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## Women journalists arrested in Hyderabad released from prison on Tuesday

Hyderabad: The two women journalists — Revathi Pogadadanda, Managing Director, Pulse Digital News Network; and Thanvi Yadav, an employee were released from Special Prison for Women at Chanchalguda on Tuesday. The court granted the journalists on bail on Monday and they were asked to furnish two sureties of Rs 25,000 each. The two women journalists were arrested by the Telangana Police earlier this month for allegedly circulating content against Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. They were remanded to judicial custody. A case was registered against them following a complaint made by a Congress leader alleging that they were wilfully spreading false propaganda against Chief Minister, A Revanth Reddy.

## Case registered against BRS MLA

Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): The LB Nagar police have filed an SC/ST atrocity case against BRS MLA Sudheer Reddy for making insulting comments about Hastinapuram Corporator Banothu Sujatha Nayak. Congress leaders have been protesting for two consecutive days, calling for strict action against the BRS MLA. During their demonstrations, they burned an effigy of Sudheer Reddy and submitted complaints to the local police station, as well as to the DCP and ACP. The Congress leaders are insisting that an SC/ST case be formally recorded and that Sudheer Reddy be arrested without delay. As calls for his arrest intensified, the police eventually proceeded with filing a case against the BRS MLA. (NSS)



## Telangana caste census will be a milestone in history: CM Revanth

Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy stated that the caste survey carried out by the Congress government in Telangana will be a milestone in history. During a meeting with leaders from the Backward Communities, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy was thanked for implementing two laws that allocate a 42 percent quota for these communities in education, employment, and political representation. In his remarks on the occasion,

the Chief Minister highlighted that the State government has conducted the caste survey transparently and has diligently ensured that the policy document remains accurate at all times. "It is an honour for us to be part of this initiative. The government has not only created a document, but has also passed legislation for the BC quota. Two separate bills have been approved by the Legislative Assembly to secure political reservations and ensure a quota in edu-

cation and jobs. Our aim is to establish the state as a model for the entire country," he expressed. The Chief Minister has urged the BC community to avoid being misled by individuals seeking political gain by exploiting caste issues.

"If the BCs criticise the caste survey, they will only end up suffering the consequences. Interfering with the process from the outset will result in injustice for the BCs. They need to take initiative in advocating for their



rights, and I will support all BC communities in this effort," Revanth Reddy said. (NSS)

## Telangana Assembly passes SC Categorisation Bill

Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): The Telangana Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Bill, 2025, was approved unanimously by the Assembly on Tuesday. Health Minister Damodar Raja Rajanarsimha presented the Bill, receiving unanimous backing from Members across all political parties. During the discussion, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy highlighted the sacrifices made by many individuals in the prolonged fight for SC Categorisation. "This marks a significant milestone that offers a lasting resolution to a longstanding issue. My government is committed to the advancement of Dalits and will continue to support them," Revanth Reddy said. He mentioned that immediately after the Supreme Court's ruling, the State government enacted a resolution in the Legislative Assembly sup-



porting the SC Categorisation. Subsequently, a ministerial sub-committee was established, and a one-man commission was formed following consultations with legal experts. We promptly accepted the findings of the one-man commission, he said. "The Commission received 8,681 proposals from the public, and its report was approved without revisions. We categorised 59 sub-castes into three groups and allocated a 15 percent reservation for them," said Revanth Reddy. During the event, the Chief Minister pledged that the government would provide support to the families of individuals who lost their lives during the fight for SC Categorisation. He assured that these families would be prioritized for assistance in the Indiramma Houses and Rajiv Yuva Vikasam programs. The Chief Minister said once the 2026 census is completed, SC reservations will be increased according to those calculations. (NSS)

## Maha Kumbh strengthened India's spirit of unity, says PM Modi

GNS News Agency, March 18

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday (March 18, 2025) said the Maha Kumbh strengthened the spirit of unity in the country and gave a befitting response to those who questioned India's capability to organise such a large congregation. Making a statement in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Modi said the success of the Maha Kumbh was a result of the contributions of countless people from the government and society. "We witnessed the enthusiasm and excitement of the Mahakumbh in India for about one and a half months. The way millions of devotees came together with devotion, rising above the concerns of convenience and inconvenience, is our greatest strength," Mr. Modi said. "The nectar of unity is the most sacred offering of the Mahakumbh," he said.

"The Maha Kumbh was such an event in which people from every region and every corner of the country came together. People put aside their egos and gathered in Prayagraj with the feeling of 'we' and not 'I'," he added. Mr. Modi said the huge display of unity at the Maha Kumbh was India's strength, particularly at a time when the world was in disarray. "The spirit of unity is so strong that it shatters any attempts to break it," he said. "We have always said that unity in diversity is the speciality of India and we have experienced its grand form in Prayagraj Maha Kumbh. It is our responsibility to continue enriching this feature of unity in diversity," the Prime Minister



said. He said people speaking different languages and dialects chanting 'Har Har Gange' on the banks of the Sangam gave a glimpse of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', which increased the feeling of unity. The Prime Minister likened the Maha Kumbh to important milestones in the struggle for independence when the self-esteem of the country was awakened. "Be it the war of independence in 1857, the time of Bhagat Singh's martyrdom, the call of Chalo Delhi given by Netaji Subhas babu or the Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi, India achieved independence by seeking inspiration from such milestones in time," Mr. Modi said. "Prayagraj Mahakumbh is a similar significant milestone that reflects the spirit of an awakened nation," he said.

## Govt is running away from answering our questions: Harish Rao



Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): Former minister and Siddipet MLA Harish Rao today raised concerns that the Congress government was running away from answering questions in the Assembly. He stated that the government canceled today's session because it could not respond to crucial questions. Harish Rao mentioned that they expressed their objections to the assembly Speaker and the assembly Secretary regarding this matter. He chatted with the media in the Assembly lobby. Speaking on the occasion, he said that This government was mortgaging HUDA lands to raise .20,000 crores in loans and added that they were preparing to raise 10,000 crores from TGILC, .10,000 crores from HMWSSB, and .10,000 crores by mortgaging GHMC properties. "In total, they will borrow 750,000 crores. They are trying to stifle our voices without answering our questions. The Assembly Speaker must protect the rights of the members," Harish Rao while stating that they are not posting the GOs on the website. Speaking further, Rao said that due to Andhra water theft, crops were withering in Mahabubnagar and Nalgonda district. "When asked whether the Rythu Bharosa scheme was provided during the rainy season, they have no answer. The Farmers suffered losses by selling their crops at lower prices due to the failure to set up procurement centers on time. During our tenure, we procured 70 lakh metric tons of paddy. The current government has only procured 52 lakh metric tons of paddy. We will also procure 54 lakh metric tons of fine paddy, but they have only procured 24 lakh metric tons," he said. Harish Rao strongly criticized the state government for its complete failure in the paddy procurement. He claimed that the Yasangi season's Rythu Bharosa benefit had not been provided so far to the farmers. "Crops are withering under the Devadula project in Warangal district. The Crops are withering in Mallanna Sagar and Dubakka areas. When we raised questions about these issues, they canceled today's question-and-answer session. Farmers are waiting for the crop loan waiver.

