially denied their involvement but later confessed when confronted with CCTV evidence showing them tampering with the bag inside the Lost and Found office, added the police. During questioning, Kumar allegedly revealed the details of the theft. "On 12th September, 2024, a CISF staff member deposited the alleged bag in their office. While he (Gaurav Kumar) was handing the bag over to Prakash Chand in the T-2 LP room, he discovered \$2,500 inside the bag. Overcome with greed, he suggested to Prakash that they could keep the money and divide it between them. To which, Prakash agreed, and they each took \$1,250. The accused Gaurav also revealed that he had deleted the entry of the \$2,500 from the system, with Prakash's complicity. Later, they exchanged the stolen currency at a money exchange office in Connaught Place, Delhi, and equally distributed it between them," said Usha Rangnani, Additional Commissioner of Police (IGI Airport). Both the accused have been sent to judicial custody.

## Madras High Court restricts number of tourist vehicles to the Nilgiris, Kodaikanal

GNS News Agency, March 15

The Madras High Court on Thursday (March 13, 2025) fixed a cap of 6,000 tourist vehicles a day during weekdays and 8,000 vehicles during weekends to the Nilgiris and 4,000 vehicles a day during weekdays and 6,000 during weekends to Kodaikanal during the summer season between April and June this year.

A special Division Bench of Justices N. Sathish Kumar and D. Bharatha Chakravarthy made it clear the cap would not apply to the tourists who visit the hill stations using public transport such as government buses and trains and also to the vehicles of local residents and those which transport essential commodities. The orders were passed after taking note that only 23,000 tourists could be accommodated in a day (at the 1,035 commercial accommodations with 5,620 rooms apart from 575 licensed homestays) in the Nilgiris and only a much smaller number of tourists could be accommodated in Kodaikanal.

The Bench also ordered that the tourists visiting the hill stations in e-vehicles should be given preference in issuance of e-pass and directed the local bodies concerned to take steps for establishment of enough number of electric charging points at vantage locations for the benefit of the e-vehicle users. The judges requested Advocate General P.S. Raman to persuade the State government to deploy mini e-buses with transparent bodies to encourage the tourists to park their private motor vehicles on the footpaths and undertake the tour to the hill stations in those buses.

The Bench said, ideally, it should become a norm in the future in order to promote quality tourism. They expressed serious concern over the ghat roads being flooded with motor vehicles especially during the tourist season thereby causing great harm to the environment and hardship to local residents. The judges said, even the tourists do not get to enjoy their travel because of being stuck in the traffic jam for hours together. Most of them end up entering reserve forest areas even during night hours and sleep in their cars or in the open leading to man-animal conflict and commission of forest offences, they lamented. Taking note of submissions made by amici curiae Chevanan Mohan, Rahul Balaji and M. Santhanaraman regarding the need to impose a strict ban on plastics in the hill stations, the judges directed the authorities concerned to keep a vigil and ensure provision of adequate drinking water dispensers for the benefit of tourists. The court also stressed upon installation of sufficient number of temporary toilets across the two hill stations during the ensuring tourist season and implementing effective solid waste management system. The judges said, the pristine nature of the hills should not be allowed to be disturbed by unregulated tourist activity.

## RSS-BJP workers illegally detain Tushar Gandhi

GNS News Agency, March 15

A group of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) activists allegedly illegally detained Tushar Gandhi, the great-grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, near Neyyattinkara, in the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday evening, causing public outcry and politically non-partisan protests from both the ruling front and the Opposition. The protesters were reportedly irked by Mr. Gandhi, who was in Kerala at the invitation of the Sivagiri Madhom, terming the RSS a cancer on the nation's soul in a speech commemorating the 100th anniversary of Sree Narayana Guru's historic meeting with Mahatma Gandhi at the Madhom. Mr. Gandhi was later in Neyyattinkara to unveil the statue of late Gandhian P. Gopinathan Nair at the latter's ancestral home. After the function, the RSS activists besieged Mr. Gandhi when he entered the vehicle. The protesters gheraoed Mr. Gandhi and demanded that he retract his speech condemning the RSS at the Sivagiri Madhom.

Mr. Gandhi stepped out of the vehicle, confronted the protesters, and was seemingly unrepentant. He shouted, "RSS murtabad and Gandhiji zindabad" back at the RSS activists. There was no noticeable police presence at the scene. Mr. Gandhi left the area after clarifying his political stance. When contacted, the Neyyattinkara police stated



they had received no reports regarding the incident. When contacted, the Sivagiri Madhom said it would react to the development on Thursday. Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition V. D. Satheesan condemned the RSS's action. He said Mr. Gandhi had arrived in Kerala to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's historic meeting with Sree Narayana Guru at the Madhom. "The RSS has put Kerala to shame and revealed their true colours as a revanchist force," he said. Communist Party of India (CPI) State secretary Binoy Viswam said the RSS's contempt for Mahatma Gandhi and the Independence Movement and the organisation's support for the feudal colonial set-up was evident in their act against Mr. Gandhi.

## In Mauritius, Modi calls for 'free, open, safe' Indian Ocean



GNS News Agency, March 15

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said a "free, open, secure, and safe" Indian Ocean was a common priority for both India and Mauritius. Mr. Modi, who is on a two-day state visit to the island nation, said this while delivering a speech alongside Mauritian Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam. He conveyed India's unambiguous support for the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos archipelago. "In the next five years, five hundred civil servants of Mauritius will be trained in India. We have reached an agreement for settlement of mutual trade in local currency. The Prime Minister and I agree that defence cooperation and maritime security are key pillars of our strategic partnership. Free, open, secure, and safe Indian Ocean is our common priority... In this regard, we will extend every possible assistance to meet the needs of the Coast Guard," Mr. Modi said after the conclusion of bilateral talks. "We fully respect the sovereignty of Mauritius with regard to Chagos," he said. Mr. Modi assured that India would extend all possible help in the establishment of the Police Academy and the National Maritime Information Sharing Centre in Mauritius. He said that India would advance the position of Mauritius over the Chagos dispute through the Colombo Security Conclave, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, and the Indian Ocean Conference. "We are fully committed to ensure protection of the Exclusive Economic Zone of Mauritius," he said.

The Exclusive Economic Zone of Mauritius gained prominence during the U.K.-Mauritius negotiations over the Chagos archipelago. The two countries had reached an agreement on October 3, 2024, under which the U.K. would

give up sovereignty over Chagos but maintain a lease over the joint U.K.-U.S. military base on Diego Garcia, the largest island, for 99 years. The deal was signed under previous Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, but the current Prime Minister has been critical of it. Prior to the commencement of Mr. Modi's visit, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had reiterated India's support for Mauritius's claim over the Chagos archipelago. Affirming India-Mauritius cultural ties, Mr. Modi said travellers from Mauritius would receive assistance for the Char Dham Yatra (pilgrimage to four holy spots in India) and the Ramayana Trail. He announced that new development projects worth Mauritian rupee 500 million would be launched under bilateral partnership. The two sides also sealed eight memoranda of understanding, including one that will allow settlement of trade issues through local currencies.

Mr. Modi was earlier conferred the highest honour of the country, the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean. Following the meeting, Mr. Misri said the objective of the agreement on national currencies was to "promote the use of local currencies for current account as well as capital account transactions, encourage direct exchange rate quotations, encourage the setting up of an Indian rupee clearing centre in Mauritius, and extend an Indian rupee clearing centre to COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) countries. The idea is to provide avenues for enhancing trade, tourism, other kinds of business activities between the two countries".

Mr. Misri said the Reserve Bank of India and the Bank of Mauritius would have to implement the agreement and "put in place the last mile systems and procedures to actually start benefiting from the agreement". The two teams also signed seven other agreements, including one between the Enforcement Directorate and the Financial Crimes Commission of the Republic of Mauritius. Mr. Misri said the agreement on sharing of white shipping information would lead to "greater maritime domain awareness" of the authorities in Mauritius. "The agreement that has been exchanged today on sharing of white shipping information between the Indian Navy and the government of Mauritius will essentially enhance Mauritius' maritime security. Its safety of its trade will lead to real-time sharing of data, preventing illegal activities," he said in response to questions from the media.

## India's AI needs an Isro-like push



If one looks at the biggest tech companies in the world in the top 50 list, one could find many well-known names such as Apple, Microsoft and Google — American companies — as well as Asian tech giants like Tencent, TSMC and Alibaba. In the game of Big Tech competition, two continents are very well represented — North America and Asia. Interestingly, it is difficult to find any European companies in the top 10. In fact, in the top 50 list, shockingly, there are only a few European tech companies. This has not always been the case.

Historically, there have been European tech giants like the Finnish company Nokia, which was the largest maker of cell phones from 1998 to 2012. But today Europe's top tech companies — SAP, Accenture, ASML, Schneider Electric and Dassault — struggle to reach a combined market cap of \$700 billion, falling significantly short of their American and Chinese counterparts. The disparity in market capitalisation is a clear indicator of the difference in the scale and impact of tech companies hailing from these regions. Apart from that, while the US and China are competing intensely in chip manufacturing, 5G technology, electronics, and, of course, artificial intelligence, Europe is nowhere to be seen. Even today in the AI race one could see the US leading with 73% of large language models developed domestically, driven by giants like OpenAI and Nvidia. China's state-backed \$75 billion AI industry leverages military-civil fusion and low-cost models like DeepSeek-R1.

In this regard, the recent Paris AI Action Summit hosted by France represented its strategic bid to establish Europe as a 'third pole' in the global AI race, countering US and Chinese dominance through a mix of collaborative governance, ethical frameworks and sovereign AI initiatives. From a larger perspective, the summit aimed to address critical challenges in AI development and promote its use for public interest. It basically focused on issues such as growing inequality between AI controllers and users, concentration of AI progress among a small group of private actors and the missed opportunities to solve key social problems due to fragmented public interest in AI initiatives.

India has already missed the bus of creating its own big tech companies like FAANGs [Facebook (now Meta), Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Google (now Alphabet)], while China has created its own bigger enterprises such as Tencent, Alibaba and Baidu. The goal is to develop AI common goods in data, open models and citizen participation that can be utilised by all interested states and organisations. Thus, the Paris AI Action Summit presented an ambitious vision for harnessing AI's potential while addressing critical societal risks. However, its proposals invite significant debate, particularly around feasibility, equity and unintended consequences.

For instance, France announced euro 109 billion in AI investments to position Europe as a 'third pole', emphasising open-source models and sovereignty. But France's investment pledge pales against the \$500 billion US private-sector AI investments. In addition, private companies like

DeepSeek and OpenAI drive rapid advancements due to competitive pressures and capital access. Hence, public interest initiatives may lag without similar incentives and while Macron's 'third pole' aims to reduce dependency, sceptics warn Balkanised AI ecosystems could stifle interoperability and worsen geopolitical tensions. Furthermore, the summit talked about promoting "socially responsible AI" through labour observatories and anti-discrimination tools, aiming to balance productivity with worker well-being. But, on the sidelines of the summit, unions highlighted AI-driven job losses in public services. They also opposed metrics like "productivity gains" that often mask workforce reductions as postal workers cited AI tools like "Lucy" (a banking chatbot) are increasing surveillance and workload without improving outcomes, ultimately resulting in a tool of algorithmic exploitation. It is interesting to note that while the summit emphasised reskilling, no concrete funding mechanisms was discussed to address structural unemployment and skill gaps in sectors like manufacturing. Similarly, the summit aimed to combat disinformation and cyber risks while promoting ethical AI, but parallel discussions on defence AI highlighted contradictions which can cause military AI escalation because dual-use technologies could fuel autonomous weapons proliferation. This exemplifies that the summit's vision hinges on unprecedented global cooperation, yet faces scepticism due to power asymmetries, implementation gaps and unintended consequences that may prioritise corporate interests over societal needs.

Therefore, while the summit marked progress in acknowledging AI's risks, its success depends on translating rhetoric into actionable, equitable frameworks which still exists as a challenge yet to be met. Relying heavily on voluntary safety pledges from corporations and non-binding agreements among nations risks being ineffective against pressing challenges like disinformation, algorithmic bias and cybersecurity threats.

Though India's focus on responsible AI aligns with its democratic values, offering a counterpoint to China's authoritarian model successes is yet to be seen. India's Rs 10,300 crore IndiaAI Mission focuses on democratising AI access through Indigenous models (eg BharatGen), GPU infrastructure and datasets tailored to the Global South, but it must address structural challenges at home and push for more substantive outcomes at international forums to solidify its leadership role in the evolving AI landscape. Eric Schmidt, former Google CEO, during a talk at Stanford University, said India could be a potential swing state in the AI supremacy battle as it has a skilled AI workforce. Thus, the major challenge for the Indian establishment is to stop the flow of its critical resource ie, "skilled AI workforce" to Western countries. Because, what is happening today is a certain form of digital colonialism where skilled human resources of India are being used by other countries to create digital products which are being sold back to India again.

India has already missed the bus of creating its own big tech companies like FAANGs [Facebook (now Meta), Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Google (now Alphabet)], while China has created its own bigger enterprises such as Tencent, Alibaba and Baidu. India must not miss this AI wave and build its own Big AI companies that may drive the next wave of innovation in the Indian tech ecosystem. AIRO, an artificial intelligence research organisation, can strengthen India's AI development capabilities, similar to how India created ISRO to streamline space technology development. India's active participation in the Paris AI Action Summit positions it as a key player in shaping global AI policies. By championing equitable access and localised solutions while strengthening its domestic capabilities in AI research and development, India has an opportunity to bridge the gap between developed and developing nations.

## History of the rupee symbol: how it came into existence?

The DMK-led Tamil Nadu government has decided to remove the official rupee symbol (₹) from the state's Budget 2025, replacing it with the Tamil script. This marks the first time a state has rejected the national currency symbol, taking its resistance to the National Education Policy (NEP) to a new level. The rupee symbol '₹' was designed by Udaya Kumar, the son of a former DMK MLA and currently an IIT professor. The M.K. Stalin government has replaced the rupee symbol with the Tamil letter for 'Ru' in the state budget logo, amid the ongoing three-language controversy.

How did this symbol come into existence?

Before 2010, the Indian rupee was often abbreviated as "Rs" or "INR" in international markets, leading to confusion with other currencies like the Pakistani and Sri Lankan rupees. In 2009, the Ministry of Finance announced a national competition, inviting designers, artists, and the general public to submit their ideas for the rupee symbol. The initiative aimed to create a mark representing India's economic strength while embracing its cultural roots.

Who is Udaya Kumar, the man who designed the symbol?

The iconic rupee symbol (₹) has a history that dates back to 2010. Udaya Kumar, then a postgraduate student at IIT Bombay, was on the verge of joining the design department at IIT Guwahati when he won a national competition to create India's official currency symbol, beating hundreds of other entries. He spent a lot of time researching, from history to the modern times. Initially, he started with



graphic elements, but then moved to scripts for he thought it could best identify the country. The Devanagari script, he thought, was especially unique. After extensive research, Udaya Kumar Dharmalingam combined the Devanagari 'Ra' for rupiah and the Roman 'R' for rupees to create the rupee (₹) symbol, giving it a distinctly Indian yet universal identity. Winning the competition in 2010 was a milestone in his life, opening new avenues in design and education. Since then, he has designed logos for institutions like IIT Hyderabad and the National Testing Agency. Now a professor at IIT Guwahati, he mentors students, encouraging innovative thinking in design. His work continues to bridge tradition and modernity, shaping India's visual and cultural identity. On July 15, 2010, the Manmohan Singh-led UPA government officially introduced the symbol, marking a significant moment in India's monetary history.

## 100-year-old Pushpabanta Palace to turn into five-star hotel

Agartala: The Tripura government on Friday inked a pact with the Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) to turn the Pushpabanta Palace, a royal property, into a world-class five-star hotel, Chief Minister Manik Saha said. "The government has been in consultation with the IHCL, a Taj group-owned entity to set up a world-class five-star hotel at the Pushpabanta Palace," he said at a press conference. "This is indeed a historic day for the state as the pact was signed on the auspicious occasion of the Holi, the festival of colours," he said. Industries and Commerce Minister Santana Chakama and Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury were also present at the press meet. Saha said this was the first time IHCL inked an MoU with any State government to develop a world-class five-star hotel.

"The proposed hotel will be named Taj Pushpabanta Palace and developed by the Taj group with an estimated cost of Rs 250 crore in the next three years," the Chief Minister said. It will have a total of 104 rooms, of which four will be developed, keeping in mind the lifestyle of the kings. Asserting that the government wants to promote the

history and legacy of the Manikya Dynasty to the global stage, he said the foreign tourists visiting the State will have a clear idea of the dynasty's history.

Built by Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya Bahadur in 1917, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore stayed at the Pushpabanta Palace and celebrated his birthday during a programme in May 1941. Claiming that the deal will generate at least 200 direct jobs, the Chief Minister said the move was aimed at promoting the State's tourism potential at the national and international levels. On the opposition of Tipra Motha Party (TMP), an ally of the BJP-led coalition government on turning the royal property into a five-star hotel, Saha said a problem is bound to erupt when any good work is initiated, but ultimately it has been solved. "We have meetings with them (Tipra Motha Party) on the issue and they have agreed to the project leading to the signing of the MoU," he said. Saha also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi would visit the northeastern State to inaugurate the redeveloped Tripureswari temple in the Gomati district. He, however, declined to reveal the date of the formal inauguration.