## Modi pens letter to "India's illustrious daughter" Sunita Williams ahead of her 'homecoming'

GNS News Agency, March 18

New Delhi: As the NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore begin their journey back home from space, after staying 'stranded' at the International Space Station (ISS) for about nine months, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written a letter to one of India's most illustrious daughters hoping for her safe return. The letter, penned by PM Modi to Sunita Williams on March 1, 2025, was shared by Minister of Minister in PMO Dr Jitendra Singh on his social media handle. As the whole world waits, with abated breath, for the safe return of Sunita Williams, this is how PM Sh @narendramodi expressed his concern for this daughter of India.

"As the whole world waits, with abated breath, for the safe return of Sunita Williams, this is how PM Modi expressed his concern for



this daughter of India," he wrote while sharing the Prime Minister's letter to Sunita Williams. In the heartfelt letter, PM Modi writes, "Even though you are thousands of miles away, you continue to remain close to our hearts. The people of India are praying for your good health and success in your mission." He also states that during his previous visits to the United States and meetings with successive US Presidents, he inquired about her well-being. PM Modi also recalled his meet-

ing with the leading astronaut during his previous visit to the US in 2016. He also extended an invite to Sunita Williams to visit India after returning from space. "After your return, we are looking forward to seeing you in India. It will be a pleasure for India to host one of its most illustrious daughters," he wrote. He further wrote, "1.4 billion Indians have always taken great pride in your achievements. Recent developments have yet again showed your inspirational fortitude and perseverance."

## Sridhar Babu urges political parties to extend support for Musi Rejuvenation project



Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): Minister for IT and Industries Duddilla Sridhar Babu has urged all political parties to extend their cooperation for the Musi Rejuvenation project and urged them to actively participate in the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR). Speaking in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, the Minister said many individuals have attempted to obstruct the Musi Rejuvenation project through various means and however, the State government remains steadfast in its commitment to this initiative. He alleged that the BRS party created a lot of hype around the Musi Rejuvenation project, but failed to take any concrete action. "It is unfair to magnify minor shortcomings. Every issue should not be politicised, as this could harm our brand image. Our primary objective is to provide Hyderabad residents

with a high standard of living by ensuring clean air and water. Revitalizing the Musi River is central to this mission," he said. "The Musi River development project has been carefully planned to be implemented in a phased manner. There are no delays in the rejuvenation work and the DPR is currently being finalised. In the first phase, we will initiate the "Gandhi Sarovar Project" near Babu Ghat. The master plan for this is in progress," Sridhar Babu said. The Minister further stated that the Musi Rejuvenation project will be executed in a well-structured and strategic manner. After receiving reports from the consultancy, experts will be engaged in planning the second and third phases. Sridhar Babu said. "The project will be carried out with careful consideration for the underprivileged residents in the Musi riverbanks. The gov-

ernment will ensure the people are not displaced without proper alternatives and it will work to dispel any misconceptions," he said.

He reminded that the State government has requested the Union government to allocate funds for the Musi rejuvenation, similar to projects like "Namami Gange" and the Sabarmati Riverfront, but not a single rupee has been allocated so far. "We have also sought funds to divert 2.5 TMC of water from the Godavari River to the Musi, but the central government has yet to respond. The Union government exhibits discrimination in fund allocation towards states ruled by non-BJP parties. Telangana, being an integral part of this country, deserves fair treatment," he said. Sridhar Babu also urged the Union Ministers representing Telangana to take the initiative and secure central funding for the Musi rejuvenation project. Those who lose their homes due to the Musi rejuvenation will be provided with double-bedroom houses. So far, 309 families have already been rehabilitated, and we are ready to show records if the opposition challenges us," he said. The Minister further stated that the State government will extend financial support to those who lose their livelihoods due to the project and compensation will be provided in accordance with the law, ensuring that no one faces injustice. (NSS)

## Congress Government fulfills decades-long demand for SC categorization: Uttam

Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy termed the passage of the SC (Rationalisation of Reservations) Bill 2025 in the Telangana Legislative Assembly on Tuesday as a landmark decision. Uttam Kumar Reddy, who chaired the Cabinet Sub-Committee on implementing the Supreme Court's verdict on SC categorisation, credited the Congress government under Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for fulfilling a demand that had remained unaddressed in both united Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for decades. "This is a historic day. For years, SC categorisation had the support of all sections, but no structured solution was ever achieved. Under the Congress government, we have fulfilled this long-pending demand with complete sincerity," he said,

addressing the Assembly. During the debate, Minister Damodar Raja Rajanarsimha tabled the bill on behalf of the Chief Minister. Uttam Kumar Reddy highlighted that the Congress party had always supported SC categorisation, with Rahul Gandhi making a clear promise on the issue during his election campaigns. He recalled that while previous governments had passed unanimous resolutions, no concrete action was taken until now. As an MLA, I have witnessed every Assembly session since 1999 where SC categorisation was discussed. However, it is the Congress government that has now turned it into reality," he added. The Congress government formulated a well-structured plan for SC categorisation, studying models from states like Punjab, Haryana, and Tamil Nadu, where similar classifications exist. The government appointed a one-man commission, which conducted an exhaustive study on SC sub-castes, gathering data on population, literacy, employment, admissions in higher education, recruitment trends, financial assistance, and political representation. The Shamim Akhtar Committee played a key role in examining 59 SC sub-castes in Telangana, analysing inter-se backwardness to ensure fair categorisation. The commission initially submitted a preliminary report, after which several SC sub-castes raised concerns. In response, the government extended the commission's tenure by a month to comprehensively address all grievances before finalising the categorisation process. "We undertook this categorisation process with utmost transparency. The concerns of all SC groups were considered, and their voices were heard," Uttam Kumar Reddy stated.

# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Leakages in India's water security

India is standing at the edge of a water crisis. While the government has allocated Rs 99,503 crore to the Ministry of Jal Shakti for 2025-26, the real concern is whether this money will translate into tangible improvements in water security. The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), launched in 2019 to provide tap water to all rural households by 2024, has failed to meet its target. As of January 2025, only 80% of rural households have been covered, forcing an extension of the scheme until 2028. Water scarcity is not just a rural issue — it affects urban India as well. Several cities, including Bengaluru, Chennai and Delhi, face periodic water shortages, exacerbated by poor planning, over-extraction of groundwater and increasing climate variability. The question remains: Will more money alone solve India's water crisis, or do we need a fundamental shift in water governance and management? While States like Goa, Gujarat, Haryana and Telangana have achieved full functional tap water coverage under JJM, others lag behind. In Jharkhand, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Kerala, less than 60% of rural households have received tap water connections. The disparities do not end with coverage — water quality and consistency remain major challenges. According to the 2022 Functionality Assessment Report, only 62% of households with tap connections receive adequate, regular and potable water. In States like Kerala, Tripura and Sikkim, 40% of households receive water that fails to meet safety standards. This means that even where infrastructure exists, the water itself may be unsafe to drink. The issue is compounded by weak water quality monitoring.

## Nobero, India's Most Loved Fashion Brand, goes offline starting in Hyderabad



Hyderabad: Nobero, a travel focused Fashion brand, from TMRW House of Brands, achieved a significant milestone today. The brand launched their first ever Exclusive Brand Outlet (EBO) at Hyderabad's Sarath City Mall. Nobero's first EBO is all set to be a hub for showcasing the best of the brand's collection while providing the perfect stage for the exciting new product & category launches that are planned. With this launch, Nobero starts their ambitious offline journey of having 25 stores across the country by the end of FY26.

Says Prashanth Aluru, CEO & Co-founder, TMRW House of Brands, "As part of Nobero's hypergrowth scale-up and being the leading category creator in the segment of Fashion, offering consumers the convenience of shopping both online and offline is the next phase of the brand's journey. This is in-line with our strategy at TMRW to ensure all brands have a cross-channel presence, with seamless shopping experience across D2C, EBOs and leading E-Commerce marketplaces. Nobero, is our newest addition to this club, with a distinctive retail experience at a leading mall in Hyderabad! At a rapid pace, we have added close to 30 stores over the last few quarters showing the power of omni-channel presence for all brands within the TMRW portfolio. We will continue the aggressive expansion momentum to scale to 125++ stores by the end of FY26".

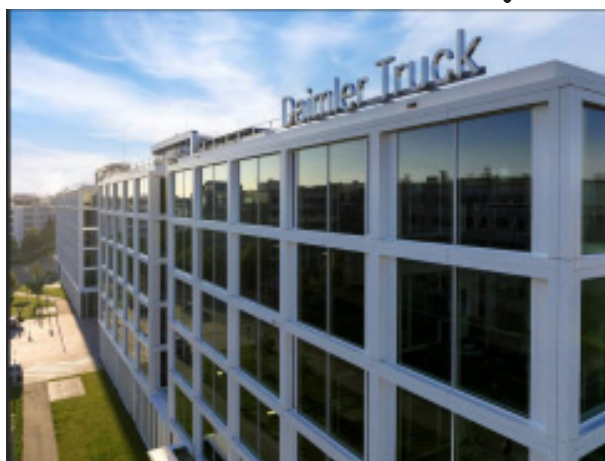
Known for their distinctive design language and functional comfort, Nobero has established a niche in the fashion forward athleisure category amongst a loyal millennial consumer base, across India. And the consumer conversations clearly indicate their preference about being mindful with life inside & outside of their professional realm. Picking up on this insight, the brand has been reinventing itself continuously. The result is stylish, yet comfortable. Says Karthik Venkat, Co-founder, Nobero, "We are beyond excited to bring Nobero a step closer to our customers through this EBO. Having our customers experience the products & spirit of the brand at close quarters and in-person interactions are our key inspirations behind going offline. With this EBO we aim at achieving 3 major goals: Bring our 'traveler brand' story alive through a thoughtfully crafted design language

## BJLP Maheshwar Reddy arrested by police

Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): City Police have arrested BJP Legislative Party Leader Alleti Maheshwar Reddy today. He was taken into custody while he was trying to support the BJYM activists who attempted to storm the assembly. Along with Maheshwar Reddy, BJYM activists were also arrested by the police. Subsequently, Maheshwar Reddy was shifted to the Boyinapalli police station.

BJYM activists attempted to storm the assembly in protest against the state government's auction of 400 acres of the Hyderabad Central University (HCU) land. Maheshwar Reddy expressed his support for them and joined the protest. As a result, several BJYM activists were arrested along with Maheshwar Reddy. They were then brought to the assembly in a police vehicle. Maheshwar Reddy protested against being taken in the police vehicle without being allowed to exit.

## Daimler Truck registers solid 2024 Group Financial Results Sales of battery-electric trucks increase by 17%



Hyderabad: Daimler Truck, the parent company of Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV), has released its financial Group results for 2024 with yet another year of strong performance, despite weak demand in key markets. The Group registered a significant increase in sales of its battery-electric vehicles compared to the previous year.