## Former CJI Ranjan Gogoi criticises Bill on simultaneous elections

GNS News Agency, March 15

Former Chief Justice of India and Rajya Sabha member Ranjan Gogoi, in a three-hour deliberation with the Parliament's Joint Committee reviewing the Bill on simultaneous elections, on Tuesday (March 11, 2025) pointed out loopholes in the Bill. He cautioned that it will not be advisable to give the Election Commission (EC) unrestricted powers to decide the schedule, according to informed sources. The Parliamentary Joint Committee headed by BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary is reviewing the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 17, 2024. The Bill seeks to empower the Election Commission to conduct simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies. According to the sources, DMK Rajya Sabha member P. Wilson pointed out that Section 82 A(5) of the new Bill states that "if the EC is of the opinion that the elections to any Assembly cannot be conducted along with the general election to the House of the People, it may make a recommendation to the President, to declare by an order, that the election to that Legislative Assembly may be conducted at a later date." By not specifying a deadline for the Election Commission, isn't the legislation giving it "arbitrary and unregulated powers". Justice Gogoi, it is learnt, accepted the argument and said it would not be advisable and the Section needed to be suitably amended to plug the loophole and was not legally tenable. The EC, he said, could not be given unchecked powers to decide to prolong or curtail a State Assembly's tenure. During the deliberations, Congress MP Manish Tewari also pointed out the example of 1991 general elections, when the outgoing Prime Minister



Chandra Shekhar, citing the law and order situation in Punjab, withheld the general elections in the State. The Lok Sabha seats of Punjab went for polls along with the Assembly in 1992. The Election Commission, unlike the Central government, does not have machinery to help it take such decisions, Mr. Tewari, according to sources, said. In the last meeting, former Chief Justice of India U.U. Lalit had also pointed out several infirmities with the Bill and argued that it could not withstand a legal challenge.

Meanwhile, the panel has decided to launch a website to get the views from the general public on the Bill. This move comes after the Opposition questioned the submission by the high-level committee headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind that 80% of response that it received on the Bill was in favour of simultaneous elections. The parliamentary panel has asked the Kovind committee to submit all the responses.

## Parliamentary panel recommends hike in wage rates under MGNREGA



GNS News Agency, March 15

Parliamentary Panel on Rural Development headed by Congress MP Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka in its report reviewing the budgetary allocation of Department of Rural Development on Wednesday (March 12, 2025), strongly argued for revision of wages and uniform rates across the country under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in view of the rising cost of living. The per day wages currently vary from ₹234 in Nagaland and Arunachal to ₹374 in Haryana and Sikkim. The panel expressed disappointment that despite its multiple recommendations on this matter over the years, the government has not implemented any significant changes.

The wages currently are linked to the Consumer Price Index For Agricultural Labourers. This index, the panel said, "may not accurately reflect" the inflation trends. "The Committee believes that this index does not fully capture the real impact of inflation, and therefore, the method of wage calculation must be reviewed and updated on a priority basis to reflect actual economic conditions at the ground level," the panel report said. The panel has also urged the government to implement a "uniform wage rate" across all state and union territories, since the scheme is primarily funded by the central government. "This would help ensure fairness and consistency in wage payments under the Scheme," the panel said.

The panel also criticized the government for delay in disbursement of wages. As per the report, till February 15 this year, the pending liabilities in wages stand at 12,219.18

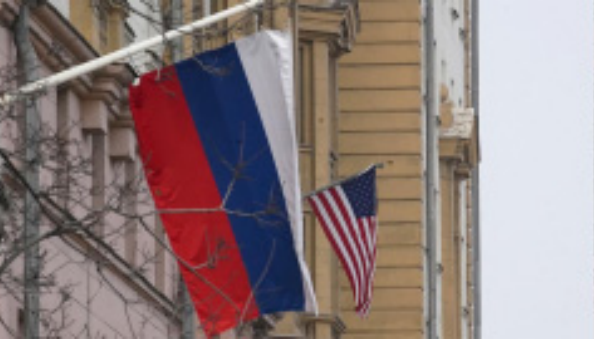
crore and 11,227.09 crore in material components and total pending liabilities are 23,446.27 crore. The panel report pointed out that one fourth of the allocated funds (86,000 crore) will go in clearing the last financial year's due. "Consequently, the actual working budget for the current financial year is reduced to 62,553.73 crore, significantly limiting the scheme's capacity to function effectively and meet its primary objective of preventing rural distress and ensuring livelihood security," the report said.

## Kunal Kamra vs Zomato yet again: Comedian slams company's post on delivery agents

Hyderabad: Comedian Kunal Kamra is at it again! Slamming food delivery app Zomato, yet again, the comedian has shared a post on his X account. This time, Kamra slammed Zomato's post on X, in which the company said: "Some people skip giving ratings to delivery partners, the same people get upset when their work does not get recognition." "Wasting no time in responding, the comedian replied to Zomato's post, saying "Someone people skip giving minimum wage and social security same people get upset when they are sent to prison. (sic)"

His comments have once again ignited discussion on gig worker wages, with people quickly taking sides even as some came in support of the comedian, some criticised his views on the matter. The latest post from Kamra comes months after he slammed Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal over his post on achieving the Guinness world record by setting up a session for first aid lessons with over 4300 delivery partners. Criticising the CEO's post, Kamra had posed a challenge to him asking if he could declare the number of delivery partners with Zomato has and what their average income was. "Can you declare the no of delivery partners you have with their average income & working hours over the last 3 months? No you can't But you can tell kgs of biryani ordered in one day. You're such a hack bro... (sic)" Kamra had said.

## Ukraine ceasefire needs 'reworking', would give nothing to Russia, says Putin's close aide



GNS News Agency, March 15

Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said on Thursday (March 13, 2025) that a proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine backed by the U.S. and Ukraine needed to be reworked to take account of Russia's own interests, the RIA state news agency reported. "The document, it seems to me, has a hasty character... It will be necessary to work, think and take into account our position too. It outlines only the Ukrainian approach," RIA cited Mr. Ushakov as saying. "A 30-day temporary ceasefire. Well, what does it give us? It gives us nothing. It only gives the Ukrainians an opportunity to regroup, gain strength and, to continue the same thing," Mr. Ushakov told Russian media.

Mr. Ushakov's remarks came as U.S. officials are set to present the ceasefire deal to the Russian side on Thursday (March 13, 2025). He told the state media that the ceasefire in Ukraine was not conducive to long-term peace and the joint U.S.-Ukrainian idea was a "hasty" step that "is not in favour of a long-term settlement." Meanwhile, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky said Thursday (March 13, 2025) the fact there was no "meaningful" response from Moscow to a 30-day ceasefire proposal from the United States meant the Kremlin wants to keep fighting in Ukraine. "Regrettably, for more than a day already, the world has yet to hear a meaningful response from Russia to the proposals made. This once again demonstrates that Russia seeks to prolong the war and postpone peace for as long as possible. We hope that US pressure will be sufficient to compel Russia to end the war," Mr. Zelenskyy said in a statement on social media.

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## U.N. probe says Israel attacks on Gaza reproductive centres 'genocidal'; Netanyahu calls it 'false, absurd'



GNS News Agency, March 15

A United Nations investigation concluded Thursday (March 13, 2025) that Israel carried out "genocidal" acts in Gaza through the systematic destruction of sexual and reproductive healthcare facilities. The U.N. Commission of Inquiry said Israel had "intentionally attacked and destroyed" the Palestinian territory's main fertility centre, and had simultaneously imposed a siege and blocked aid including medication for ensuring safe pregnancies, deliveries and neonatal care. "Israel categorically rejects the unfounded allegations," its mission in Geneva said in a statement.

The commission found that Israeli authorities "have destroyed in part the reproductive capacity of Palestinians in Gaza as a group through the systematic destruction of sexual and reproductive healthcare", it said in a statement. It said this amounted to "two categories of genocidal acts" during Israel's offensive in Gaza, launched after the attacks by Hamas militants on Israel on October 7, 2023. The United Nations' genocide convention defines that crime as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. Of its five categories, the inquiry said the two implicating Israel were "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction" and "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group".

"These violations have not only caused severe immediate physical and mental harm and suffering to women and girls, but irreversible long-term effects on the mental health and reproductive and fertility prospects of Palestinians as a group," the commission's chair Navi Pillay said in a statement. The three-person Independent International Commission of Inquiry was established by the U.N. Human Rights Council in May 2021 to investigate alleged international law violations in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Ms. Pillay, a former U.N. rights chief, served as a judge on the International Criminal Court and presided

over the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Israel accused the commission of advancing a "predetermined and biased political agenda... in a shameless attempt to incriminate the Israel Defence Forces".

The report said maternity hospitals and wards had been systematically destroyed in Gaza, along with the Al-Basma IVF Centre, the territory's main in-vitro fertility clinic. It said Al-Basma was shelled in December 2023, reportedly destroying around 4,000 embryos at a clinic that served 2,000 to 3,000 patients a month. The commission found that the Israeli Security Forces intentionally attacked and destroyed the clinic, including all the reproductive material stored for the future conception of Palestinians. The commission found no credible evidence that the building was used for military purposes. It concluded that the destruction "was a measure intended to prevent births among Palestinians in Gaza, which is a genocidal act". Furthermore, the report said the wider harm to pregnant, lactating and new mothers in Gaza was on an "unprecedented scale", with an irreversible impact on the reproductive prospects of Gazans. Such underlying acts "amount to crimes against humanity" and deliberately trying to destroy the Palestinians as a group, the commission concluded. The report came after the commission conducted public hearings in Geneva on Tuesday (March 11, 2025) and Wednesday (March 12, 2025), hearing from victims and witnesses of sexual violence. It concluded that Israel had targeted civilian women and girls directly, "acts that constitute the crime against humanity of murder and the war crime of wilful killing".

Women and girls have also died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth due to the conditions imposed by the Israeli authorities impacting access to reproductive health care, "acts that amount to the crime against humanity of extermination", it added. The commission added that forced public stripping and nudity, sexual harassment including threats of rape, as well as sexual assault, comprise part of the Israeli Security Forces' "standard operating procedures" toward Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday (March 13, 2025) condemned the report as "false and absurd". The anti-Israeli circus known as the UN Human Rights Council has long been exposed as an anti-Semitic, corrupt, terror-supporting, and irrelevant body," Mr. Netanyahu said in a statement issued by his office. "Instead of focusing on crimes against humanity and the war crimes committed by the Hamas terrorist organisation in the worst massacre against the Jewish people since the Holocaust, the U.N. once again chooses to attack the state of Israel with false accusations, including absurd claims" of destroying sexual and reproductive healthcare facilities in Gaza, he said.

## U.S. President Donald Trump threatens 200% tariff on wine, champagne from France, other EU countries

GNS News Agency, March 15

Bottles of Chianti wine are displayed at the Vinitaly exposition in Verona. U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to impose 200% tariffs on wine, champagne and other alcoholic products from France and other European Union countries in retaliation against the bloc's planned levies on US-produced whiskey. U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday (March 13, 2025) threatened to impose 200% tariffs on wine, champagne and other alcoholic products from France and other European Union countries in retaliation against the bloc's planned levies on U.S.-produced whiskey.

Mr. Trump has launched trade wars against competitors and partners alike since taking office, wielding tariffs as a tool to pressure countries on commerce and other policy issues. On Wednesday (March 12, 2025), the European Union unveiled tariffs countering U.S. moves on steel and aluminum, hitting some \$28 billion of US goods in stages from April. Mr. Trump on Thursday (March 13, 2025) renewed his criticism of the bloc, singling out a 50-percent levy on US whiskey as being "nasty".

Trump announces Reciprocal Tariffs - What does it mean?

The President has set in motion his plan to impose reciprocal tariffs on imports, which is expected to further deepen the global trade war. 'Reciprocal tariffs' are tariffs designed to match the tax rates that other countries charge on imports, endorsing a 'tit-for-tat' approach towards international trade. These duties, which are indirect taxes, are a source of revenue for a country. Anti-dumping duty, countervailing duty or safeguard duty are also kinds of tariffs. [Video Credit: The Hindu] He termed the EU "one of the most hostile and abusive taxing and tariffing authorities in the World" and said it "was formed for the sole purpose of taking advantage of the United States." Uncertainty over Trump's trade plans and worries that they could trigger a recession have roiled financial markets. But US stocks regained some ground Wednesday even as some Asia markets retreated. US distillers have called the EU's levy on American whiskey "deeply disappointing."

"Reimposing these debilitating tariffs at a time when the spirits industry continues to face a slowdown in US mar-



ketplace will further curtail growth and negatively impact distillers and farmers in states across the country," said Distilled Spirits Council head Chris Swonger in a statement on Wednesday. A 2018 imposition of similar tariffs led to a 20-percent drop in American whiskey exports to the European Union. The lifting of that measure in 2021 saw US whiskey exports surge by nearly 60 percent, industry data showed. It was not immediately clear what legal justification Trump would rely on to hike tariffs on European alcohol. Trump's tariff wars have taken aim at Canada, Mexico and China over allegations they are not doing enough to curtail fentanyl smuggling or illegal immigration into the United States. Justin Trudeau reacts to Donald Trump's tariffs on Canada

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called American tariffs "very dumb" and said that U.S. President Donald Trump is appealing Russia while launching a trade war against Canada. [Video Credit: The Hindu] He has also taken aim at specific commodities, including steel, aluminum and copper. Some countries, much like the EU, have imposed retaliatory tariffs on the United States in response to Trump's moves to address what he terms unfair trade imbalances. China has vowed "all necessary measures" in response to US measures, and has already imposed duties of 10-percent and 15-percent targeting US agriculture products ranging from soybeans to chicken. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen on Wednesday maintained that the EU's retaliation, affecting products ranging from bourbon to motorbikes, was "strong but proportionate."

## All will lose: U.N. chief warns amidst growing global trade war

GNS News Agency, March 15

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned that "all will lose" when countries get into trade wars, against the backdrop of tariff wars unleashed by the Mr. Trump administration. "I think we live in a global economy. Everything is interlinked. And obviously, one of the great advantages of having a situation of free trade is to create the conditions for all countries to benefit. When we enter into a trade war, I believe all will lose," Mr. Guterres said in United Nations on Wednesday (March 12, 2025).

He was responding to a question on the growing global trade war. U.S. President Donald Trump, in his second term in the White House, has said America will impose reciprocal tariffs on nations that charge high levies on U.S. goods. The Trump administration's global tariffs on steel and aluminum have come into effect, prompting the European Union (EU) and Canada to also announce levies on U.S. products. The administration has also announced tariff on imports from Canada, Mexico and China. In a retaliatory action, these countries have also announced tariffs on goods imported from the United States. Mr. Trump has said

America is "going to take in hundreds of billions of dollars in tariffs", and "we are going to become so rich, you are not going to know where to spend all that money. I am telling you, you just watch. We are going to have jobs. We are going to have open factories. It is going to be great". Mr. Trump has repeatedly called out India for the high tariffs that it imposes on American products. Last week, he criticised the high tariffs charged by India and other countries, terming them "very unfair", and announced that reciprocal tariffs will kick in next month on nations that impose levies on American goods. Mr. Trump has said America has been "ripped off" for decades by nearly every country on earth, and "we will not let that happen any longer". "If you do not make your product in America, however, under the Mr. Trump administration, you will pay a tariff and in some cases, a rather large one. Other countries have used tariffs against us for decades and now, it is our turn to start using them against those other countries. On average, the European Union, China, Brazil, India, Mexico and Canada... And countless other nations charge us tremendously higher tariffs than we charge them." Mr. Trump has said. "I

## China urges 'diplomatic' Iran nuclear solution ahead of Beijing talks



GNS News Agency, March 15

China called for a "diplomatic" resolution to the Iran nuclear issue as it prepared to host diplomats from Tehran and Moscow for talks. The United States withdrew from a landmark deal, which had imposed curbs on Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief, during President Donald Trump's first term. Tehran adhered to the 2015 deal for a year after Washington's withdrawal but then began rolling back its commitments.

Beijing is set to host Russia and Iran — both key diplomatic partners — on Friday for trilateral talks on Tehran's nuclear programme. "In the current situation, we believe that all parties should maintain calm and restraint to avoid escalating the Iran nuclear situation, or even walking towards confrontation and conflict," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman

Mao Ning told a regular briefing. The meeting will be attended by China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, Beijing has said.

Iran's Foreign Ministry has said the meeting would focus on "developments related to the nuclear issue and the lifting of sanctions". No details about the timing of the meeting have been shared. However, Beijing has said the talks would aim to "strengthen communication and coordination, to resume dialogue and negotiation at an early time". "China sincerely hopes that all parties can work together, continuously increase mutual trust and dispel misgivings, and turn the momentum of restarting dialogue and negotiation into reality at an early date," Mao said. Since returning to the White House in January, Mr. Trump has called for a new nuclear deal with Tehran while reinstating his "maximum pressure" policy of sanctions. Iran has officially ruled out direct talks as long as sanctions remain, with President Masoud Pezeshkian vowing on Tuesday that his country "will not bow in humiliation to anyone". Mr. Trump said last week he had sent a letter to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urging negotiations and warning of possible military action if Iran refused. A quarterly report by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in February said Iran had significantly increased its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to 60% purity — a short step from the 90% needed to make a nuclear weapon.

## Pakistan PM meets survivors of deadly train hijack and the commandos who ended the siege

GNS News Agency, March 15

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was in the restive southwestern Balochistan province on Thursday (March 13, 2025) to meet survivors of a train attack and the commandos who rescued over 300 passengers from insurgents who killed 21 civilian and four troops. The Baloch Liberation Army, an outlawed group behind multiple deadly attacks in recent months, claimed responsibility for the attack that began Tuesday and ended Wednesday when troops killed all 33 insurgents in an operation that the military said resulted in no further passenger deaths.