The Group revenue slightly decreased by 3% to \*54.1 billion (down from \*55.9 billion in 2023) and an adjusted EBIT decrease by 15% to \*4,667 million (\*5,489 million in 2023). However, the Free Cash Flow of the Industrial Business increased by 12% to \*3,152 million last year, from \*2,811 million in 2023. The Group's Trucks Asia segment also witnessed a 22% decrease to 125,234 units in 2024, from 161,171 units in 2023. The segment's revenue also declined by 13% to \*6,111 million from \*7,060 million in

2023. Incoming orders also witnessed a slight 2% decrease in 2024 due to the declining demand in EU30 region and the weaker market demand in India, Indonesia and other Asian markets. However, the Group's order intake in Q4 2024 driven by positive development in Mercedes-Benz Trucks and Trucks Asia increased significantly by 15%, compared to Q4 2023. Daimler Truck registered 460,409 commercial vehicles sales worldwide in 2024, a 12% decrease from its sales in 2023 which stood at 526,053 units. However, sales of its battery-electric vehicles increased by a significant 17% with 4,035 units of sales. Daimler Truck projects unit sales to range between 460,000 and 480,000 units this year (2024: 460,409 units). Additional information and documents (Annual Report incl. a detailed disclosure of the five reporting segments of Daimler Truck for the 2024 financial year are available online in the Investor Relations section of Daimler Truck: Annual Results Conference / Daimler Truck

Daimler Truck at a glance

Daimler Truck Holding AG ("Daimler Truck") is one of the world's largest commercial vehicle manufacturers, with over 40 main locations and more than 100,000 employees around the globe. The founders of Daimler Truck have invented the modern transportation industry with their trucks and buses a good 125 years ago. Unchanged to this day, the company's aspirations are dedicated to one purpose: Daimler Truck works for all who keep the world moving. Its customers enable people to be mobile and get goods to their destinations reliably, on time, and safely. Daimler Truck provides the technologies, products, and services for them to do so. This also applies to the transformation to CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral driving. The company is striving to make sustainable transport a success, with profound technological knowledge and a clear view of its customers' needs.

## New Zealand Prime Minister Strengthens Academic Ties with India, Announces Scholarships at IIT Delhi

Hyderabad: The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Hon. Christopher Luxon, chaired an education focused event at IIT Delhi, reaffirming the deep academic ties between New Zealand and India. The event celebrated the New Zealand Centre, a flagship initiative that brings together all New Zealand universities in collaboration with IIT Delhi.

A key highlight of the event was the announcement of a NZ\$260,000 partial scholarship package under the New Zealand Excellence Awards (NZE) 2025, reinforcing New Zealand's commitment to supporting Indian students. Additionally, a unique Virtual Internship Programme was announced, providing 30 IIT Delhi students with the opportunity to intern remotely with New Zealand companies, offering cross-border industry experience and insights into New Zealand's innovative work culture.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon stated, "New Zealand and India share a reciprocal education partnership, built on academic excellence and cultural exchange. As we navigate an increasingly interconnected world, we remain committed to equipping students with the skills needed to succeed on the global stage. Through the initiatives announced today we are fostering deeper connections and empowering future leaders and innovators." Prof. Rangan Banerjee, Director of IIT Delhi, highlighted the significance of the partnership, saying, "At IIT Delhi, we are dedicated to fostering global academic collaborations that drive innovation and research excellence. Our partnership with New Zealand through the New Zealand



Centre has facilitated knowledge exchange, joint research, and student mobility. By focusing on areas like sustainability and disaster resilience, we are addressing real-world challenges with a shared commitment to innovation. The introduction of the Virtual Internship Programme and expanded research collaborations will further enhance global exposure and industry experience for our students."

## The surpunch couple's helping hand geaved to the poor people



Damera, March 18, Indian Chronicle: "Hanumakonda district collector congratulated Ramjan, a young farmer who was cultivating Dragon Fruit. The collector visited the dragon fruit garden, which was cultivated by farmer Ramjan in Sitarampuram village in Damera Mandal. Asked about the way the dragon fruit cultivated. Star Fruits, Figure, Panasa,

White Afi, Apple, Apple Bear and Jama have been asked about the cultivation of fruit orchards. Congratulations on the way marketing. Ramjan told the collector that ? 2.98 lakhs were sanctioned under EGS scheme for farming deshavali hens. The collector suggested that... young farmers should adopt special crops and improve employment opportunities by taking Ramjan as an ideal. The collector then spoke to the authorities. The collector has instructed the relevant authorities to ensure that the water shortage of water is not arising in the zone. DRDO Mena Srinu, Additional DRDO Srinivasa Rao, District Plantation Manager Srinivas Reddy, Mandala Special Officer Balaraju, MPDO Kalpana, Tahsildar Jyotivarakshmi Devi and MPO KVRangachari, PR AE Sammi Reddy, APO Sarada, APM Jhansi, ideal farmer MD Ramjan, GP secretaries and EGS staff participated.

## Congress party adopted dual stand on BC community issues : MLC Kavitha

Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): BRS party MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha today launched a scathing attack on the Congress party, accusing it of maintaining a dual stance on Backward Classes (BC) issues and betraying BC communities historically and in the present. Addressing the media here in the city, Kavitha stated that the Congress party had never genuinely worked for the BC welfare. She pointed out that the Kaka Kalelkar Commission report was dismissed by former PM Jawaharlal Nehru, while the Mandal Commission, aimed at uplifting BCs, was shelved for a decade during former PM Indira Gandhi's tenure and only implemented in 1990 by V.P. Singh. Kavitha also highlighted how former Rajiv Gandhi opposed the BC reservations in Parliament by claiming they would divide the country.

Referring to the Kamalapur Declaration and Congress's promise of 42% reservation for the BCs, Kavitha demanded to know as to how the figure was calculated. She questioned as to why it took nine months after coming to power for the Congress government to set up a Commission and why its report had not been made public. She warned that the absence of a caste and village-wise population data and category-wise quotas in the BC Reservation Bill could lead to legal complications, putting the law at risk of being struck down by courts. Kavitha demanded the immediate allocation of ?20,000 crore annually under a BC Sub-Plan, criticizing the Congress government for allocating only ?9,200 crore last year. She underscored the stark economic disparity, noting that BCs make up 50% of the population but own only 15% of national wealth. She emphasized that true development could have been achieved if BC reservations were implemented alongside SC/ST quotas. "India could have outpaced the US if the

Congress hadn't denied BCs their due for decades," she said while noting that Despite a 27% reservation in UPSC, BCs have never crossed 8% of selected candidates and 23% of BC-reserved posts remain vacant. She expressed concern over the neglect of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, particularly in education. She recalled the special quota introduced by KCR for these communities in residential schools, a provision she claims the Congress has failed to implement.