The train was heading from the Balochistan capital, Quetta, to the northern city of Peshawar when insurgents blew up the track, forcing nine coaches and the engine of the Jafer Express train to stop partially inside a tunnel. The BLA regularly targets Pakistani security forces and has attacked trains, but had never been able to hijack any train in the past. They have also attacked outsiders such as Chinese workers, thousands of whom are involved in multibillion-dollar infrastructure projects in Balochistan. Oil and mineral-rich Balochistan is Pakistan's largest and least populated province. Members of the ethnic Baloch minority say they face discrimination and exploitation by the central government. Amid tight security, Sharif and members of his Cabinet were received by senior government officials on his arrival at an airport in Quetta, his office said. It provided no further details. Authorities said arrangements were made to transport the bodies of victims to their hometowns and people who were wounded were receiving medical treatment. Shafiqat Ali Khan, the spokesman at Pakistan's ministry of foreign affairs, told reporters in Islamabad that BLA assailants who hijacked the train were in contact with their handlers in Afghanistan.

"Our security forces successfully eliminated all 33 terrorists, including suicide bombers, while rescuing the hostages," he said. Khan said the attackers had been "in direct communications with Afghanistan-based planners throughout the incident" and Pakistan has repeatedly asked Kabul "to deny the use of its soil for terrorist groups like BLA for their attacks against Pakistan." "We urge Afghanistan to hold perpetrators, organizers, financiers, of this reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and cooperate with the gov-



ernment of Pakistan to bring all those who are concerned with this attack, including the real sponsors of terrorism to justice," Khan said. In an overnight statement, the military said it had "confirmed intelligence" indicating that the assault was "orchestrated and directed by terrorist ring leaders operating from Afghanistan, who were in direct communication with the terrorists throughout the incident." In Kabul, Abdul Qahar Balkhi, a spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rejected the Pakistani charges, saying: "We are saddened by the loss of life of innocents in the incident." However, the military in the statement urged the Afghan Taliban government to uphold its responsibilities and deny the use of its soil for terrorist activities against Pakistan. According to a military statement, the "terrorists, after blowing up the railway track, took control of the train and held the passengers hostage including women, children and elderly, using them as human shields." Many survivors said the assailants opened fire on the windows of the train, entered the cars and killed or wounded people before taking them hostage. Three soldiers who had been guarding the railroad track were among those killed, according to military spokesman Lt. Gen. Ahmad Sharif. Separately, Pakistani security killed 10 militants after spotting them near a military facility in South Waziristan, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, officials said. Authorities said those killed were members of Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP. The group is an ally of the Taliban in Afghanistan and has been emboldened since the Afghan Taliban seized power there in 2021.

## NTPC eyes Andhra Pradesh for nuke plant, State govt. yet to respond

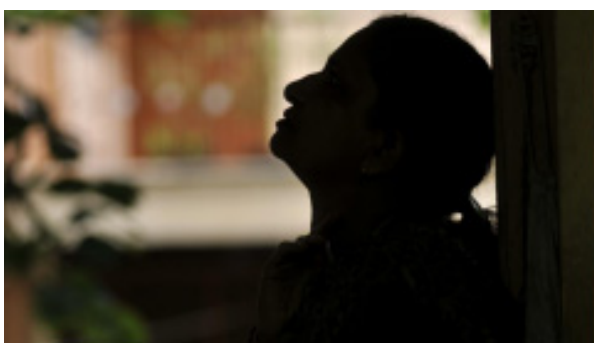
GNS News Agency, March 15

If the on-going talks on nuclear power plant proposed by NTPC Limited with the Andhra Pradesh government materialise, the atomic energy plant is likely to be set up anywhere in one of the proposed places such as Nellore, Prakasam and Anakapalli districts in future, reliable sources in the NTPC and the Andhra Pradesh government, said. NTPC is evaluating sites in various States, including Andhra Pradesh, to rapidly expand nuclear power generation in the country to meet net zero targets by 2070. Each potential location requires regulatory approval from the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB). NTPC has already constituted a dedicated team to consult the State governments, mostly along the East and West coasts.

"A formal proposal has been made to Andhra Pradesh government to allot the required land (at least 2,000 acres) and water for the nuclear power plant. We have not received

any response from the State yet. But, NTPC has received a positive response from Chhattisgarh, where a MOU has also been signed for setting up 4,200 MW of nuclear power capacity at an estimated cost of ₹80,000 crore. We are exploring 23 locations across the country, including some in Andhra Pradesh, but we are interested in Anakapalli district due to its geographical conditions and water resources, including Polavaram major irrigation project," an NTPC official told The Hindu on Thursday on condition of anonymity. When contacted, an official from the State government secretariat said, "Yes, the proposal from NTPC regarding a nuclear power plant at possible locations in Andhra Pradesh, is true. Coastal areas like Nellore, Prakasam and Anakapalli districts have been proposed. However, the State government is yet to take any formal decision on it. Public concern is likely to be one of the major concern."

## The invisible struggle: Addressing the plight of deserted women in India



with familial and community rejection, leads to social isolation and hinders their reintegration into society. In rural areas, where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, these challenges are compounded by factors such as caste, religion, and geographic location.

The lack of targeted State welfare measures further exacerbates their plight. Stringent criteria for social welfare benefits, such as residency requirements, create insurmountable barriers for women who have migrated in search of sustenance. Inter-State disparities in welfare provisions leave many deserted women excluded from essential support. Housing is another critical area of concern, with significant gender disparities in property ownership. While recent initiatives such as PMAY-G mandate joint ownership, many properties remain solely in the husband's name, leaving deserted women without a secure social safety net. Similarly, while some States have categorised deserted women for ration card benefits, a lack of uniformity at the Central level hinders their formal recognition as eligible beneficiaries. Even well-intentioned schemes such as the Swadhar Greh Scheme often fail to deliver tangible benefits owing to budgetary constraints and implementation challenges. Limited access to property, low literacy rates, and childcare responsibilities further reduce their bargaining power in the labour market. While schemes such as MGNREGA have identified deserted women as a special category, these measures are insufficient to address their comprehensive needs.

The pervasive lack of awareness regarding legal rights and personal agency compounds these obstacles. Despite the existence of laws designed to protect deserted women, prohibitive legal fees, procedural complexities, and social stigma deter many from seeking justice. Even with free legal aid, many deserted women do not file maintenance cases or receive minimal support. Studies, like the one from Sakhi: One Stop Centres in Maharashtra, show that even when cases are filed, outcomes are uncertain and prolonged. These challenges highlight the need for legal reform and sociocultural advocacy. Rules that edge out women from employment for getting married are 'coarse', unconstitutional: Supreme Court

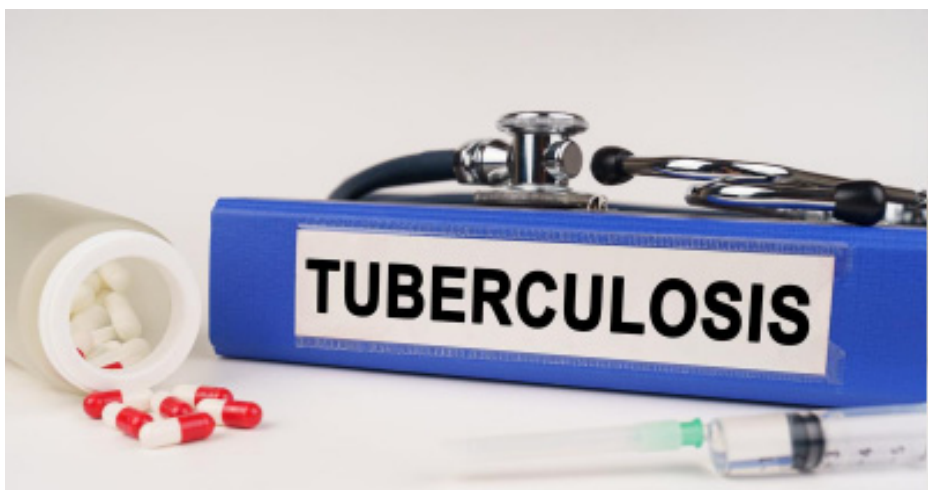
Addressing the plight of deserted women requires a comprehensive policy intervention. Integrating them into State welfare measures and expanding empowerment initiatives through self-help groups (SHGs) are crucial steps. Improving legal literacy through dedicated legal support centres is equally essential. Community support networks and free counseling are needed to address their psychological needs. Expanded access to healthcare and insurance coverage will provide a safety net against economic and social instability. A formal national institution dedicated to the care of deserted women would ensure uniform policy implementation and recognition of their specific needs. Legal reforms are necessary to expedite processes and remove administrative barriers. Simplifying procedures and enforcing existing legislation are key goals. Organisations such as CORO India and Ekal Stree Sanghatana are working to bring awareness to the plight of single women. Women's rights organisations must continuously challenge and transform the socio-cultural beliefs that marginalise deserted women. The plight of deserted women underscores the need for a more inclusive approach to women's empowerment. Their legal invisibility and socio-economic vulnerability highlight a critical deficiency in current gender-sensitive policymaking. A multi-pronged strategy encompassing legal reform, policy innovation, and grassroots advocacy is essential. Excluding deserted women from the policy narrative is a moral and practical failure that demands urgent correction.

## Sharpening India's anti-tuberculosis fight

The omnipresence of tuberculosis (TB) in the pages of history and literature is testimony to how the disease has plagued generations across the world and continues to be a major problem even today. India bears over a quarter of the global TB burden. Political will in India has helped drive a great deal of progress in the fight against the disease. For example, in 2023, addressing the big challenge of 'missed' TB cases, 25.1 lakh patients were diagnosed in India as having TB, highlighting strengthened case finding efforts. However, as we work toward the goal of TB elimination — the Prime Minister has urged citizens to work towards TB elimination — we must look to innovate and deploy proven technologies and tools at our disposal.

Regimens and issues The first low-hanging fruit that I believe must be invested in urgently is new shorter regimens for drug-resistant TB. It has been encouraging to learn that India will soon introduce the World Health Organization (WHO) - recommended shorter regimen for drug-resistant TB. The current regimens on offer are long and arduous, requiring patients to consume nearly 13 to 14 tablets every day if they are on the shorter nine to 11-month regimen, or four to five tablets every day if they have been put on the 18 to 24 month longer regimen. The treatment is physically and psychologically draining and has severe side effects, such as loss of hearing, and even psychosis.

Moreover, a problem with such an extended treat-



ment regimen that requires regular visits to a TB clinic for nearly two years is loss of employment, driving many families into poverty. In 2022, WHO recommended the shorter, safer and more effective regimens called BPaLM for all drug-resistant TB patients, and there is a lot of recent data that show this regimen to be more effective with better compliance. With only three to four tablets every day, patients can complete their treatment within six months, with minimal side effects. The success rates of this regimen are also reported to be higher — 89% as compared to the 68% treatment success rate reported in the country in the 2023 India TB Report. Given its efficacy, close to 80 countries around the world have already procured the BPaLM regimen and about 20 of the highest burden countries are already rolling it out.

Research indicates that savings from implementing this regimen will be between 40% to 90% of the cost of current treatment regimens, and that an immediate transition to BPaLM could result in an annual saving of ap-

proximately \$740 million (or approximately ₹6,180 crore) for health systems globally. This is a more effective and safer solution to treat drug-resistant TB and we must work on expediting access to this regimen to all eligible patients across the country. Making the best use of new treatments The next question is this. How do we go about diagnosing more people with TB so that they can benefit from these game-changing new treatments? The answer lies in making sure that we are screening and testing quickly and efficiently to reduce delays in accurate diagnosis. For this, a proactive approach is essential. It is time we modernised and used health datasets, which include GIS mapping, to identify vulnerable populations such as those with comorbidities (for example, malnutrition, diabetes and HIV), former COVID-19 patients, and at-risk communities in slums, prisons, or those who are homeless. Targeted multi-disease focused screening drives can then be conducted to detect TB cases early, even

among those without typical symptoms. In fact, recent evidence highlights that a significant number of people with pulmonary (i.e., lung) TB may not exhibit recognisable symptoms such as cough, fever, weight loss, or night sweats.

The National TB Prevalence Survey (2019-21) highlights the importance of chest X-rays, which detected 42.6% of cases that would have otherwise been missed. Leveraging advancements in technology, portable X-ray machines equipped with AI-driven tools can significantly reduce diagnostic delays, especially in remote and under-resourced areas. Further, there is a critical need to expand the use of rapid molecular tests over less sensitive microscopy methods for faster detection and drug resistance profiling. This shift is crucial in promptly identifying TB cases and determining appropriate treatment options. In short, by proactively identifying at-risk populations and investing in and leveraging advanced/innovative diagnostic technologies,

## Caught between the warp and weft of business and life



In name, Akkalkot road falls in an industrial area. But the 4-5-km potholed road, in Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) in Solapur district, is deserted. The factory units, spread across 216 hectares of the industrial area, resemble homes with white rangolis outside each gate. In the quiet afternoon, the only sound is the khat-khat of power looms, bearing testimony to still-running textile industry of the area. Here, 600-700 units operate with about 10 people in each, weaving textile for Solapuri chaddars and towels. Chaddars are used in daily life for everything from a floor spread to a blanket. In his Solapur home Govind Zanwar, 54, who produces bamboo towels now after switching out of the chaddar, says there are many reasons for its decline. Besides a change in customer tastes, cheaper synthetic textiles flooding the market, and the increased cost of production, he ascribes the downfall to the lack of innovation in design. "Aesthetics matter and the chaddar features loud colours. There is scope for a revival, but it will be difficult," he says. Zanwar, who lives in a joint family of Marwaris, who were initially trading in cloth, got into the production of chaddar and towel about 15 years ago. His daughter and son do not want to get into the business, and are looking at careers as professionals in corporate jobs.

In 2005, the jacquard chaddar made from cotton yarn got the Geographical Indication (GI) stamp, an Indian government certification that a particular craft originated in an area. That year, the Geographical Indications Journal, a government document issued for GI tags, had listed at least 15,000 handlooms and power looms operating in Solapur, employing over 2 lakh people, all producing the Solapuri chaddar. In 2004, the journal reports that exports amounted to ₹500-600 crore. Now, only 600-700 looms remain, according to data from the Textile Development Foundation (TDF), an association of manufacturers established in 1995 in Solapur. Exports have grown to ₹800-1,000 crore, as per estimates by an industry expert. The government does not have current figures.

Shrinivas Bura, 59, a textile engineer who worked in a corporate office in Mumbai, and then returned to start Bravo Kids School to train a generation to think independently and like entrepreneurs, is also the founder of TDF. He points out that chaddar production started declining from the year 2000. He blames the government and manufacturers for the downfall. "The government ignored the industry, while the producers failed to innovate. We realised only when external players from Haryana's Panipat captured our chaddar market. Now made-in-China towels are posing a danger to our towels," Shrinivas says, going through old records, covered in dust. He says Haryana producers use synthetic fibres and claim they are cotton.

Pentappa Gaddam, 65, a manufacturer and the president of the Solapur Zilla Yantramag Dharak Sangh (SOZIYA), an association that represents the community's needs to the government, says, "We complained to the government about the duplication, but no one listened to us." The association last complained eight years ago in letters, and has since stopped, since the number of producers has come down. In a grey building in Siddheshwar Nagar, Suraj (name changed to protect privacy), 53, sits in his cramped office surrounded by piles of brightly coloured cotton towels. He is a third-generation producer, who owns 12 power looms operating in two shifts. "We all are working for survival. Forget bringing the next generation into the business. I am working at a 5% margin in towels; earlier it was 20%." He has had to shift from the Solapuri jacquard chaddar to towels, because there is barely any demand for the chaddar any more. Suraj's voice is drowned in the noise of the thana-bana (warp-weft) coming together to form cloth. It is Tuesday, the day he pays out weekly wages before the weekly day off on Wednesday. Suraj belongs to the Padmashali community of weavers, who repeat a legend, where people from the community made a piece of cloth from padma tantu (lotus fabric) for Lord Vishnu THEN?. Around 1877, when Solapur's first mill — Solapur Spinning & Weaving Mills — was established, they migrated here from Karimnagar, Warangal, and Siddipet, now in Telangana. It wasn't just about job opportunities, but also to escape the drought in those areas. "We are able to sustain ourselves today only because our past generations built the foundation. We own the land, so we don't take its value into account while pricing products. If we do, we will run into losses," says Siddheshwar Gaddam, 61, the owner of a chaddar and towel factory, and the third generation in the business. His grandparents worked in mills like Jam Mill, Laxmivishnu Mill, and others, which collapsed in the 1950s. They purchased looms at a low price and started small units, becoming self-employed and giving employment to others. "From grey cloth, they shifted to chaddar, and 15 years ago we started with towels, as it had an international market."

Many like Suraj and Siddheshwar have quit manufacturing Solapur chaddar and shifted to towels. Suraj asks, "When Prime Minister Narendra Modi is saying 'go local', why is the government not banning Chinese products." The decline of the Solapur chaddar is also tied to economic growth and a rise status among customers.

Gurubai is lost between the warp and the weft, as she carefully winds thread on the bobbin. Spreading her hands out as she speaks, she says, "I don't know how old I am; maybe 50. I came to Solapur when I got married and started working with the chaddar. I was 15 then." She wears a shirt over her saree, so that the cotton dust doesn't stick to her body and clothes. "It gets itchy," she adds. She earns ₹800 to 1,000 every week for a 12-hour shift, and fears losing her job, because she knows no other work. Some months though, her salary just about pays her medical bills. Her work involves concentration and the use of her eyes, back, and hands. When these body parts ache, she takes an injection to deal with the pain.

Shridhar Gudheli, 48, a member of the labour union associated with the right-wing-politics Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), pointed out that workers don't have uniforms or safety gear, characteristic of informal work in India. He started as a worker, but now he fights for the rights of workers. "The wages were last increased in 2022. Business owners will tell you the market is tight, just to avoid a wage increase," he says. On their lunch break, a group of power loom workers, all in their 30s and 40s, sit under a tree and open their tiffin boxes. They are covered in cotton dust. All the workers were in their late 30s to 40s., covered with cotton dust. Nagesh Usapoyal, 43, a third generation

chaddar maker says, "I rode a cycle yesterday; I am still riding a cycle today. That is us, the textile industry workers." He dusts off cotton threads from his torn brown vest and folded pants. Usapoyal says he earns ₹8,000 a month. Laxman Kusma, 35, is at the managerial position as he is a college graduate, but earns the same amount as a weaver. His work is to manage the weavers and look after the factory in the absence of the owner. Sitting on his bike, Laxman says, "I work double shift. In the morning I deliver milk for ₹250 a day. I come to the factory at around 8 and leave at about 7 in the evening." SOZIYA has been demanding civic facilities like water, smooth roads, drainage lines, a fire unit, and low rates of interest on loans.

The decline of the Solapur chaddar is also tied to economic growth and a rise status among customers. As incomes increase, people migrate from the chaddar to branded bedsheets that arrive in plastic packaging. Plastic mats have taken over from floor seating.

"With the chaddar, washing is problematic, and our product was perceived as a poor man's commodity," says Govind Bura, 57, a manufacturer, and Shrinivas' brother. Today, labourers prefer the towel, and those who have the chaddar say it lasts at least five years, so there are few repeat buyers. Solapur holds a geographically strategic position as it is situated in the southeastern part of Maharashtra.

Manufacturers talk about the fact that Solapur receives water only once every five days, so it's difficult for a water-intensive industry to run. For 1 kg of yarn, 60 litres of water is needed. Currently, the producers use tanker water. "Many shifted to recycled hosiery waste yarn as it is already dyed, which doesn't require water, says Zanwar. SOZIYA has been demanding civic facilities like water, smooth roads, drainage lines, a fire unit, and low rates of interest on loans. District Industries Centre (DIC) officer Santosh Kolte says, "We are aware of the water issue. The work of setting up a new pipeline has been in progress." DIC's job is to take care of Solapur's needs. In his home-balcony office, Ashok Indapure, a trader who commissions goods and sells them on Amazon.in, says, "Solapur Government Polytechnic College discontinued textile-related courses as the students did not opt for the course, given the outdated syllabus." He feels if the Maharashtra State Board of Technical Education (MSBTE) sets up diploma courses it may help. A few mill owners blame politicians for ignoring Solapur, a city of migrants with people who speak Marathi, Telugu, and Kannada. There is also a mix of Hindus and Muslims, preventing politicians from creating religion- and caste-based vote banks. One producer says, "Baramati had Sharad Pawar who made sure the region developed. We had Sushil Kumar Shinde (a former chief minister), but he did not have the political will to do anything."

Solapur holds a geographically strategic position as it is situated in the southeastern part of Maharashtra, bordering Karnataka and a six-hour road ride from Telangana. The textile industry flourished in this area because of train connectivity. "But we needed an upgrade with airline connectivity," says Shrinivas, adding that there has been an airport here for 30 years, but it has been mostly non-operational. The closest international airports are Pune and Hyderabad, both a five-hour drive away. "Buyers from other countries avoid travelling here, as they have to take various modes of transport to reach here."

Charwak Burgul, whose 2,200 square foot unit was started in 1987 by his father, says for any textile-based industry to survive generations, there must at least be a 10% year-on-year growth, so there is a cushion for the bad years. His margins have dropped from 25% WHEN to 10%. To cut the cost of production, manufacturers shifted from power looms to shuttle-less looms in 2010 or so. The speed is high and gives four times the output compared to the power loom, and requires limited manpower. Charwak runs a full-fledged chaddar production unit with 10 power looms and 20 rapiers. "This is our legacy, we have to keep it alive somehow," he says, while walking through rows of power looms that can produce 10 chaddars a day, unlike the rapiers that do double.

He claims Solapur is the only place in India where everything from the doubling of yarn (twisting two yarns) and dyeing to the winding (hanks transferred to bobbins) and warping (yarn transferred to beam) is done under one roof. For the towel, the process is the same, with the dyeing being done after weaving. The entire process takes 15 days. The most common sizes are 48x90 inches, 54x90 inches, and 60x90 inches. Charwak has tried to innovate by creating wall hangings, portraits, and bags, but he is unsure of where to find a market. Youth and women in factory leadership are uncommon. Amit Bura, 25, is one of the few who has taken up his father's trade, but he does not see the Solapur chaddar as a profitable business. "We are experimenting with other products. We tried bottle-making but did not succeed. We are exploring other ideas," he says.

## Fire, fidelity and an inhuman heritage

In Europe, Christian clergy burnt alive women suspected of being Satan-worshipping witches. In Arabia, the 'People of the Ditch' were martyrs who chose death by fire rather than giving up Islam. The theatre of death in matters of faith is very much part of human culture. The practice of Sati — burning of Hindu widows — needs to be seen in this context.

In 1829, the East India Company passed a law banning Sati. Christian missionaries had long highlighted this practice in European circles to argue that, despite its lofty philosophy, India was a barbaric land in need of civilisational rescue. Defying this ban, a decade later, the Sikh controlled lands saw the burning of four Rajput queens and seven slave girls on the funeral pyre of Raja Ranjit Singh. A Kangra miniature painting was commissioned to commemorate this event. In 1861, Michael Madhusudan Dutta wrote his famous ballad Meghnad-Badh that valorised the sati-hood of Prameela, widow of Indrajit, daughter-in-law of Ravan, a story with roots in the 700-year-old Telugu Ranganatha Ramayana. Even Hindu social reformers, known for supporting the ban against Sati, praised this Bengali ballad as a literary masterpiece.

No one knows when the pan-Indian practice of warrior widows burning themselves with (sahagamana) or without (anugamana) the corpse of their husband came to be known as 'sati' — a word that means the chaste wife. The inhuman practice was strongly linked to the belief in fidelity-magic; that a woman who thinks of no one but her husband had supernatural powers. She could collect water in unbaked pots, as in the story of Sati Renuka; she could stop the sun from rising, as in the story of Sati Shilavati; she could turn the Hindu Trinity into her babies, as in the story of Anasuya. Sati Savitri even saved her husband from the jaws of death. So, it was assumed that a chaste wife would protect her warrior husband from death.

## Understanding the neurobiological basis of substance abuse addiction



can lead to addiction, it does not inevitably do so on its own. A complex interplay of genetic predisposition, psychological history, environmental factors, and the age of first-use determines individual vulnerability. This multifactorial understanding challenges simplistic narratives and underscores the need for more nuanced approaches to prevention and treatment. The scientific community has made significant strides in understanding addiction through animal models, which provide controlled conditions for examining how substances affect the brain. These studies have elucidated the impact of genes, developmental processes, and environmental factors on substance-taking behaviour. Human studies using brain imaging technologies like MRI and PET scans have further illuminated the biochemical, functional, and structural changes induced by substance use.

However, despite these advances, our understanding of how the brain changes during recovery remains incomplete. What factors support or hinder long-term recovery from substance use disorders? What neurobiological processes allow individuals to sustain behavioural changes and build resilience against relapse? These questions represent the frontier of addiction research. A deeper comprehension of the recovery process will undoubtedly influence the development of more effective treatment and support programs. It may also help address the broader social, educational, and professional functioning challenges that often accompany substance use disorders.

Perhaps one of the most significant contributions of neurobiological research on addiction has been its role in reducing stigma. By framing addiction as a chronic brain condition rather than a moral weakness, this research has encouraged the integration of substance use disorder treatment into mainstream healthcare. Clinical trials continue to explore effective medications for various substance use disorders, with promising developments, particularly in the realm of opioid addiction. As our understanding of the neurobiological basis of addiction evolves, so too will our treatment approaches, potentially leading to more targeted interventions that address the specific neural circuits disrupted in addiction. As we observe Brain Awareness Week, it behoves us to reflect on how neuroscientific insights can inform public policy, treatment approaches, and societal attitudes toward addiction. Embracing a neurobiological framework, we can move beyond simplistic blame narratives toward more compassionate and effective responses. The brain's remarkable plasticity — its ability to reorganise and adapt — offers hope even in the face of addiction's persistent challenges. With continued research, improved public understanding, and evidence-based interventions, we can work toward a future where substance use disorders are prevented where possible and treated effectively where necessary. In this endeavour, we must remember that behind every statistic and brain scan lies a human being — someone whose neural circuitry has been altered but whose capacity for recovery remains. This is fundamental in guiding our scientific inquiry, clinical practice, and public discourse on addiction. The writer is a neuroscientist, Director of the Centre of Excellence in Neurodegeneration and Brain Health, and Director, Centre for Neuroscience at Cochin University of Science and Technology.

Adolescence represents a critical "at-risk period" for substance use and addiction. During this developmental stage, the brain undergoes significant reorganisation, with the prefrontal cortex — the region responsible for impulse control and rational decision making — being among the last areas to fully mature. This neurobiological reality helps explain why adolescents are particularly vulnerable to substance use disorders and why early intervention is crucial. The neuroadaptations that occur with ongoing substance use not only impair brain function but accelerate the transition from controlled to compulsive use. Perhaps most concerning is that these alterations may persist long after substance use ceases, contributing to relapse vulnerability and periodic cravings even after prolonged periods of abstinence.

It is essential to recognise that while substance use

## Restorative sleep with mind-body techniques to sleep smarter



Sleep is the oldest and most spoken about physiological activity. Hindu scriptures refer to Kumbakarna, the giant who loved his sleep, while the fairy tales refer to Sleeping Beauty. We have been introduced to the concept of sleep all through our lives. There is no "on and off button" to sleep, but it shapes the very basis of our existence and is important for holistic development for a healthy mind, body and emotions. Sleep, being a dynamic process, lets the body and brain undergo essential restoration. Yet in our current fast-paced life, sleep quality and quantity, have taken a backseat. On this World Sleep Day, which falls on March 14, 2025, it is crucial to recognise that sleep should be our priority: not a luxury, but a necessity for optimal health, mental clarity and emotional well-being.

Numerous studies have stressed the adverse effects of poor sleep as an increasing risk to almost all diseases starting from diabetes and hypertension to cancer. Another aspect often overlooked is how bad sleep affects mental health, emotional balance and cognition. Good sleep, especially in the night, is critical to having a good day, with better mental resilience, a calmer mindset and enhanced productivity. How well we sleep determines the quality and productivity of our wakeful time. There is a lot of data available, but the translation to meaningful sleep is where we struggle -- insomnia, restless sleep and chronic fatigue are taking over the world like a pandemic. This is further exacerbated by digital overload, stress, poor nutrition and anxiety. The good news is, mindfulness, something from our ancient traditions backed with scientific evidence, is emerging as a powerful aid in fighting the poor sleep dilemma. It is not rocket science, but a non-judgemental practice that has you remain in the present. One of the most common advocated techniques to improve sleep quality is meditation, giving focused attention to breathing and allowing thoughts to reduce and settle into stillness. Integrating simple techniques like guided imagery, body scan and mantra meditation into your sleep routine can help achieve better sleep outcomes. Scientific evidence shows that mindful meditation is even equivalent to sleeping pills, demonstrating a significant reduction in time to fall asleep and improving sleep quality. Athletes are taught the importance of warm-ups before any workout. Similarly, our brain can also benefit from a warm-up before a good sleep. This can be achieved using a mindfulness technique called progressive muscle relaxation. In this, the individual systematically tenses and relaxes various muscle groups, enhancing body awareness and fostering relaxation. This method not only prepares the body physically to rest but also reduces mental stress, creating a holistic pathway toward improved sleep. Gentle yoga, like the child pose, downward dog pose, forward bending, shavasana and breath control can reduce stress and improve the sleep quality. These activate the parasympathetic

nervous system, signalling the body that it is time to unwind. Simple breathing techniques like the 4-7-8 breathing technique or alternate breathing technique relax the brain, heart and also reduce stress, thus preparing us for a good night's sleep. Sleep, when planned well, is a battle half won. This means planning a mindful bedtime routine which can contribute to maintaining good sleep hygiene. Every small act counts if it is done with deliberation and planning. The ritual ideally starts right from the evening, approximately around 5 p.m., by reducing caffeine intake, having an early dinner, minimising exposure to blue light by restricting digital devices, and mild physical activity or gentle yoga, reflective activities or reading to allow the brain to wind down and transition from daytime stress to nighttime relaxation. Sleep hygiene also includes ensuring your bedroom has minimal lights and sounds and an ideal temperature.

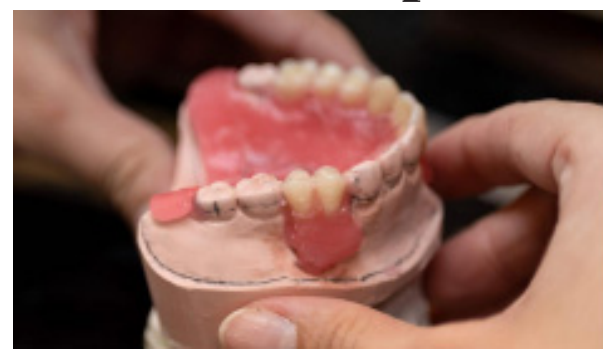
This World Sleep Day, let us commit to prioritising sleep. Recognise that sleep isn't wasted time, but productive time, essential for our mental health, emotional resilience, and physical well-being. Let's embrace it as an essential part of our self-care routine. The path to restful sleep is within reach. By embracing the practice of mindfulness, let us reclaim restful nights, rejuvenated mornings, and vibrant days ahead.

## No insurance coverage, lack of government support are barriers to improving India's dental care: experts

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Oral Health Status Report (2022), dental caries (tooth decay) in permanent teeth is the most common dental health concern globally. Subsequently in India, dental caries and gum disease dominate the oral health landscape. P. D. Madan Kumar, dentist, professor, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Ragas Dental College, Chennai, points out that dental caries affects nearly 60% of the population, while gum disease, or periodontal disease, is even more widespread, impacting about 85%. Particularly concerning is the emergence of cervical caries, also known as root caries, which is increasingly seen among both young children and the elderly. Dental diseases and the need for routine checkups

According to Yashwanth Kumar Venkataraman, senior dentist and orthodontist, Chennai, gum disease is the most commonly encountered problems in Indians. "I think 99% of our population at some age or the other would have undergone some kind of gum problem," he says. Many people mistakenly believe it is limited to occasional bleeding or swelling, but the reality is far more complex. As Dr. Venkataraman explains, "People often visit the dentist only when the damage is irreversible." Gum disease typically starts with gingivitis, an early stage of inflammation, but if left untreated, progresses to periodontitis, where the gums recede, bone levels drop, and teeth eventually become loose or fall out. Additionally, as per a report published by the National Centre for Disease Control, Directorate General of Health Services, around 60 million people are at risk of developing dental fluorosis across several states in India. Dr. Kumar, emphasis that the major cause of fluorosis is due to excessive fluoride in groundwater, that is spread across in many regions, contributing significantly to dental issues. The risks of oral cancer, other diseases

Another concern Dr. Venkataraman notes is the link between broken teeth and oral cancer. "I see at least one case every two months where oral cancer developed simply because of an untreated sharp or broken tooth," he says. Continuous friction from a sharp edge of a tooth against the inner cheeks, gums, or tongue creates repeated trauma, which over time can cause tissue changes and lead to cancer. "It's tragic because these cases are entirely preventable," he says. "A simple fix, like trimming the tooth, capping it, or polishing the edges, could have stopped the cancer from developing." "Small cavities might not cause severe pain, so people ignore them," Dr. Venkataraman points out. "By the time they come to us, the decay has progressed so much that it requires root canals or extractions." Early detection could save both teeth and money, as a simple filling can last for 10-20 years, while a root canal is costly and may still result in tooth loss after a decade. This lack of awareness about preventive care leads to a lack of regular dental check-ups. Dr. Venkataraman also emphasises the need to understand that oral health isn't just about teeth, as it's linked to diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Addressing



the cost concerns, one of the most critical barriers to dental care in India is the absence of dental insurance. While health insurance typically covers surgeries and hospitalisations, dental care is excluded unless linked to an accident. "Not a single dental hospital in India has insurance coverage for routine or preventive dental care," says Dr. Venkataraman. "Even private hospitals offer eye care insurance, but not dental care." This means people have to pay out of pocket for basic procedures like cleanings, fillings, and root canals. The cost deters many from seeking treatment early, allowing minor issues leading to major health concerns. "If dental insurance became part of health schemes, people wouldn't delay treatment," he says. "He stresses that this lack of coverage is a systemic failure, one that pushes dental care into the category of luxury rather than necessity."

S. Srinivas, HOD, dentistry, Prashanth Multi Speciality Hospital, Chennai, points out the importance of community education. "Awareness about simple practices like gargling after meals, drinking water regularly to cleanse plaque, and chewing sugar-free gum to stimulate saliva production can greatly enhance oral hygiene. Also, proper brushing techniques, using the right toothpaste, along-side regular dental check-ups are crucial," he says. Dr. Venkataraman also stresses the need for the government to launch awareness campaigns in regional languages. The WHO's Global Oral Health Action Plan (2023-2030) aims to shift from curative to preventive care, promoting fluoride use, reducing sugar intake, and expanding access to affordable dental care. Likewise, Dr. Kumar, notes that India's national oral health policies, also include initiatives like subsidised fluoride toothpaste and sugar control measures, but it still needs to be implemented nationwide, covering rural parts in India. Other initiatives like the national tobacco control and cancer control programmes according to Dr. Kumar, should strengthen public-private partnerships to improve tertiary care in dentistry. Experts also call for government hospitals with functioning dental clinics in every town to address India's oral health crisis. Despite having thousands of unemployed dentists, the country struggles with streamlining dental care services. Therefore, a collaborative effort between the government, healthcare providers, and the public is necessary to address this issue.