The BRS Leader also highlighted the lack of constitutional safeguards for BCs and women, which continues to marginalize them socially, economically, and politically. Kavitha called on BC communities to rise and fight for their rightful share, demanding economic independence, political representation, and self-respect. She said, "The Congress has historically sidelined BCs. It's time we hold them accountable for their hypocrisy." (NSS)

## MLA Danam Nagender slams officials

Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): The rebel MLA of the opposition BRS party Danam Nagender today expressed his anger over the officials' behavior in the state Assembly. He claimed that the officials were not responding to their pleas and applications. He made sensational comments by saying that the foundation stone for a substation at an Eidgah ground in his assembly constituency was laid without his knowledge and added that he demolished the structure in his regular style as an expression of his protest. He stated that when he asked for land for an MLA camp office in a nearby area, the officials were unable to provide it. "How-

## OPPO India builds on the popularity of F Series with the highly-anticipated F29 Series

OPPO set to launch the OPPO F29 series on 20th March 2025



Hyderabad: OPPO India will launch the OPPO F29 series, the Durable Champion, on 20th March 2025. The F29 Series highlights OPPO's strategic commitment to delivering durability, reliability, and performance-driven smartphones tailored to meet the demands of India's gig economy, which encompasses millions of drivers, delivery partners, shopkeepers, and business owners.

OPPO F series - A front runner in sub-INR 25K category Each new edition of the F Series builds upon the durability and quality standards set by its predecessor, as demonstrated by the impressive 30% sales growth of the OPPO F27 Pro+ in the first six months following its launch, compared to the F25 Pro. The series continues to see strong demand across regions like Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Nagpur. Additionally, OPPO's focus on durability and product quality has earned it the distinction of being the most preferred brand for water and dust resistance, according to Counterpoint Research.

Tested In India, Made for India

Manufactured at OPPO India's Greater Noida facility, the F29 series—as lightweight as 180g and just 7.55mm slim—is not only made in India but also tested by SGS (Société Générale de Surveillance) in India for IP66, IP68 and IP69 ratings that certify it against the highest levels of dust and water ingress. Its IP66 rating certifies it against powerful water jets; ideal for users who work in wet conditions, from vendors to construction workers. The IP68 rating endorses it for submersion in 1.5 metres of water for 30 minutes; this means it is built to survive accidental drops in water-filled potholes and kitchen sinks, while its IP69 rating implies it can endure high-pressure, high-temperature water jets up to 80°C, making it perfect for those working in industrial settings or extremely humid weather conditions.

Damage-proof 360° Armour Body\*

OPPO F29 series It boasts a 360° Armour Body to endure unexpected drops and impacts. The Sponge Bionic Cushioning on the OPPO F29 series absorbs impact to minimise damage from falls while its elevated battery cover and side frame add an extra layer of protection. At the same time, the new Raised Corner Design Cover on the OPPO F29 series protects all four corners against damage.

The Lens Protection Ring on the smartphone, which is crafted out of strengthened glass, sits higher than the camera lens to prevent scratches on it. Also, the smartphone's internal frame, which protects its motherboard, has been upgraded to aerospace-grade aluminium alloy; this increases structural integrity by 10% over its predecessor.

## Future City will serve as pillar of Telangana's economy: Sridhar Babu



Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): Minister for IT and Industries has informed that the Future City will serve as a pillar of Telangana's economy, supporting the State's overall growth by fostering industrial development and creating employment opportunities. Speaking in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, Sridhar Babu stated that Chandigarh is currently recognised as a well-planned city in India and the State government is committed to transforming Hyderabad into a similar model city in the coming years. "The Rapid urbanisation is taking place around Shamshabad Airport and the Outer Ring Road (ORR). In this context, the government has devised plans to develop a special city named 'Future City' with world-class infrastructure and sustainable growth as its core objective," he said. "The Future City will span an area of 770 square kilometers, covering 56 revenue villages across seven mandals in the Rangareddy district. To ensure systematic and well-equipped development, a dedicated governing body, the 'Future City Development Authority,' has been established. The Future City will be developed into a global-standard metropolis, on par with Hyderabad, Secunderabad, and Cyberabad," Sridhar Babu said. (NSS)

ever, they laid the foundation stone for the substation at the Eidgah ground without my knowledge. Therefore, I had no other option but to demolish it," He said and mentioned that students were not being given eggs in the mid-day meals scheme and added that they should provide eggs to those children. He said that it was not enough for the officers to just note that serious action should be taken on the issues within his constituency. He commented that he was a senior MLA compared to others. He accused that they were being blackmailed on social media with the help of small publications regarding the construction of new buildings and added that the GHMC officials were trembling before them.

# Ramesh reddy the brand of hospitality industry most effected and most reserved intelligent principal of regency collage of hotel management & culenery academy

Ind. banjarahills. Mar 18. "Perri Ramesh kumar reddy no name to introducing in the hospitality industry entire twin cities in to the Hyderabad he is the principal of regency collage of hotel management& culnurnery academy at the centre of banjarahills thousands of his students settled in the hospitality industry all over world, dedication& commitment brand ambassado of Ramesh reddy regency College of hotel management conducting so many programs on the particular occasionHappy women's day! Celebrating strength, wellness, and empowerment! ??? Team Regency, in association with Care Hospitals, marked #WomensDay with a special 'Accelerate Action' event—featuring a yoga session, medical health checkups, cervical cancer awareness talk, gynecologist consultation, ECG, and general checkups. ???????"A day dedicated to women's health and well-being because empowered women lead stronger communities!"The collector congratulates the young farmer who cultivates 'Dragon Fruit' .."Damera, March 18, Indian Chronicle: ""Hanumakonda district collector congratulated Ramjan, a young farmer who was cultivating Dragon Fruit. The collector visited the dragon fruit garden, which was cultivated by farmer Ramjan in Sitarampuram village in Damera Mandal. Asked about the way the dragon fruit cultivated. Star Fruits, Figure, Panasa, White Afi, Apple, Apple Bear and Jama have been asked about the cultivation of fruit orchards. Congratulations on the way marketing. Ramjan told the collector that ? 2.98 lakhs were sanctioned under EGS scheme for farming deshavali hens. The collector suggested that.. young farmers should adopt special crops and improve employment opportunities by taking Ramjan as an ideal. The collector then spoke to the authorities. The collector has instructed the relevant authorities to ensure that the water shortage of water is not arising in the zone. DRDO Mena Srinu, Additional DRDO Srinivasa Rao, District Plantation Manager Srinivas Reddy, Mandala Special Officer Balaraju, MPDo Kalpana, Tahsildar Jyotivarakshmi Devi and MPO KVRangachari, PR AE Sammi Reddy, APO Sarada, APM Jhansi, ideal farmer MD Ramjan, GP secretaries and EGS staff participated.



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# Konda Surekha announces constitution of Yadagirigutta Temple Trust Board



Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): Minister for Endowments Konda Surekha has announced the constitution of Yadagirigutta Temple Trust Board. Speaking in the Assembly on Tuesday after the introduction of Telangana Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments (Amendment) Bill, 2025 in the Assembly on Tuesday, the Minister said there will be a Trust Board with 18 members,

whose term of office will be two years. The Chairman and Members of the Board will not receive any salary and allowances, but will receive DAs. An IAS officer will be the Executive Officer of the temple. The Board's budget will be under the control of the government, Konda Surekha said. The Minister said the educational institutions and spiritual schools can be established and managed in Yadagirigutta under the management of the Board. Konda Surekha further stated that all temples in Telangana that generate an income of Rs. 100 crore work under the auspices of the Endowments department. The Minister said the Congress government has provided free bus facilities to women, which has increased the number of devotees visiting temples in Telangana. She said that earlier, there were no proper facilities for the devotees in Yadagirigutta, but after the Congress came to power, it spent crores to provide facilities. In a bid to provide the better facilities, the State government has decided to form a Trust Board in Yadagirigutta, Konda Surekha added. Later, the Speaker announced the passage of Bill unanimously in the Assembly. (NSS)

# Pinky Reddy inaugurates FLO Hyderabad Centre of Excellence



Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): The FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO) Hyderabad Chapter opens the FLO Hyderabad Centre of Excellence. The Centre was formally inaugurated on Tuesday morning by its Past National President, FLO Pinky Reddy. In the entire FLO network spanning 20 chapters across India, Hyderabad is the first to launch a Centre of Excellence. The Centre, located at Banjara Hills, Hyderabad. It is designed to equip women with skills, knowledge, and opportunities to advance in their personal and professional journeys. The Past Chairpersons' Council will manage it. Speaking on the occasion Reddy said 'We have been talking about it for 15 years and now that dream has become a reality. It is the need of the hour because it fosters expertise, promotes best practices, and drives innovation, leading to improved efficiency, quality,

ity, and cost-effectiveness, ultimately enhancing competitive advantage.

Giving her opening remarks Priya Gazdar, Chairperson of FLO Hyderabad said - "Today marks a historic milestone for FLO Hyderabad as we bring to life the collective vision of our past leadership - the FLO Hyderabad Centre of Excellence. For grassroots women, it will be a space for job-readiness skilling, vocational training, and financial and digital literacy. Beyond learning and training, the CoE will also serve as the operational backbone of FLO Hyderabad." The FLO Hyderabad Centre of Excellence has a training hall which can accommodate up to 60 participants, 4 cubicles for the admin staff and 4 cabins for Committee meetings. The interiors of the centre are done tastefully with an impact and an achievement wall featuring evocative images of many of its initiatives such as the ones supporting dying weaves such as Gollabhama, Telia Rumal, Narayanpet weaves and Cherial Painting. 40,000 women were impacted through their various initiatives. Over a lakh saplings were planted. Images of the pylons installed by FLO were on display, as well as images of the Past Chairpersons on the Meet the Visionaries wall. On display also were the initiatives of the year 2024-25, the MSME Schemes Ready Reckoner, and 3 white papers on - 01. Empowering Women Farmers through sustainable growth; 02. Work opportunities for young urban women living in slum areas and 03. Sustaining heritage weaves of Gollabhama, Muthyamgadi and handloom livelihoods in Siddipet were showcased. (NSS)

# Sridhar Babu counters MLC Shambipur Raju's comments over future city



Hyderabad, March 18 (NSS): The comments made by BRS party MLC Shambipur Raju in the state Legislative Council today have stirred a controversy. MLC Raju's remarks were objected to by state Minister D. Sridhar Babu. During the question and answer session on Tuesday, in response to a question about the Future City, Shambipur Raju stated that it was not a Fourth City, but a Four Brothers City. State Minister D. Sridhar Babu expressed his objection to these remarks by stating that such comments were inappropriate. He emphasized that he did not mention anyone's name and pointed out that more severe comments were made in the Assembly and added that the Chief Minister himself stated that they would strip and beat up their critics. He questioned as to whether there was one law for the ruling party and another law for others. In response, the legislative council Chairman suggested not to discuss outside matters in the house while indicating that there is a rule and a procedure that should be followed. Subsequently, Minister Sridhar Babu stated that Shambipur Raju should come to the Assembly, where such responses can be given and added that all expect the MLCs to behave in a dignifying manner in the council. Speaking in the Council about the future city, Minister Sridhar Babu mentioned that when one thinks of a planned city in the country, Chandigarh comes to mind and added that the government was determined to develop Hyderabad into such a city in the coming days. He noted that urbanization was rapidly taking place centered around Shamshabad Airport and the Outer Ring Road and added that plans had been made to construct a special city named "Future City" with all amenities, aiming for sustain-

able development. He stated that this Future City would be developed as a world-class city to match Hyderabad, Secunderabad, and Cyberabad. He revealed that the Future City would span an area of 770 square kilometers across 56 revenue villages in seven mandals of Ranga Reddy district. He informed that the "Future City Development Authority" had been established to systematically develop the Future City with all facilities. He stated that the Future City would serve as a backbone for the Telangana economy and would contribute to the state's development, industrial establishment, and job creation. (NSS)

# Rajiv Yuva Vikasam scheme should be applied to OC communities: Poladi Rama Rao

Karimnagar, March 18 (NSS): "The Rajiv Yuva Vikasam scheme should be applied to the economically backward EWS unemployed youth in OCs," said Poladi Rama Rao, the National President of the Federation of OC Social Societies. He demanded that the financial assistance provided to the unemployed youth of SC, ST, BC and Minority communities through the respective corporations under the Rajiv Yuva Vikasam scheme should also be applied to the unemployed youth of the economically backward OC and EWS communities. Rama Rao spoke at a meeting organized with the leaders of the Federation at the Federation office in Karimnagar on Tuesday. Speaking on the occasion, He said that it was not right for the state government to form OC corporations to provide financial and welfare assistance to the poor among the OCs and to delay the announcement of the funds and policies by the governing council, thus causing grievances to the OCs. Although it is laudable that the state government is focusing on providing self-employment opportunities and financial empowerment to unemployed youth, Poladi Rama Rao appealed to the government leaders to implement social justice by applying the scheme to the unemployed youth of SC, ST, BC, minority communities as well as the economically backward OC and EWS communities. He said that they were not against anyone and their aim was to ensure that the poor of all economically backward communities get the fruits of self-employment and welfare.