## With drug Empagliflozin going off patent, doctors look forward to price reduction, benefitting diabetic, heart and kidney patients

Earlier this week, German manufacturer Boehringer Ingelheim's patent to manufacture Empagliflozin, a medication to treat type 2 diabetes mellitus, expired in India. Empagliflozin is sold under the brand name Jardiance. "Empagliflozin belongs to the SGLT-2i group of drugs. (Sodium glucose transporter inhibitor) drugs. These drugs have shown multiple benefits, including weight loss, control of diabetes, prevention of heart failures, heart attacks and kidney damage, said V. Mohan, chairman, Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, Chennai. "Now that the drug is going off patent, it will be prescribed more," he said.

Until the year 2000, Indian diabetologists prescribed only three classes of drugs — metformin, sulfonylureas and insulin. But these medications can cause hypoglycaemia. During this time, research to improve the control of diabetes was ongoing, and gliptins and gliptins were the answers. These two new classes of drugs not only controlled blood sugar without causing hypoglycaemia, but also protected the heart and kidneys. Gliptins were introduced in 2006 but were expensive. A few years ago the manufacture of these drugs became universal.

With the end of patent, the price of 25mg tablet of empagliflozin which until till now cost ₹70 per tablet, could cost ₹15 to ₹20. A 10mg tablet will cost ₹10 to ₹15, surmised diabetologist A. Panneerselvam. "As a clinician, if 100 patients needed it, I would prescribe it for only 10 patients, because of the cost factor. Now we will recommend it for all patients who will benefit," he said. The expected fall in price however, does not translate into a panacea for the ailment, he



Doctors are expecting a drastic reduction in the price of the drug, enabling them to prescribe it to more patients

cautioned. People must adhere to diet and exercise advice, he pointed out.

What is the drug Empagliflozin?

Empagliflozin, marketed as Jardiance, is a drug for type 2 diabetes mellitus, manufactured by Boehringer Ingelheim, a pharmaceutical company headquartered in Germany. It is used as an adjunct to diet and exercise, to improve glycaemic control and reduce the risk of cardiovascular death in patients with established cardiovascular disease, as per its website. The patent for the drug expired on March 11, and reports indicate multiple generics are expected to hit the market, at lower prices. The India diabetes care drugs market was estimated to be worth USD 1.7 billion in 2024 and is expected to reach USD 2.01 billion by 2029.

Rajaram Anantharaman, consultant cardiologist with Kauvery Hospital said research on the drug had revealed its protective effects for the heart. Studies showed that the drug helped people at risk for heart disease even if they did

not have diabetes. "In the past 20 years we had no new major heart medication. These SGLT 2 inhibitors prevent glucose absorption in the kidney. The fluid collection in the lung is therefore reduced, and hospital admission with heart failure comes down. Overall deaths also drop," he explained. Cardiologists use four different medications for heart failure. They are beta blockers, ARNI inhibitors, mineralocorticoid receptor antagonists and SGLT2 inhibitors. The other three drugs are already available in generic form, Dr. Rajaram said. "We call them the four pillars of heart failure (treatment). With empagliflozin becoming cheaper, the medications will reduce symptoms, deaths and hospitalisations. "We do have a lot of heart failure patients in India. This drug will help in terms of symptoms and improving quality of life," he added.

Benefits for the kidney: Rajan Ravichandran, senior consultant nephrologist with MIOT, said: "For some unknown reason the drug also protects the kidney. The drug's mechanism reduces protein leak into

urine. When sugar is removed along with water, the heart function will improve. Once the tissue oedema goes away the organ functions better. That applies to kidneys also," he explained. The drug was found useful in kidney disease as it helped in weight loss and prevented water retention. "Experience has shown that the drug can be used in kidney patients with or without heart failure or diabetes," Dr. Rajan said, recalling that he had used the drug soon after it was introduced a decade ago. "When I used the drug when it first came out, on a patient, the achievement was remarkable." He has a word of caution: "People who are thin, those with repeated urinary tract infections and those who have experienced sudden deterioration in kidney function must be careful." A person who takes the medicine and gets diarrhoea will become dehydrated. The drug will draw away water along with sugar. It acts as a diuretic. Persons with food poisoning should avoid the medicine as it can affect the kidneys. Those with gastroenteritis or infections in the genitals should also avoid it, Dr. Rajan said.



# Will the state be India's next big travel destination?



system of the Ahom dynasty, often called the 'Pyramids of India' — to its World Heritage List. It has brought the medieval kingdom's legacy into the global spotlight, leading to the announcement of a new Charaideo Museum. The state, which banks heavily on its wildlife destinations to attract tourists, has also declared Sikhna Jwhlwao, a vital corridor between Manas and Raimona National Parks, as its eighth national park, further cementing its reputation as a biodiversity hotspot. The fact that Assam was ranked No. 4 on The New York Times' '52 Places to Go in 2025' list — for its "incomparable biodiversity", "tea estates and river islands", and its deep-rooted history and indigenous cultures — has also added to the buzz. And the developments don't end there. Luxury tourism is on the rise with The Postcard Hotel's debut in the Durrung Tea Estate and Reliance's partnership announcement with the Oberoi Group to build a seven-star hotel. Is Assam finally on the brink of a long-awaited tourism breakthrough?

Tourist arrivals in Assam have surged dramatically over the past five years, signalling a shift in the state's travel landscape. Domestic footfall, which had plummeted to just 13.5 lakh in 2020-21 due to the pandemic, rebounded sharply to 98.12 lakh in 2022-23 before settling at 70.36 lakh in 2023-24. International arrivals tell a similar story — rising from a mere 347 in 2020-21 to a high of 26,128 last year, according to Assam Tourism. Come summer, when temperatures climb to a toasty 32 degrees Celsius, the state government hopes the numbers will increase even more.

In aid of this, last month, at the Advantage Assam 2.0

Summit held in Guwahati, the state secured ₹4.91 lakh crore in investments, with 270 MoUs signed, focusing on tourism, culture, and hospitality. At a time when overtourism in popular destinations such as Goa and India's many hill stations — and its attendant troubles of environmental degradation, rising real estate costs, and overstretched infrastructure — are driving tourists to seek less congested options, Assam hopes to step up as a tranquil alternative. "Earlier, people only knew about Kaziranga [home to the endangered rhino] and, to a lesser extent, Manas. Now, with Instagram and content creators, even community festivals that were once local events are getting national attention," says Amit Kumar, executive editor of EastMojo, one of the Northeast's leading digital multimedia news platforms. He points to hidden gems such as Goalpara's Jain Caves and Kaipholanso Waterfall in Karbi Anglong, now weekend destinations thanks to social media creators seeking fresh, high-engagement content. "With insurgency at an all-time low [according to Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah this week, "violent incidents in the state decreased by 70%"], previously inaccessible regions are now welcoming more visitors," he adds. The state is also further strengthening its appeal. There are the 'Awesome Assam' campaigns in other Indian states, proactive tourism initiatives, better road and digital connectivity, and the introduction of a tourist police force to ensure visitor safety. The Guwahati airport is undergoing a major expansion, too. Scheduled to open soon, it is increasing its runway capacity and will be able to accommodate 13.1 million passengers annually. Rural tourism is coming up, with

homestays in Majuli, Goalpara and Nagaon offering immersive experiences. "I work with women to help them set up homestays — not just as a business but as a way to introduce authentic Assamese culture to travellers," says Arijit Purkayastha of Koyeli Tours and Travels. Tea tourism, once confined to specific seasons, is also expanding, reinforcing Assam's position as a year-round destination.

There's a shift towards experience-driven tourism as well, exemplified by hospitality brands such as The Postcard. Set within the 140-year-old Durrung Tea Estate, this boutique property marks a turning point for high-end hospitality in a region long overlooked by luxury travellers. "From the very inception of The Postcard, we recognised the immense potential of India's Northeast. Durrung stood out for its accessibility, deep-rooted tea legacy, and seamless connection to Assam's culture and wildlife," says Chopra, adding that instead of a large-scale development that disrupts the place's natural beauty, "we've taken a more thoughtful approach, with just 12 rooms spread across 1,400 acres of pristine tea estate".

"We chose Assam as our first destination in the Northeast for a very strategic reason: India's tea trails begin here. Durrung is also surrounded by five national parks and offers excellent accessibility — just three hours from Guwahati, two from Itanagar, and 15 minutes from Tezpur airport, which is being upgraded," states Chopra, adding that instead of a large-scale development that disrupts the place's natural beauty, "we've taken a more thoughtful approach, with just 12 rooms spread across 1,400 acres of pristine tea estate".

## Student violence in Kerala: The many layers behind the mayhem

When he retires as Principal of a government school in Palakkad district this May, A.K. Anilkumar is likely to carry the memory of an incident that happened towards the end of his 36-year-long career, though he would prefer to forget it. In January 2025, the video of a 17-year-old Plus One student from his school went viral on social media. Furious over the confiscation of his mobile phone, which was not allowed in the school, the boy could be seen making a death threat at his teachers, including Anilkumar. It created such a furore that it prompted the State government to order a probe. "It was the first such experience in my long teaching career. It wasn't the fear of bodily harm that hurt me but the pain of whether all my years in teaching have been rewarded in such a manner," rues Anilkumar.

The incident came close on the heels of another incident in which a man was stabbed to death by two minor boys, aged 14 and 16, for allegedly questioning the public use of drugs at Thekkinkadu Maidan in Thrissur district on the New Year eve. Since then, a spate of violent incidents involving youngsters has struck Kerala, claiming many lives and disrupting several families. A gang war-like clash between two groups of teenage students led to the death of a 15-year-old boy at Thamarassery in Kozhikode. Several instances of group clashes involving school students have gone viral on social media. The violent incidents involving schoolchildren and teenagers have triggered a debate about what has gone wrong with the youth. While some blame it on the drug menace and the alleged influence of violent movies, others have raised deeper concerns that include gaps in parenting, mental health anxieties, and the impact of tech and social media on Gen Z. Arun B. Nair, Professor of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram, feels that the younger generation is facing a social disconnect syndrome, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 lockdowns and the digital revolution.

"Digital revolution appears to have made humans more impulsive and impatient. The revolution, which facilitates instant fulfilment of a desire, whether going for a movie or expressing love, has also eliminated the previously existent time lapse between a desire and gratification. This leaves the brain hardly any time to evolve an alternative plan if that desire goes unfulfilled, resulting in aggressive overreaction with suicidal or homicidal ramifications," Dr. Nair says. Thampy Mathai, Director of Maithri, the Kochi chapter of Befrienders Worldwide, a global organisation working for suicide prevention, points out that "suicidal tendencies are often found to be triggered by relationships, which, in the first place, are built on fleeting interactions on social media. When those relationships go haywire, they are hell-bent on either self-destruction or the destruction of the other partner," he says.

Aseel Muhammed, a social media influencer and a third-year psychology student at Farook College, Kozhikode, accuses the older generation of setting the narrative over the violent conduct of the new generation and the mainstream media running debates pandering to that. "The older generation who runs the system is not willing to admit their follies in parenting and deficiencies in academic curriculum. They are even unwilling for a course correction. They, along with the media, are impatient to wrap up the debate by finding convenient scapegoats such as cinema and solutions like bringing back corporal punishment to straighten up the children. The stressful surroundings in which children are growing, their emotional well-being, and lack of avenues to express themselves are often neglected," he says.

Amruth G. Kumar, Professor of Education, School of Education, Central University of Kerala, attributes the child aggression to a large extent to the authoritarian and violent parenting styles, unresolved sibling rivalry, feuds between family members and with neighbours, and lack of parental supervision. "Violence can be used as a tool to establish dominance and status in peer groups. Students grab this idea from their surroundings. Violence for dominance is rampant around them and if the family environment also suggests that violence is an effective means for gaining control or respect, children tend to emulate it," he says. Award-winning Malayalam filmmaker Blessy says that a few recent movies in Malayalam, which had an overdose of violence and reaped success at the box office, had tried to normalise killings or murdering. "I feel there is an attempt to celebrate such violence on screen knowingly or unknowingly," he says. Muhsin Parari, a popular scriptwriter, questions the very premise of the debate, which he alleges has put the entire Gen Z under the needle of suspicion.

"Have we carried out any scientific study yet on whether there is a spike in violence among the youth? Isn't it irresponsible to make such inferences without concrete data-based evidence?" he wonders. Coming to the defence of cinema, Parari feels that the grip of a social media giant on public opinion was way more dangerous than cinema's influence on the youth. The public falls for algorithm-driven sensationalism and populism, producing absurd paranoia to evade accountability, he says.

Blessy agrees that the blame of instilling aggression and violence in the minds of the youth cannot be placed on cinema alone, as it figures among several other psychological and social issues prevalent in society. "But cinema



is capable of an instant transfer of an emotion to the audience," he says. A few members of the film fraternity, who preferred not to be quoted, share the apprehension that the debate may even lead to backdoor censorship of cinemas, which, according to them, the moralistic elements in society have been craving for long. The first salvo has been fired with the Central Board of Film Certification denying satellite rights to a recent Malayalam flick on the grounds of extreme violence, points out a popular filmmaker, who wished not to be quoted.

P. Vijayan, Additional Director General of Police, Intelligence, who was behind the concepts of social policing and Student Police Cadet programme, feels that attributing the violence amongst youth to a few convenient factors may result in a lopsided conclusion. "The general deterioration in mental health, loss of a values-based system, the rising pleasure-seeking attitude, and the environment around the younger generation also play a role in shaping their responses and behaviour," he says. "Films and drugs may serve as triggers but portraying them as foundational issues will not help. Working in silos will not help but collective societal efforts are needed. Also, scientific studies on behaviour of the youth are needed," he says. Prof. Kumar has called for the elimination of undemocratic spaces in households and society as the first step towards preventing violence among children, besides a collaborative approach from the family, school, and community. "Parents shall provide emotional security and a safe home environment for their children. Also, schools should learn to decode the cues to understand the problems students face at home and in the community, their fears, and concerns. Rather than having a counsellor in every school, every teacher needs to become a psychologist who understands the child," he says. Dr. Nair finds faulty parenting practices as problematic, especially parents' lack of communication during their children's adolescence.

"Adolescents often complain that parents either don't listen to their problems or trivialise them while parents complain of their adolescent children being not obedient. What is needed is not authoritarian parenting, which the previous generations were used to, but authoritative parenting, which is a blend of affection and discipline. Parents need to understand that their children were born in a more rights-based world with greater emphasis on personal rights and space," Dr. Nair says. He also warns that addiction to gadgets and graphically violent online games could serve as a trigger to a generation, which is already subjected to faulty parenting and is impatient and impulsive owing to their over exposure to digital technology. Anilkumar remains worried about the aggressive behaviour of his teenaged student. So are many parents and teachers about the lives of the youth lost to violence on the streets.

## A new discovery sheds light on our long-extinct cousins

Hyderabad: Fragments of face bones from a species of extinct human previously unknown, dating from between 1.2 million and 1.4 million years ago, were discovered in the caves in the Atapuerca Mountains in Spain during archaeological excavations, which were going on for the last 50 years.

The human traces stretched from the Bronze Age to hundreds of thousands of years into the past — before modern humans like us (Homo sapiens) even existed. These are earliest human remains ever found in Western Europe. Back in 2022, during an annual field season, the team unearthed a series of bone fragments from a cave called Sima del Elefante (Pit of the Elephant). The fragments are from the left side of the mid-face of an adult human. In 2008, a human jawbone more than 1.1 million years old had been found at the same site. The new fragments were found around two metres deeper than the jawbone, which suggests they are even older. Since the discovery, the team spent more than two years meticulously studying the remains.

## Is learning Hindi as a third language necessary?

The National Education Policy, 2020, encourages students up to at least Class 5 to learn a regional language in addition to the local language or mother tongue and English. While the Central government asserts that the choice of the additional regional language is left to the States, the NEP's strong pitch for the three-language formula has led to fear, especially in Tamil Nadu, that there is an attempt being made to impose Hindi on non-Hindi speaking States. This week, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin dubbed the NEP a "Hindutva policy" aimed at promoting Hindi, rather than focusing on India's overall development. Is learning Hindi as a third language necessary? Yogendra Yadav and T.M. Krishna discuss the question in a conversation moderated by K.V. Prasad. Edited excerpts:

Should learning a third language be made compulsory?

Yogendra Yadav: Absolutely not. First, because the spirit of federalism and respect for diversity is foundational to the Union of India. So, nothing can be imposed on any State, least of all a language policy. If we have different views on language, they are resolved through consensus, not through imposition. I'm entirely with the DMK and the people of Tamil Nadu on the imposition issue. T.M. Krishna: If I may ask, why learn three languages? To be clear, we are not talking about students learning other languages of their own accord, which is anyway happening. A government that selectively deletes chapters from history textbooks, stating that there is too much of an education burden on students, is not even willing to look at the fact that learning another language is definitely a burden on them. Also, children in primary and middle school don't have an imagination of time or the distant future. So asking them to learn a third language, in the name of future benefit, is basically an imposition. There is also the argument being made that learning more languages creates unity. This is a smokescreen. Forcing a language on someone is not unity. Yogendra Yadav: Once we disentangle the idea of teaching three languages from Central imposition and the compulsion of Hindi, we can discuss the issue dispassionately. The point about the burden of education is something that experts have handled. They have come to the conclusion that if you teach a third language, it only helps your primary and secondary language, so I believe that the three-language formula merits serious consideration on grounds of pedagogy and national unity. As for practicality, I know of schools which do follow this formula. They do not give you the option of all the 22 languages (recognised in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution), but they give you three or four options to choose from. These things can be worked out provided there is a political will and a capacity to teach anything at all.

If compulsory learning of an additional language will be a burden on students, will it not be equally burdensome on schools, since they will need qualified teachers and funds for this purpose?

T.M. Krishna: More than 5,000 schools in Uttar Pradesh are managed by a single teacher. Bihar has a massive teacher shortage. So, even in terms of resources, this formula does not make sense. When resources are few, it makes more sense to look at the ways in which we can teach primary subjects better. And when the mother tongue is the mode of learning and communication in class, and there is English as well, I don't believe that adding another language is necessary.