# Sambhal return to primitive practice for sehri calls, azaan as govt bans loudspeakers

GNS News Agency, March 18 Sambhal (UP): It is 3 am and the only figure visible in Sambhal city's dark-lit bylanes is a lonesome man, walking down lazily with a kaffan loosely draped around his neck and a green 'saafa' covering his head. Ever since the beginning of Ramzan, Mohammad Suhail has been giving a wake-up call to the 'rozedaars' (people observing fast during Ramzan) to begin their 'sehri' (the meal before the fast). With a drum hanging around his neck, Suhail shouts, "Uth jao bhaiyo, sehri kaa time ho chuka hai..." He repeats his message twice and then beats the drum. Muslims have been forced to return to the rather primitive practice due to the Uttar Pradesh government's banning loudspeakers at religious places in 2022. "Now, it is 3 am. It is the time for sehri. Loudspeakers are not allowed, so people who are sleeping are unable to get up. For them, I beat the drum, so that the 'rozedaars' can wake up, and perform their 'sehri' and then observe the fast," Suhail told PTI Videos. Suhail is not alone made to strain his vocal cords. With the loudspeakers gone, muezzins too are now giving 'azaan' - a call for prayer - shouting from the mosques' rooftops. Several loudspeakers, apparently taken off mosques, lay before policemen when PTI



visited a local police station. On December 13 last year, an Imam was fined Rs 2 lakh for allegedly using a loudspeaker for azaan beyond the permissible decibel limits. Sambhal shot to front-page headlines after riots broke out there last November following a survey of the Mughal-era Shahi Jama Masjid. Four people were killed and several, including police personnel, were injured in the clashes.

# The BJP government is systematically undermining MGNREGA: Sonia Gandhi

GNS News Agency, March 18 Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson and Rajya Sabha MP Sonia Gandhi accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre of systematically undermining the rural employment scheme, under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, (MGNREGA), the flagship poverty alleviation policy introduced by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by the late former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Ms. Gandhi was speaking during the Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. She said that the programme that was a landmark legislation of the Manmohan Singh government has been a "crucial safety net for millions of rural poor." "It is deeply concerning that the present BJP government has systematically undermined the scheme. The budget allocation remains stagnant at ?86,000 crores - a 10-year low as a percentage of GDP," the Congress leader said. She further said that the recent Union Budget allocation, when adjusted for inflation, effectively declined by 24,000 crore. "Moreover, estimates suggest that nearly 20% of the allocated funds will be used to clear pending dues from previous years," Ms. Gandhi said.

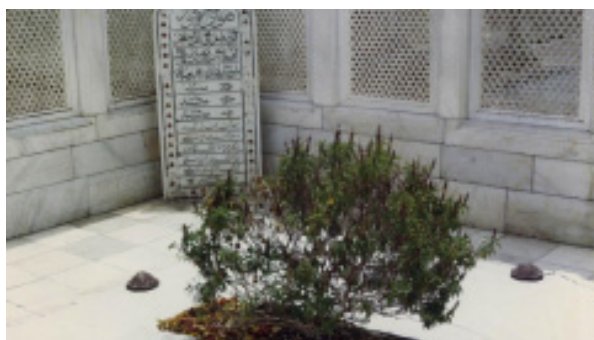


Speaking during the Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, the Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson said MGNREGA's budget as a percentage of GDP is at a 10-year low

The former Congress president also dwelled on the challenges brought upon by various technological interventions, including wage payments through the Aadhaar Based Payment System (ABPS), and capturing the attendance of workers via the National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS). This, coupled with persistent delays in wage payments and low wage rates, was hindering the programme, Ms. Gandhi said. On behalf of the Congress party, she demanded five reforms to ensure that the MGNREGA contin-

ued to provide "dignified employment" and "financial security" to the rural poor. Ms. Gandhi said that adequate financial provision should be made to sustain and expand the scheme; the minimum wage rate should be increased to ?400 per day; and there should be timely disbursement of wages. She also pressed for increasing the number of guaranteed work days from 100 to 150 days. In her brief intervention, Ms. Gandhi did not speak about the ongoing impasse between the Centre and the West Bengal government, where the programme has not been operating since December 2022.

## Tensions rise in Maharashtra over demand to demolish Aurangzeb's tomb



GNS News Agency, March 18

Amidst the rising tensions over the removal of the grave of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, situated at Khuldabad in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, local authorities on Sunday barred Hindutva leader Milind Ekbote from entering the district from March 16 to April 5.

The order was issued on Saturday (March 15, 2025) by the Deputy Resident Collector's office. "After the release of the film Chhaava, the views of many people on the Mughal emperor have turned extreme, as seen in social media posts. The district authorities have learnt through intelligence inputs that Mr. Ekbote's organisation, Dharmaveer Sambhaji Maharaj Pratishthan, and his supporters, could be planning to reach Khuldabad to raze Aurangzeb's tomb. Considering all the unrest, the district administration decided to pro-

hibit the entry of Mr. Ekbote and his supporters into the limits of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar," the office of the Collector said. The district administration also said the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal had planned agitations from March 17, seeking the removal of the tomb. Mr. Ekbote in the past has been accused of instigating caste-based riots on January 1, 2018 in Bhima Koregaon in Pune district. He also took part in the agitation to raze down the tomb of Afzal Khan, situated in Pratapgad in Satara.

Later in the day, the Leader of the Opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Council Ambadas Danve issued a challenge. "The tomb is the remains of our history. We should be able to tell our future generations that Aurangzeb came here and was defeated and buried in this land itself. The call to remove the grave is a conspiracy to end this history. The presence of the grave is a reminder that the Mughal king was defeated and buried here. Those who have the guts to demolish the tomb, I challenge them to do it," Mr. Danve said. Shiv Sena leader and guardian minister of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district Sanjay Shirsat stoked further controversy. "Maharashtra's soil does not have place for the grave of a cruel emperor who tortured and executed Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. It should be removed and there is no debate about it. Those who love Aurangzeb and his grave can take the remnants home. The Opposition takes out rallies holding flags of Pakistan while living in this country. If people like Danve want to keep the tomb, then he should go and offer namaz there," Mr. Shirsat said.