Is it fair to make adoption of the three-language formula a pre-condition for the release of Central funds for schemes?

Yogendra Yadav: Holding back grants is unconstitutional. This is part of a political assault on the autonomy of the Tamil Nadu government, led by the Governor himself. I understand why not just the DMK, but all parties and the people of Tamil Nadu feel slighted. T.M. Krishna: It is unconstitutional, unethical, and devoid of any basis. Some people say, let the people decide whether they want three languages or two. But people did not decide about the three-language policy; individuals in the Union government made this decision.

Why is there so much resistance to an educational policy that stresses on the need to learn an additional language?

Yogendra Yadav: My suspicion is that the resistance does not come from pedagogical concerns. It emanates from disquiet with double standards. Frankly, the formula was sabotaged by north India. The expectation was that all the southern and eastern States would learn Hindi, while the Hindi speakers found a shortcut for themselves — they used Sanskrit as a shield so that they would not have to learn a new language. So, in effect, the policy meant that everyone would be forced to learn the mother tongue of Hindi speakers, but they would not have to learn anyone else's mother tongue. That legitimate unease has clouded the debate on multilingualism in our country. T.M. Krishna: Multilingualism is not just a political problem; it's pedagogic too. The pedagogical methods have changed. At the primary and middle-school level, activity-based learning and experiential learning should be the focus. There are already two languages at play; that itself is multilingualism. I do not view multilingualism in terms of language alone; it is a way of making people be diverse in feeling and in being. People



learn languages when they forge relationships, for instance. We can't forget that cultural character and emotional connections make people learn a language. Monolingualism is predominant in many Hindi-speaking States, irrespective of the three-language formula. Yogendra Yadav: The problem is the false sense of pride that many people in north India have developed, especially in Hindi-speaking areas, that somehow Hindi is a more privileged language than any other language. Many people in the north use the term 'national language', which is nowhere mentioned in the Constitution. This is what irks the non-Hindi speaker. The Hindi that we know today is a recent and young language, unlike Tamil or Kannada, which are some of the oldest and richest languages in the world.

T.M. Krishna: It is difficult to get data on this, but I would like to know how many schools in north India that profess to teach three languages really do that. Is the policy actually being followed?

Yogendra Yadav: As I said, in most north Indian States, Hindi is taught along with English and Sanskrit. Sanskrit has become a way to bypass the requirement of the third language. So, technically, yes, it is followed. T.M. Krishna: Exactly my point. There is a very important cultural point that needs to be understood about the Tamil people and the Tamil language. Tamil as a language is very distinct from every other Sanskrit-based or Sanskrit-derived language. Fundamentally, it is a very difficult task for a Tamil speaker to even learn Hindi or its cousin languages. In Tamil Nadu, people have learned other languages on their own. The dominant positioning of Sanskrit in the NEP, especially for a Tamil speaker, is intimidating especially when the language is so distinct and different grammatically and structurally. Yogendra Yadav: To position Sanskrit as the sole carrier of our cultural heritage is a serious mistake. Besides, Sanskrit is not being taught to inculcate classical learning, but mainly to sabotage the three-language formula. In effect, Hindi speakers are not learning a new language or script.

What do you propose is the way forward to end the current stand-off?

Yogendra Yadav: Learning three languages, which are distinct from each other, is a good idea to nurture multilingualism that is inherent in our cultures. But this cannot be imposed on anyone. Students should learn a modern Indian language that is distinct from their mother tongue. In the north, it would be "preferably a south Indian language" — exactly what the original formula had mandated and was never implemented. T.M. Krishna: The distinctness is exactly why I feel there should be only two languages. English is already so distinct from whatever language you speak, be it Hindi or Tamil. Therefore, adding another language is not going to help.

## Nothing to accelerate its 'Make in India' initiatives

New Delhi: Leading consumer electronics brand Nothing said on Friday it will continue to add more workforce in India, as it has always believed in working with the local economy to provide the necessary boost. India will play a pivotal role in the global smartphone industry in the years to come, and Nothing is committed to accelerating its 'Make in India' initiatives and boosting domestic production. Nothing's Co-founder Carl Pei has just announced to hiring of two Chiefs of Staff to run the company in the US and in India. "This is all in line with our larger plan of ensuring India's key status in the scheme of things," said Pranay Rao, Head of Marketing, India, Nothing. "We currently have 500 employees in our Chennai factory, of which 95 per cent are women, 800 plus employees in the Noida factory and 80 plus employees on-rolle across functions. "As we scale we will continue to add more workforce," Rao noted. The London-headquartered company just launched the Nothing Phone (3a) series which has been strategically priced keeping Indian consumers in mind. "Starting at Rs 22,999, the Phone (3a) is what we expect will get the general consumers ticking who are looking for good overall performance with a best-in-class camera module," said Rao. On the other hand, if I talk about the Pro version, "we are hoping that those with inclination towards photography will make the pick considering the introduction of the 50 MP Periscope lens with Sony LYTIA 600 sensor which delivers lossless in-sensor zooming at up to 6x and when boosted with AI clarity-enhancing algorithms.

## Trai may restrict Starlink, satcom firms to mobile dark spot regions



Starlink, and Amazon Kuiper. Bharti Enterprises-backed OneWeb and Jio-SES have already received regulatory clearances, whereas Starlink and Kuiper are still awaiting approvals.

Since satellite broadband services would be priced at a premium compared to fiber-based broadband, government subsidies might be required to make them affordable for the masses in rural and remote areas. A potential funding mechanism could be the Digital Bharat Nidhi initiative, which supports rural connectivity projects. According to estimates by Bernstein, Starlink's pricing is substantially higher—10 to 14 times—than the country's leading broadband providers. Based on current rates, a 50-200 Mbps Starlink connection would require an upfront payment of Rs 52,242, followed by a monthly charge of Rs 10,469. Including taxes and levies, the annual cost would amount to Rs 2,15,600. In contrast, fiber broadband plans from Airtel and Jio offering similar speeds cost between Rs 11,000 and Rs 15,000 annually.

According to analysts, Starlink's direct-to-cell technology, which utilises specially designed satellites to function as space-based cell towers, could complement existing telecom networks. Instead of replacing conventional mobile services, this technology may enable Starlink to serve as a roaming partner for Airtel and Jio in remote regions. Since direct-to-cell technology requires access to telecom spectrum for compatibility with existing smartphones and terrestrial networks, any such arrangement would need regulatory approval and structured agreements with telecom operators. Bharti Enterprises chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal on Wednesday said that satellite technology should be integrated into the telecom sector under similar regulatory conditions. At the India Mobile Congress last year, Mittal joined Reliance Industries' chairman, Mukesh Ambani in advocating that satellite operators planning to serve urban consumers should be subject to the same licensing conditions as telecom operators. "If satellite companies want to serve elite urban consumers, they must acquire telecom licences, purchase spectrum, and pay licence fees just like telecom operators," Mittal had stated.

With both Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio forming strategic partnerships with Starlink, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) is now expected to expedite its recommendations on satellite spectrum pricing. Sources said that the regulator will likely recommend that satellite companies initially focus on providing services in mobile dark areas—regions where terrestrial networks are unavailable. This move could alleviate concerns earlier expressed by Jio and Bharti Airtel, among other telecom operators, that global satcom players, such as Starlink and Amazon Kuiper, might capture urban market share without participating in spectrum auctions.

Sources said that Trai's cautious approach is driven by the evolving nature of satellite communications technology. Currently, satellite signals cannot be received directly on standard mobile devices, and satcom services are significantly more expensive than conventional mobile plans. However, technological advancements could change this, therefore Trai wants to retain the discretion to make amends in a changed scenario. By restricting satellite services to areas lacking mobile coverage, Trai would be able to evaluate market dynamics and the role of satcom operators in bridging the digital divide. Given that satellite broadband is primarily intended to reach remote locations where fiber or wireless connectivity is unviable, this phased approach would enable it to test and monitor the effectiveness of satellite networks. Currently, five companies are vying to provide satellite Internet services: Eutelsat OneWeb, Jio-SES,

## Identify areas where US goods can be chosen over China, Govt asks industry

Amid fears of export disruptions due to US reciprocal tariffs set to take effect April 2, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Thursday asked the industry to identify areas where sourcing from China and other countries can be replaced by American goods, executives familiar with the development told. According to a statement from the Ministry, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said the government is working to protect exporters' interests while simultaneously pursuing multiple strategies to ensure the best outcomes for Indian exporters. On reciprocal tariffs, Goyal urged exporters to move beyond a "protectionist mindset" and encouraged them to be bold.

During a meeting with industry representatives Thursday, officials discussed the opportunities and impact of these tariffs. Steel and aluminium exporters informed the government that \$5 billion worth of goods have already been affected by Trump's 25 per cent tariffs on these metals, which took effect this week. "The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is particularly concerned, as exports worth \$5 billion have been hit by Trump's recent tariffs. Total exports under Chapters 72/73/76 amount to \$5 billion. Chapter 73, covering iron and steel products, accounts for \$3 billion and is primarily driven by MSME exporters," said Pankaj Chadha, Chairman of the Engineering Export Promotion Council (EEPC) India. "Since the voyage time to the US is around 60 days, about \$1 billion worth of shipments are currently on the high seas and will be affected by this duty," Chadha said.

Industry representatives also provided input on market access that the government could offer the US in sectors such as textiles, gems and jewellery, carpets, and electronics. While the textile sector expressed willingness for zero-duty access on US products, the gems and jewellery sector urged the government to maintain a minimum 2.5



per cent duty on cut and polished diamonds, down from the current 5 per cent. Meanwhile, several exporters told the government that India is already receiving higher orders as key US suppliers such as China, Mexico, and Canada face steeper tariffs. "Apart from agriculture and few other sectors, these tariffs could work in India's favour, as we produce goods at much lower costs than the US. Even if tariffs are reduced for the US in certain segments, competitiveness is what matters," said a participant at the meeting. Meanwhile, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has warned that increased trade policy uncertainty and the prospect of new tariffs could weigh on trade in the medium term. "The latest reading of 102.8 for the barometer index is above both the quarterly trade volume index and the baseline value of 100. This would normally indicate that merchandise trade is above trend, with accelerating growth. However, rising trade policy uncertainty could have temporarily boosted trade as businesses and consumers front-load imports ahead of potential measures, possibly reducing demand later in the year. As a result, the barometer index should be interpreted with caution," the WTO said in its report released

## Trump 2.0's first sweeping tariff goes live, could increase dumping pressure on India

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday imposed his first across-the-board 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminium, which could increase dumping pressure in the Indian market, already experiencing a surge in steel supply due to Chinese overcapacity. The US tariffs escalation raises concerns over dumping in India as neighboring China would have 45 per cent effective tariffs on its steel and aluminium products in the US giving it higher incentive to look for other markets. Notably, Trump had announced a 20 per cent across-the-board tariff on Chinese imports prior to Wednesday.

Higher tariffs in the US market traditionally lead to dumping elsewhere, particularly in European and Indian markets, where steel demand currently exceeds domestic production capacity. During Trump's first term, the EU has imposed restrictions on steel and aluminium fearing trade diversion, hurting Indian exports. Minister of State in the Ministry of Steel, Bhupathuraju Srinivasa Varma, in response to a parliamentary question on a plan to impose a levy or tariff on imported steel, stated that the government has already introduced a quality control order banning substandard steel.

"Anti-Dumping Duty (ADD) measures on certain steel products—such as seamless tubes, pipes, and hollow profiles of iron, alloy, or non-alloy steel (excluding cast iron and stainless steel) from China PR; electro-galvanised steel from Korea RP, Japan, and Singapore; stainless steel seamless tubes and pipes from China PR; and welded stainless steel pipes and tubes from Vietnam and Thailand—are currently in place," Varma said in response to a question raised by Congress MPs M.K. Vishnu and Kalyan Kale on Tuesday. "Countervailing Duty (CVD) is in place for welded stainless steel pipes and tubes from China and Vietnam. Basic Customs Duty (BCD) has been reduced from 2.5 per cent to nil on ferro-nickel and molybdenum ores and concentrates, which are raw materials for the steel industry," Varma said in the response.

The think tank Global Trade and Research Institute (GTRI) noted that India imports more iron and steel (excluding finished products) and aluminium products from the US than it exports. This means that if India retaliates, the US would face a bigger impact in these sectors. India has a trade deficit in iron and steel, exporting \$494.2 million to the



US while importing \$842 million. In aluminium and aluminium products, trade is nearly balanced, with exports at \$859.8 million and imports slightly higher at \$898.9 million.

"Unlike in June 2019, when India responded to similar US tariffs with higher duties on American goods, this time India appears unwilling to take countermeasures, despite the economic impact. Even though both countries have agreed to negotiate, these tariffs indicate that Trump has little regard for India's concerns. Given this, India should reconsider its engagement in trade negotiations," GTRI stated. US blanket tariffs increase the risk of a global trade slowdown, as the European Union—the world's largest trading bloc—has decided to retaliate against US tariffs. China, the second-largest economy, has already hit back with tariffs targeting US farm products. "In response to new US tariffs affecting more than Euro18 billion of EU exports, the Commission is putting forward a package of new countermeasures on US exports. These will come into force by mid-April, following consultations with Member States and stakeholders," the EU announced. It added that the countermeasures could apply to US goods exports worth up to Euro 26 billion, matching the economic scope of the US tariffs. "In the meantime, the EU remains ready to work with the US administration to find a negotiated solution. The aforementioned measures can be reversed at any time should such a solution be reached," the EU stated. Earlier this year, the World Bank warned that across-the-board US tariffs of 10 per cent could reduce already lacklustre global economic growth of 2.7 per cent in 2025 by 0.3 percentage points if America's trading partners retaliate with tariffs of their own.

## India 'super important' market, to discuss potential partnerships with IndiGo, Air India: Riyadh Air CEO Tony Douglas



India The Riyadh-based full-service airline, Riyadh Air, is Saudi Arabia's second national carrier alongside Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) and is slated to start commercial operations later this year. (Credit: Pixabay) The Riyadh-based full-service airline, Riyadh Air, is Saudi Arabia's second national carrier alongside Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) and is slated to start commercial operations later this year.

Saudi Arabia's ambitious new airline Riyadh Air considers India a "super important" market and will explore potential partnerships with Indian carriers IndiGo and Air India in addition to its plans of operating flights between the two countries as passenger flows between India and Saudi Arabia are growing rapidly. Riyadh Air's Chief Executive Officer Tony Douglas said Wednesday. Saudi Arabia expects India to become its largest source market for tourism by 2030, and Indian nationals are already the biggest non-Saudi resident group in that country, making India a lucrative market for Riyadh Air. Douglas is in New Delhi as part of a Riyadh Air delegation for meetings with India's aviation regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to discuss the requisite permissions and support for launch of the airline's India operations. Douglas is also slated to meet top executives of IndiGo and Air India to discuss possible partnerships.

The Riyadh-based full-service airline, which is Saudi Arabia's second national carrier alongside Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) and is slated to start commercial operations later this year, has already forged partnerships with various global airlines including Delta Air Lines, Singapore Airlines, Turkish Airlines, Virgin Atlantic, China Eastern, Air China, and Egypt Air. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is the force behind Riyadh Air, which aims to fly to

over 100 destinations by 2030. The airline has 39 wide-body Boeing 787 aircraft on order, with an option to expand the order size to 72 jets, in addition to 60 Airbus A321 narrow-body planes. According to Douglas, Riyadh Air currently has two major gaps in its airline partnerships—North-Western Europe and India—and it wants to cover those. Speaking to reporters in Delhi, while Douglas did not elaborate on the likely talks between Riyadh Air and the Indian airlines, he said that the conversations at this early stage would be mostly exploratory, and expressed keenness to forge partnerships in India as long as they are a "win-win" proposition for Riyadh Air as well as the potential partner airline. The Riyadh Air CEO is bullish on the Indian-Saudi Arabia air traffic and sees significant opportunities in both point-to-point traffic between Riyadh—which will serve as the airline's central hub—and India, as well as transfer traffic between India and Western destinations with the Saudi Arabian capital serving as a connecting hub.

But unlike other West Asian hub airports and their flagship airlines that connect flyers from India travelling onwards to destinations in Europe and North America in vast numbers, Riyadh Air feels that point-to-point traffic between India and Saudi Arabia will form the base load of its India operations as travel demand between the two countries themselves is expected to surge in the coming years. Notably, India's aviation establishment wants to see homegrown carriers dominate international passenger traffic from and to India and major Indian airports transform into international hubs competing with major connecting hubs like Dubai and Doha. For this reason, India has been loath to expand the authorised capacity under bilateral air services agreements with various countries in Asia. But Douglas believes Riyadh Air and Saudi Arabia cannot be viewed from that lens. "Riyadh (airport) today has 93 per cent point-to-point (traffic) and there is only 7 per cent in Riyadh which is transfer (traffic)...that isn't going to fundamentally change anytime soon," Douglas said, adding that Riyadh is polar opposite to certain hub airports in neighbouring West Asian countries that have over 80 per cent of traffic as transfer traffic. "We (Saudi Arabia) are not using anywhere near the limit on the existing bilateral (flying rights between India and Saudi Arabia). There is plenty of headroom...At the moment we are not constrained by that," he said. Saudi Arabia targets to have 7.5 million visitors from India annually by 2030. The number of Indians travelling to Saudi Arabia increased by 50 per cent in 2023 to more than 1.5 million.

## Retail inflation drops to 7-month low in Feb, food inflation eases most since May '23; IIP grows by 5% in Jan

Retail inflation eased to a seven-month low of 3.61 per cent in February, compared to 4.26 per cent in the previous month, led by a sharp decline in food inflation, provisional data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) on Wednesday showed. Food inflation, based on the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI), fell to 3.7 per cent, the lowest since May 2023, when it was 3.19 per cent.

Factory output, as measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), also grew by 5 per cent in January, compared to 3.5 per cent in the previous month, led by manufacturing of basic metals, refined petroleum products, and electrical equipment, quick estimates from the NSO showed. According to retail inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the headline inflation rate in rural India dropped to 3.79 per cent in February compared to 4.59 per cent in January. In urban India, too, headline inflation fell to 3.32 per cent from 3.87 per cent. On February 7, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had reduced the repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 6.25 per cent after keeping it unchanged for two years. With further easing of headline inflation in February, comfortably within RBI's band of 4+-2 per cent for medium-term inflation targeting, the central bank could consider another rate cut in the next meeting of its six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in April.

"The RBI started its rate cut cycle in February and today's inflation print gives space for the RBI to deliver another 25 bps rate cut in April. Beyond that, a 25 bps rate cut could be delivered in the June or August policy depending on incoming data. We see cumulative rate cuts of 50-75 bps in this cycle for now," HDFC Bank's Treasury Research Desk said in a note. The inflation rate for the food and beverages segment, which accounts for 45.86 per cent of the total weight of CPI, was registered at 3.84 per cent in February, 4.05 per cent for rural and 3.44 per cent for urban. Food items such as ginger, tomato, and garlic recorded the lowest year-on-year inflation at -35.81, -28.51, and -20.32 per cent respectively. Overall, the inflation rate for vegetables was registered at -1.07 per cent.

"However, we believe that the sequential uptick in vegetables inflation in March 2025 is likely to prevent a further softening in the food and beverages inflation print in the month, after the substantial cooling seen over the past four



months. This would push up the CPI inflation print mildly to -3.9-4.0 per cent in the next month. Overall, the CPI inflation is now expected to average at 3.9% in Q4 FY2025, well below the MPC's projection of 4.4 per cent for that quarter," rating agency ICRA's chief economist Aditi Nayar said. "The problem areas appear to be fruits and vegetable oils. The latter has also been affected by the volatile rupee which has pushed up imported cost," Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Bank of Baroda, said. The inflation rate for fruits was registered at 14.82 per cent and for oils and fats at 16.36 per cent in February. On the industrial output front, manufacturing, which accounts for 77.6 per cent of the weight of the IIP, grew by 5.5 per cent in January against 3.4 per cent in December. Mining output recorded a growth of 4.4 per cent against 2.7 per cent in December, whereas electricity output was up 2.4 per cent against 6.2 per cent in the preceding month. Growth in output of capital goods—an indicator of investment—declined slightly to 7.8 per cent from 10.4 per cent in December. The growth rate was high compared to 3.2 per cent in January 2024. "At the usage-based level, the two lead indicating sectors in IIP—basic goods and intermediate goods—grew more than 5 per cent after a gap of five months. This along with capital goods, infrastructure goods and intermediate goods growing at more than 7 per cent in January 2025 are pointers towards nascent stage of broad-based recovery. However, this should not be treated as full industrial recovery as we have witnessed in the past most of the times, these recoveries fizzle out quickly," Devendra Kumar Pant, chief economist at India Ratings, said.

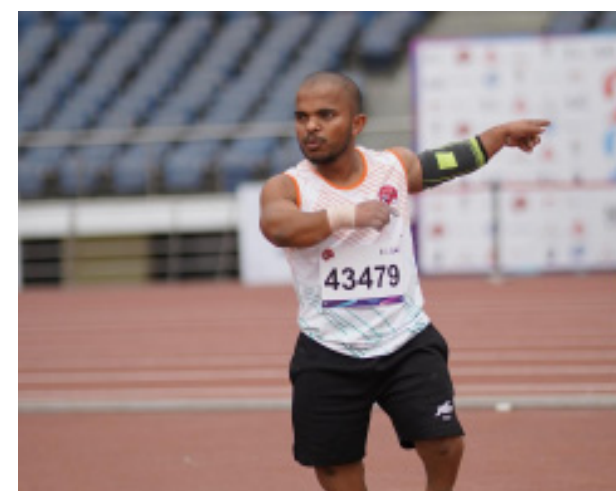
## Musk's Tesla wants to sell these two models in India

New Delhi: Elon Musk-led Tesla Inc has initiated the process for the certification and homologation of two of its electric cars in India, which is an essential requirement for all vehicles before they can be sold in the country. Tesla India Motor & Energy Pvt Ltd, the local unit of Musk's firm, has submitted two new applications for homologation of the Model Y and Model 3 cars in India, according to industry sources. Homologation is the process of certifying that a vehicle is roadworthy and meets the norms laid out for all vehicles manufactured in India or imported into the country. The tests ensure that the vehicle matches the requirements of the Indian market in terms of emission and safety and roadworthiness in accordance with the Central Motor Vehicle Rules. The company had earlier submitted seven applications for homologation in India earlier which were meant for test cars. An eighth application was approved recently. The move comes amid talks with the US and India on a free trade agreement under which tariffs are expected to be lowered by both countries to enhance bilateral trade. Musk has been keen to enter India as he is looking for a foothold in the world's third-largest car market as an alternative to China after the communist country came under strict US sanctions. While the Indian government is keen that Musk set up a plant in India to make Tesla for the local market, the billionaire wants to export the car to the country without any immediate manufacturing plans. Electric car



sales in India recorded a 20 per cent jump to 99,165 units in 2024, from 82,688 units in 2023. Tata Motors and JSW MG Motors are currently the market leaders. In addition, the luxury electric vehicle market also posted an increase in sales during the year, with 2,809 EVs sold by BMW, Mercedes Benz India, Volvo Cars India, Audi and Porsche in 2024, up from 2,633 units in 2023. According to the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA), the electric passenger vehicle retail sales in India grew by nearly 20 per cent. The EV market is expected to continue growing, with industry forecasts predicting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 43 per cent. The electric two-wheeler segment recorded significant growth, with 1.13 million units sold in 2024, up from 8,60,000 units in 2023.

## Para Athletics GP not a one-off, we are in India for the long haul: WPA



GNS News Agency, March 15

The lack of sufficient top-level international participation in India's maiden Para Athletics Grand Prix event was not a concern for the world body with officials confident of things getting better in the coming years. World Para Athletics (WPA) Competitions Head Martin Chorley, while admitting it was a much smaller event both in scale and participation compared to other WPA competitions, insisted that the timing was as much a reason as uncertainty about the organisation. "Considering that the contract was signed only last December, it's fantastic to organise and deliver the event to the levels expected and it gives me confidence moving forward for the World Championships in September," Chorley said on the sidelines of the final day's action at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Thursday. "More importantly, it is a chance for many of the youngsters, both Indian and from overseas, to experience what international competition is all about, get used to bigger events and get guaranteed classification opportunities. At the same time, this is only the beginning. It's a multi-year contract for the entire paralympic cycle of four years, a pathway to bigger

events, not a one-time thing where India will just host this and the World Championships and be done with major events," he explained. Asked about the way forward in terms of improving the organisation, Chorley was optimistic. "The local organising committee has been very willing to make changes and address the issues in the run-up to the Worlds, take suggestions and improve. Already the teams and athletes here this time have been pleasantly surprised with the facilities and many will be coming in September. Once they see what facilities India has, and with the proposed track and the stadium refurbishments, I am sure they will come in much higher numbers in 2026," he hoped. Meanwhile, Vanessa Low did not disappoint, the Australian taking top spot in the women's Long Jump (T38, T44, T61) category despite a below par 4.96m jump in the three-competitor event. Vanessa, who set a new world record of 5.45m in her category at the Paris Paralympics, had only three legal jumps but they were enough to beat the other two participants – Zhana Fekolina of Russia, participating here as a neutral para athlete like many others since the suspension of Russia and Belarus from the Olympic programme, and India's Bhavani Munniyandi.

Among the men, Para Asian Games medallist Ravi Rongali finished third in the shot put (F40-41) category with a best throw of 9.89m, behind Russians Denis Gnezdilov (11.36m) and Aiaal Sivtsev (12.10m). Veteran Ankur Dhama too finished third in an all-Indian race in the men's 5000m (T11-12) won by Sharath Shankarappa while Saurabh Sharma clinched silver. Important results (Indians unless stated): Men: 5000m (T11-12): 1. Sharath Shankarappa (16:19.13), 2. Saurabh Sharma (16:58.08), 3. Ankur Dhama (18:58.08); shot put (F35-37): 1. Kudratillokhon Marufkhujayev (Uzb, 14.89m), 2. Alan Kokoiy (NPA, 14.68m), 3. Albert Khinchagov (NPA, 12.46m); shot put (F40-41): 1. Denis Gnezdilov (NPA, 11.36m), 2. Aiaal Sivtsev (12.10m), 3. Ravi Rongali (9.89m); Women: 200m (T35-38): 1. Rhiannon Clarke (Aus, 26.76s), 2. Margarita Goncharova (NPA, 27s), 3. Preeti Pal (31.50s); long Jump (T38, T44, T61): 1. Vanessa Low (Aus, 4.96m), 2. Zhana Fekolina (NPA, 4.13m), 3. Bhavani Munniyandi (3.51m).

## I faced discrimination, my career was destroyed: former Pakistan cricketer Danish Kaneria

GNS News Agency, March 15

Former Pakistani cricketer Danish Kaneria has alleged that he faced huge discrimination in Pakistan and his career was destroyed. Kaneria, who is a Hindu by faith, said he did not get equal values and respect in Pakistan. He had participated in the Congressional Briefing on 'Plight of minorities in Pakistan' Speaking to ANI, on the sidelines of the event, Kaneria said, "Today, we all gathered here and expressed how we all faced discrimination and raised our voices. I also faced discrimination in Pakistan and my career was destroyed. I did not get equal values, respect in Pakistan... "All the people who came here spoke against discrimination, on how Pakistan treated them. So, the main aim was to spread awareness among everyone, especially US, on how people suffer and the problems that exist in Pakistan and take action against it." Kaneria had played 61 Tests for Pakistan and is only the second Hindu to feature in the Pakistani cricket team after Anil Dalpat. Congressman demands action

Indian-American U.S. Congressman Shri Thanedar also attended the event and urged the U.S. to condemn 'human rights violations' in Pakistan against Hindu minorities and demand quick actions against Pakistan to ensure that these atrocities stop. Speaking to ANI, Thanedar said that he is attending the conference to support the Hindus amid their struggle against atrocities in Pakistan. He urged the U.S. State Department to impose sanctions against Pakistan until these atrocities stop. Meanwhile, former jour-



nalist for the Wall Street Journal, Asra Nomani, recalled how her colleague and friend, Daniel Pearl, who she said was "kidnapped, beheaded and cut into pieces" in 2002. She said that minority people in Pakistan are not allowed the rights and freedoms of equal citizens. "I saw on the streets of Karachi, Pakistan, the tragic impact of the sectarianism that is laying claim to too many minorities. My friend and colleague, Daniel Pearl, was the journalist who was kidnapped and then beheaded and cut into pieces in 2002," Nomani said. "In the decades since and until today, we have a crisis in which too many minority people in the nation of Pakistan are not allowed the rights and freedoms of being equal citizens. And so I stood here today to testify to my witness and to my own journalism seeing this injustice that's happening and that needs to be corrected," she added.

## 'He's an incredible bowler': Nathan McSweeney opens up about facing Jasprit Bumrah's 'chaos' in BGT



GNS News Agency, March 15

Nathan McSweeney Jasprit Bumrah India vs Australia Australia's Nathan McSweeney plays a shot during the day three of the second cricket test match between Australia and India at the Adelaide Oval in Adelaide, Australia. Australian batter Nathan McSweeney recently opened up about facing Jasprit Bumrah in the Border Gavaskar Trophy, saying that it was "chaos" facing the Indian bowler. He also said that before facing Bumrah, he didn't think it would be a big deal but found out the hard way

what the Indian pacer brings to the table. "Yeah, tough work is probably an understatement. He's an incredible bowler. I was probably naive going into it, never faced him before and (thinking) he'll be fine. But he's an incredible bowler that has a great skill but just relentless ability to pitch the ball in the area where you don't want as a batter," McSweeney said. "So, it was a very tough challenge but also gave me a hope that no one kind of had great success against him and everyone was trying to tackle him at the same time and no one was playing him with ease, which gave me a little bit of confidence," he added. McSweeney, originally a middle-order batsman, was included in the Test squad after Australia were unable to zero-in on a reliable partner to Usman Khawaja. In the six innings he batted, McSweeney had scores of: 10, 0, 39, 10\*, 9 & 4 as Bumrah repeatedly tested Australia's batting line-up. The Australian had a tough time against Bumrah in the series scoring just 72 runs in 3 matches and getting sent back by the Indian pacer 4 times out of 5. He would then be dropped from the Australian side for the last 2 Test matches. Meanwhile, Bumrah was the Player of the Series against Australia in the BGT, bagging 32 wickets across five Tests. However, he sustained a back injury in the series and could not bowl in the second innings of the 5th and final test.

## 'We have had one of the best IPL cycles in the last three seasons': Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson

GNS News Agency, March 15

Sanju Samson Rajasthan Royals Sanju Samson (c) of Rajasthan Royals celebrate win with players during match 9 of the Indian Premier League season 17 (IPL 2024) between Rajasthan Royals and Delhi Capitals held at the Rajaw Mansingh Stadium, Jaipur on the 28th March 2024. Rajasthan Royals skipper Sanju Samson recently discussed in length about captaining the franchise, spilling the details on the last three Indian Premier League cycles with RR finishing 3rd last season, 5th in 2023 and second in 2022. In an interaction with JioHotstar, Samson talks in details about how despite having to let go of players who have been an integral part of the team in the past, RR have managed to rope in some interesting new players in their place. "We've had one of the best IPL cycles in the last three seasons, with the highest winning percentage and some of the best players Rajasthan Royals has ever had. We had all the superstars from around the world, and it felt like a family. But then, as per IPL rules, you have to let go of that

family and build a new one again. So that's where we are now. We've brought in some interesting players, from a 13-year-old to a 35-year-old, creating a mix of youth and experience in the squad," Samson said. "Personally, I'm very excited about this challenge—meeting new people, building relationships, and understanding the personalities behind the performances. That's where the real fun lies. The work begins long before the IPL, during the 7-10 days of preparation. I try to spend as much time as possible outside my room, talking to my players and coaches, building that camaraderie. And then, we embark on the journey together as a unit. That's where the joy of being a captain comes in," he added. In the IPL auction last year, Rajasthan managed to secure Jofra Archer, Maheesh Theekshana and Wanindu Hasaranga while also adding the likes of Akash Madhwal and Kumar Kartikeya Singh into their ranks. They also brought in 13-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi who scored 104 off 62 balls in India Under-19's Youth Test against Australia in Chennai last year.

## Stuart Broad says England should not make Ben Stokes ODI captain – 'Would be lost for words'



GNS News Agency, March 15

While England are in search of a new ODI captain, former seamer Stuart Broad has cautioned against taking a backward step in appointing Test skipper Ben Stokes as leader of the 50-over side. After England's harrowing league-stage Champions Trophy exit and Jos Buttler's resignation from captaincy, ECB managing director Rob Key had suggested Stokes among the potential candidates for the ODI captaincy. "Ben Stokes is one of the best captains I've ever seen. So it would be stupid not to look at him. It's just the knock-on effect of what that means," Key told reporters last week. "I think nothing's off the table really. You look at every single option and you think, right, what is the best thing to do? How is that going to impact on other things? While Stokes had previously hinted at returning for the Champi-

ons Trophy, a hamstring tear during last year's New Zealand tour doused the plans. Stokes has not featured in a 50-over match since the 2023 ODI World Cup, a tournament for which he had returned from retirement. As Stokes' name is making the rounds for a potential ODI leadership role, his former teammate Broad cautioned against the move.

"Going for Stokes would be a move of desperation. I would be lost for words if England appointed him," Broad told Daily Mail. "Firstly, there is the schedule. He's not going to the Indian Premier League to try to prioritise the Test match team and get his physicality right for the big events on the horizon. How many overs has Stokes bowled successfully in the last three years while battling his knee injuries? Not many. "And you're going to add another eight to 10 overs in a 50-over format onto his workload? The mathematics of that make no sense. As someone who played 121 one-day internationals I can honestly say I found the 50-over format more tiring than Test match cricket. Why? Because it's such high intensity. "You bowl 10 overs in three and a half hours, during which you are running from fielding positions, sprinting after balls all the time, non stop. Ben Stokes is the best captain we've got, but it doesn't mean he's the right person to do the 50-over job," Broad remarked. Stokes will have a busy year ahead of him on the Test front with two heavyweight five-match Test series loaded against India at home and the Ashes in Australia later this year. England will next play a three-match ODI series against West Indies at the end of May.

## 'He's unique in the way he bats and scores runs': Denesh Ramdin heaps praise on Rishabh Pant

GNS News Agency, March 15

Former West Indies skipper Denesh Ramdin lauded India wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant and called him unique due to his flamboyant batting style. "Obviously, Rishabh Pant is one—he's unique in the way he bats and scores runs. There's a young guy from Australia, Josh Inglis—he did well in the Champions Trophy. There are many young keepers coming through," Ramdin said. The 40-year-old also said that over the years, the role of the wicketkeepers have evolved since Adam Gilchrist came into prominence.



"Back in the day, wicketkeepers were primarily just keepers, but now cricket has evolved. The role of the keeper-batsman has expanded, starting with players like Adam Gilchrist, who opened the batting and excelled. Others like Quinton de Kock, Brendon McCullum, and of course, the exceptional Mahendra Singh Dhoni, have been fantastic in shaping the modern wicketkeeper's role." Ramdin also shared his thoughts on how Sunil Narine might perform in the upcoming IPL season. "Obviously, Narine was the MVP last year, and his team won the championship. He'll have a lot of confidence going into the new season, but every season brings a new atmosphere and new challenges, with different players in the team. I have no doubt that Sunil, though a man of few words, expresses himself fully through his performances with both the ball and the bat," he

said. Pant, who was in the India side which won the Champions Trophy recently but did not get a match, will next be seen in action leading the Lucknow Super Giants in the upcoming Indian Premier League season

Pant was bagged by Lucknow Super Giants for Rs 27 crores after a ferocious bidding war at the IPL auction. While his former franchise Delhi Capitals opted for an Right To Match bid at Rs 20.75 crore, LSG raised the bidding by a staggering margin to Rs 27 crore, make him the most expensive signing at the auctions history ahead of Shreyas Iyer, who received a Rs 26.75 crore bid from Punjab Kings.

## 'Sometimes he needs to trust his teammates': Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim on Bruno Fernandes

GNS News Agency, March 15

Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim lauded captain Bruno Fernandes after the Portuguese midfielder netted a hat-trick against Real Sociedad to propel the club to the last 8 of the Europa League. However, Amorim also said that Bruno needed to trust his teammates a little bit more on the field. "When we need it, (Fernandes) is always there," Amorim said. "He can bring the ball forward. He can score goals. He is a perfect captain for our team and we need to help him win titles." "We know that sometimes he is frustrated. We know he wants to win so badly and when things are not going well, he is changing position and going after the ball. Sometimes he needs to trust his teammates," he added.



United, who drew the first leg against Sociedad last week, went a goal down after 10 minutes when Matthijs de Ligt fouled Mikel Oyarzabal and Oyarzabal converted from the spot. However, the hosts levelled six minutes later with a penalty scored by Fernandes after Igor Zubeldia had fouled Rasmus Hojlund. Another spot-kick gave United the lead five minutes after the interval after Ariz Elustondo was ad-

judged to have fouled Patrick Dorgu and Fernandes again made no mistake. Sociedad were reduced to 10 men when Jon Aramburu fouled Joshua Zirkzee and Fernandes completed his hat-trick before Diogo Dalot wrapped up a 5-2 aggregate victory for the English side in added time. United will next meet Olympique Lyonnais in the Europa League on April 11 for the first leg of the quarterfinal with the second leg set for April 18. In the Premier League, they'll face Leicester City on March 17.

## All England wipe-out: Axelsen, Antonsen, Kodai, Kunlavut, Lee Zii Jia all gone before Quarterfinals

GNS News Agency, March 15

While the opening round saw the exit of Viktor Axelsen, going down to Lin Chun Yi, Lin himself perished late on Thursday in straight sets 21-10, 21-18 to Kenta Nishimoto. Jonathan Christie, defending champ and third seed was ousted by Lakshya Sen, but the notable exit on Thursday were Kunlavut Vitidsarn (seeded 5) going down to Alex Lanier, 22-20, 21-15 and second seed Anders Antonsen losing to Wang Tzu Wei 21-10, 21-13. Lee Zii Jia, seeded 7th, had lost in round of 32 to Ng Ka Long Angus, while Kodai Naraoka didn't survive the first round bloodbath either, losing to compatriot Yushi Tanaka. Top seed Shi Yuqi might not feel too safe with the unpredictable bounce bunny Loh Kean Yew lining up, and Li Shifeng is thoroughly beatable by Sen, with the Indian winning 7, losing 4. Sen has won the last two at French Open and Thomas Cup. Chinese 6th seeds He-Ren and Taiwanese Lee-Yang (8th seeds and not to be confused with Olympic champions) survived. Massive reshuffles have happened in pairings, and two Korean and two Indonesian quarterfinalists are mismatched, also meaning all are unseeded. Half-Daddies Hendra Setiawan is now coach and saw the immediate impact as Sabar Karyaman Gutama and Moh Reza Pahlevi Isfahani mentored by him made Last 8, first beating Olympic silver medallists Liang-Wang and then getting rid of second Chinese Huang-Liu.



Korean world champion Seo Seung-jae jaw-droppingly made his first quarter, after first win at All England in five years, and with Kim Wan Ho is slotted to take on Chinese Xie-Zeng. Another China vs Korean final sees the absolute box-office pair of Kang Min Hyun with Ki Dong Ju (snazzi-

est hairdo) take on Ke-Ren at the Minoru Yoneyama court. The second Indonesian pair sees former All-England champ Bagas Maulana team up with Leo Camando against Taiwanese Lee-Yang. Women's singles have no such earthquakes, though it sees the maximum famous names missing – from injured defending champion Carolina Marin to retired Tai Tzu Ying. Seven of eight seeds are in quarters, the sole unseeded being Tokyo Olympics champ Chen Yufei who plays An Se Young. The other battles: intergenerational Tomoka Miyazaki vs struggling Akane Yamaguchi, Tunjung vs Han Yue and Chochuwong vs Wang Zhi Yi which means 3 Chinese in Last 8. There's also 3 Chinese and 3 Japanese in women's doubles, with 6 of 8 seeds going through. Treasa-Gayatri and Tan-Thinaah are the underdogs challenging seeds 3 and 2 respectively. Mixed doubles have interesting names lining up. The Mairs couple from England, Jenny and Gregory. And the Indonesian disruptors – Rehan Kusharjanto who mans the net, and the super tall Gloria Widjaja who attacks incessantly from the back.

# Aamir Khan turns 60: Co-stars and directors reflect on Aamir's lasting impact on the film industry



actors, but Aamir Khan is on another level. His contribution to cinema is unparalleled. For him, the film is first, it's not Aamir Khan. He is a person who sacrifices himself completely to the director, no questions asked. He is like an ocean, it depends on you how deep you want to dive to take out the pearls. His talent is unlimited," he said. Mehra continued, "It's only time that teaches us the wisdom of life. I am sure 100 years from today when we look back, we will understand the real meaning of Aamir Khan's contribution to global cinema."

His 3 Idiots and Laal Singh Chadha co-star Mona Singh agrees that there is no one like him in the industry and his involvement in the shoot of a film speaks for itself. "Whenever I have worked with him, I have seen him multitasking. He knows where the lighting is, he knows what the director's lens is. He is always 200% involved," she shared. Aamir Khan is known for doing fewer films in a year, as compared to his contemporaries in the film industry. "Less is more. When you dilute yourself in numbers, you might stay in the eyes of the audience, but you are going to dilute your quality," reflected Mehra. Aamir's Ghajini was the first film to cross the Rs. 100 crore mark at the box office, making him the first actor to reach that benchmark. The filmmaker added, "Aamir has always gone for quality not the number of films, and then profits came with that. It's not about the number of films you have done, it's about the impact, the work you have done."

Filmmaker Nitesh Tiwari and Aamir Khan collaborated on the 2019 sports drama Dangaal, which went on to become the highest-grossing Indian film. "The numbers were never his or my focus. That's the best thing about Aamir sir. He hasn't created the Rs 100 crore impact by thinking about box office numbers, that happened because he cares about his movies. His passion reflected in Dangaal's quality and its success," expressed Tiwari. Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India (2001) created history by becoming a box

office hit, earning critical acclaim, and being nominated for an Academy Award. The film continues to find takers even after two decades. Talking about its impact, veteran actor Dalip Tahil, who has worked with Aamir in numerous films, said, "Aamir has had a colossal impact on the film industry. He did it with his own film Lagaan – produced and even acted in it. He brought a wave of change in cinema. He made a serious topic such fun to watch. Everyone was thinking why he was making a cricket film in Gujarat, with people in dhotis. It was a master film." "Lagaan was a breakthrough film, it changed a lot in the film industry. There were cliches earlier ki yeh vo nahi dikha sakte. He eliminated those beautifully. He showed everyone that content matters at the end," Tahil added. Tiwari agreed with his view and said, "It crossed the money barrier, everyone shut up after that. Sab baatein honi band hogyi uske baad. Lagaan made its name in history, the impact is beyond imagination if you think about it." Aamir Khan continues to inspire the newer generation of actors and has set an example for his peers as well. "The best thing about him as an actor is that he works towards the total product, he doesn't want him to shine, he wants to work to shine. He is an easy person to work with. He inspires every actor. His entire family is like that, they are a very basic Bombay family."

There's so much to learn from him. When it comes to his craft, he taught me so much on the set, it was my first film," expressed actor Shruti Seth, who has worked with him in Fanaa (2006). To which, Mona Singh added, "When you are that good an actor and when you want to keep challenging yourself and respect the craft, that is the time you take to select the roles you want to do. That is the reason why we see so little of him, only one film every 2-3 years. Kudos to him for choosing such good projects, inspiring us, and setting an example for the youth as well. He has always broken barriers and chosen the tough path. He inspires all of us with his choices."

## Aamir Khan confirms starting work on dream project Mahabharat

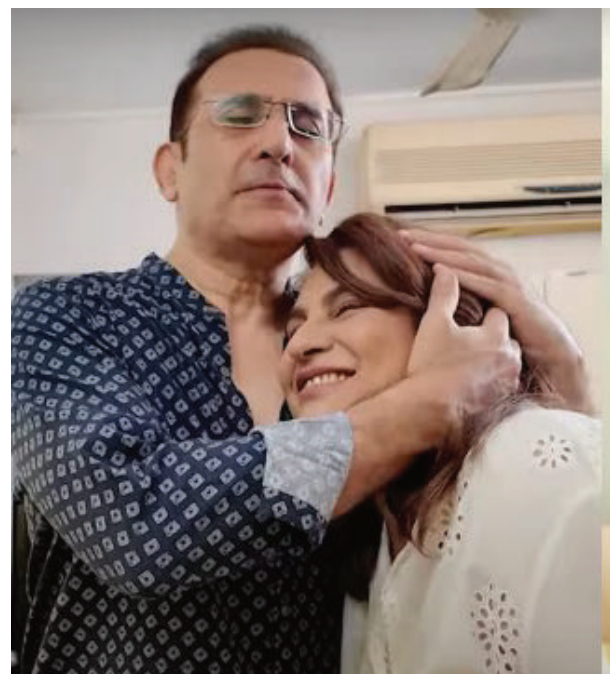
Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan, who turned 60 on March 13, 2025 (Thursday), confirmed that he has begun work on his dream project, Mahabharata. The actor opened up about the film during a press conference in Mumbai. "We have begun working on it (Mahabharata). We have put together a team, and the writing work has started," he said. When asked if his fans can expect the project to be a reality within the next five years, Aamir said, "Let's see how the first phase goes. I will take a call on it after that."

According to many news reports making the rounds, Salman Khan and Aamir have discussed the possibility of a sequel to Andaz Apna Apna, their 1994 comedy film written and directed by Rajkumar Santoshi. "I would love to see Andaz Apna Apna 2 happen. We have told Santoshi to write the script. Salman and I would want to do it." The actor also spoke about his meeting with Shah Rukh Khan and Salman at his residence. "We had a lovely time catching up." Will there be a collaboration between the three big Khans of Bollywood? "If we get the right script, then why not."



The veteran star, who produced Kiran Rao's Laapata Ladies— India's official entry to Oscars — is awaiting the release of Sitare Zameen Par. "It's a sequel to Taare Zameen Par but it has a different central character compared to the original. That film was emotional and made you cry. This will make you laugh. Sitare Zameen Par has a great thought. It's futuristic in its own way."

## Archana Puran Singh sends husband Parmeet Sethi into food coma, but her mom isn't impressed: 'Even a 10-year-old...'



Archana Puran Singh grew up in Dehradun, and before she moved to Mumbai, she spent every Holi eating 'malpuas' (a doughy deep fried bread lathered in sugar syrup) made by her mother. In her latest YouTube vlog, Archana revisited that chapter of her childhood as she attempted to make some 'malpuas' at her Mumbai home. Archana has often spoken about not being much of a cook, but this time, she insisted that the recipe was so simple that even she can't make excuses. Archana recently injured her right hand, so she had to cook with her left hand. At one point, her husband Parmeet Sethi and her sons, Ayushmaan and Aaryaman, all got together in the kitchen to watch her cook. Parmeet joked that Archana was fulfilling a ritual meant for new Punjabi brides three decades after her marriage.

By the time she was done making one 'malpua', Archana was extremely impressed with her cooking and called her family members to take a bite. "I can taste my childhood in my mouth," she said. When Parmeet tasted the 'malpua', he was so blown away that he instantly hugged her. "You still have time, start cooking in the house. Our life will get better," he said. When Archana made her mother taste the 'malpua', she liked it but said that this recipe was so simple that even a 10-year-old could follow it.

Archana Puran Singh has been appearing on Kapil Sharma's show for many years now. The show is currently on a break before it returns for its third season on Netflix. Before this, Archana was with the same team for a similar

show on Sony. Previously, Archana revealed in an interview with Siddharth Kannan that she was getting paid half of other actors on the show. "Paise ye log double le jate hai. Toh sahi hai na mehnat karo bhai. (These people earn double the money, so they must do the hard work). I'm getting paid to laugh, and they're getting paid for their hard work. Some get paid for their beauty, others for their talent, but I get paid for all of that," she said.

## Hema Malini photographed reading 'script for reality show' Indian Idol, viewers share reactions

How much reality is there in our reality shows? This has been a hot topic among contestants, judges, and audiences. Recently, a Reddit user shared a photo of Hema Malini seemingly reading a detailed script for an entire episode of Indian Idol. The guest judge was photographed with the script in her hands, leading fans to wonder how much of Indian Idol is pre-determined.

The post includes screenshots from the recent Holi special episode. Hema Malini was dressed in a white saree in the episode, which aired earlier this week. In the clip, she is smiling and speaking to someone off camera, with the script in her hand. A part of the script read, "Hema ji to describe Mathura style Holi: Priyaganshu ise lath maar Holi kehte hain..." (the script goes on to describe the origins of Lath Maar Holi)

The clip was shared with the caption, "Reality shows. Stumbled across this frame of Hema Malini holding the detailed script of last week's episode of Indian Idol. This is for those who still believe these shows are 'real' ???"

A user reacted by saying, "It has been scripted since forever!!! Most of the reality shows...even Big Boss to an extent," while another added, "So do you think how are reality shows made lol. Nothing new in it. They need to plan everything. Those extra elements and how to make an hour."

Another person reacted by saying, "This is so embarrassing tbh." A comment also read, "I'd once got to work at the backstage of a dance reality show, and everything even Bharti Singh's comic timing & punchlines and (at the time Govinda had come to the show as a judge) so even him speaking of how he liked the song a lot and the contestant wanting Govinda to dance on it, everything was scripted." Hema Malini was part of the Holi episode and joined the other judges panel of Shreya Ghoshal, Vishal Dadlani and Badshah.

## Farah Khan recalls running around Abhishek Bachchan's vanity van just to get him on Happy New Year set: 'He was a naughty kid'



Farah Khan hasn't directed a film since 2014's Happy New Year, but now, she has a career as a YouTuber and is quite regular with her vlogs. In her latest vlog, Farah met Abhishek Bachchan, who is currently promoting his film Be Happy, with the film's director Remo D'souza. Farah recalled her memories of shooting Happy New Year with Abhishek.

Farah described Abhishek as a "naughty kid" who would make her run around on the set. He even made her run around his vanity van. As she chased him, he played hide and seek with her. Farah recalled this memory and asked Remo if he had ever had the same experience with him. Abhishek jumped in and reminded Farah that he did this only "because you needed the exercise."

Abhishek also recalled a state dinner with the King of Morocco, where they had to follow certain protocol. They could not sit or start eating before the King, but Farah did not adhere to any of that. She even fell asleep on the table. Abhishek recalled that actors like Alan Rickman were also present at the dinner, and that he and Boman Irani tried to wake Farah up by throwing bread at her face.

Abhishek Bachchan's latest release, Be Happy, is currently streaming on Prime Video. The actor only had one release in 2024, Shoojit Sircar's I Want to Talk, which tanked at the box office. Before that, he was seen in R Balki's Ghoomeo, but that too did not impress his fans. He will next be seen in Housefull 5 with Akshay Kumar, Bobby Deol, Riteish Deshmukh, among many others. His last theatrical hit was Housefull 3 in 2016. He was seen in Anurag Kashyap's 2018 film Manmarziyaan with Vicky Kaushal and Taapsee Pannu and while the film did get some appreciation, it wasn't a hit at the box office. Apart from these theatrical releases, Abhishek has appeared in many streaming projects in the last few years – Dasvi, The Big Bull, Bob Biswas, Ludo and his web series Breathe: Into the Shadows.

## Dino Morea knows his worth, recalls feeling insecure when offers dried up: 'I am not at the top'



Actor Dino Morea entered the Hindi film industry just before the turn of the century. After making his mark in the fashion sphere, the supermodel turned to acting with the Raj Kaushal film Pyaar Main Kabhi Kabhi (1999). His next film, Raaz (2002), made him an overnight sensation, and he received high praise for his role. His career slowed down in the 2010s, which prompted him to diversify.

In a recent interview with Pinkvilla, the actor shared the insecurities that he faced after the offers started drying up. He also shared the importance of staying in touch with reality. "When you are sitting at your home and waiting for the offers, sometimes you do bad roles just to remain relevant for the audience," said the actor.

Dino stated that when he entered the industry, playing the lead role was much more important compared to now. He said that in the current scenario, there are no 'lead roles, just characters,' and that the industry has evolved. "Now you can't go around thinking you're the lead role or you deserve one; you need to face reality," the actor added that he understands his current worth in the industry, and that is the reason why he is doing smaller roles more often.

He said that his parents taught him to be kind and humble to everyone, because you never know when you might need their help. When asked whether he ever needed monetary help from his parents during his low phase, Dino replied that he was the one taking care of his parents. "I did not want to choose the wrong movies, but in order to do that you need to earn money from somewhere else, like a business," he said. The actor has made a return since the 2020s, working in Telugu and Malayalam films like Agent and Bandra, and was also seen in the web series The Empire. He was last seen in Mere Husband Ki Biwi alongside Bhumi Pednekar and Arjun Kapoor.