## Every noble attempt for peace with Pakistan met with hostility, betrayal: PM Modi



GNS News Agency, March 18

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that every attempt to foster peace with Pakistan was met with hostility and betrayal and hoped that wisdom would prevail on the leadership in Islamabad to improve bilateral ties. In a podcast with Lex Fridman released on Sunday (March 16, 2025), Mr. Modi recalled that he had specially invited his Pakistan counterpart Nawaz Sharif for his swearing-in ceremony in 2014 with the hope that the two countries could turn a new leaf.

"Yet, every noble attempt at fostering peace was met with hostility and betrayal. We sincerely hope that wisdom prevails upon them and they choose the path of peace," the Prime Minister said in his over three-hour interaction. Mr. Modi said he believed that even the people of Pakistan long for peace because they also must be tired of living in strife, unrest and relentless terror where even innocent children are killed and countless lives are destroyed.

The Prime Minister said his first attempt at improving bilateral relations was a gesture of goodwill. "It was a diplomatic gesture unlike any in decades. The very people who once questioned my approach to foreign policy were taken aback when they learned I had invited all SAARC heads of state and our then President Pranab Mukherjee beautifully captured that historic gesture in his memoir," Mr. Modi said. "This was a testament to how clear and confident India's foreign policy had become. This sent a clear message to the world about India's commitment to peace and harmony, but we didn't get the desired outcome," he said. President Trump more prepared in second term; we share bond of mutual trust. Mr. Modi said he shares a bond of mutual trust with U.S. President Donald Trump and they connect well because they believe in putting their respective national interests above everything else.

Mr. Modi hailed Mr. Trump as a man of courage, who took his own decisions, was unwaveringly dedicated to the United States and the same spirit was on display when he was shot at by a gunman on the election campaign trail last year. The Prime Minister said President Trump appeared far more prepared than before in his second term. "He has a clear roadmap in his mind with well-defined steps, each one designed to lead him toward his goals," Mr. Modi said on Mr. Trump's second term as President. The Prime Minister said he had the chance to meet members of Mr. Trump's team during his recent visit to the U.S. "I truly believe he has put together a strong, capable group. And with such a strong team, I feel they are fully capable of implementing President Trump's vision," Mr. Modi said. He recalled his meetings with Vice President J.D. Vance, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, Vivek Ramaswamy and Elon Musk. The Prime Minister recalled the 'Howdy Modi' community event at the packed NRG Stadium in Houston in September 2019 and how Mr. Trump listened to his speech by sitting among the audience.

"Now, that's his humility. The President of the United States sitting in the audience while I spoke from the stage, that was a remarkable gesture on his part," Mr. Modi said. The Prime Minister also recalled how the U.S. security detail went into a tizzy when he casually asked Trump to take a round of the packed stadium to greet the audience and he had agreed without hesitation. "His entire security detail was thrown off guard, but for me that moment was truly touching. It showed me that this man had courage. He makes his own decisions, but also he trusted me and my lead in that moment enough to have walked with me into the crowd," he said. "It was that sense of mutual trust, a strong bond between us that I truly witnessed on that day. And the way I saw President Trump that day walking into a crowd of thousands without even asking security, it was truly amazing," the Prime Minister said. Mr. Modi said he saw the same resilient and determined Mr. Trump when he was shot at during the U.S. election campaign. "Even after being shot, he remained unwaveringly dedicated to America. His life was for his nation. This showed his America First spirit, just as I believe in nation first 'India first,'" the Prime Minister said. "I stand for India first and that's why we connect so well. These are the things that truly resonate," Mr. Modi said. The Prime Minister said politicians across the world get so much media coverage that people mostly perceive them through its lens. "People rarely get the chance to truly meet or personally know one another and perhaps third-party intervention is the real cause of tensions," Mr. Modi said.

## City records cleanest air quality in three years with AQI of 8



GNS News Agency, March 18

Delhi recorded its cleanest air for any day between January 1 and March 15 in the last three years on Saturday (March 15, 2025), according to the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM).

The 24-hour average AQI stood at 85 at 4 p.m. on Saturday (March 14, 2025), placing it in the 'Satisfactory' category, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). This is the first 'Satisfactory' air quality day of 2025. An AQI between 0 and 50 is considered 'Good,' 51-100 is 'Satisfactory,' 101-200 is 'Moderate,' 201-300 is 'Poor,' 301-400 is 'Very Poor,' and 401-500 is 'Severe.'

The CAQM also shared on its X account, stating, "Today, Delhi recorded an average AQI of 85, the lowest in the last three years for the period from 1st January to 15th March. Today's AQI is also the first day of the current year with a 'Satisfactory' AQI (AQI 51-100)." It further mentioned that Delhi has witnessed a 'Satisfactory' AQI in March for the first time in five years, since 2020. Today, Delhi recorded an average AQI of 85, the lowest in the last three years for the period from 01st January to 15th March. Today's AQI is also the first day of the current year with a 'Satisfactory' AQI (AQI 51-100). Meanwhile, the maximum temperature in Delhi on Saturday (March 15, 2025) was 33 degrees Celsius, 4.1 degrees Celsius above the seasonal average, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The minimum temperature was 18.7 degrees Cel-

sus, while humidity levels fluctuated between 62% and 50%. On Friday (March 14, 2025), Delhi experienced its hottest day of the year so far, with the mercury reaching 36.2 degrees Celsius, 7.3 degrees Celsius above normal, the IMD stated. The weather department has predicted generally cloudy skies with light rain or drizzle on Sunday (March 16, 2025). The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to be around 32 degrees Celsius and 17 degrees Celsius, respectively.

## Theft at Pune railway station: Police return jewellery worth Rs 10 lakh to elderly man

GNS News Agency, March 18

The Government Railway Police recovered jewellery worth Rs 10.28 lakh belonging to an elderly man which was stolen at the Pune railway station premises, officials said on Sunday. While the incident happened in January and the accused was arrested a few days later, the jewellery was handed over to its owner Friday after completing the formalities, police said.

Police have identified the accused in this case as Sumit Kumar Satvirisingh, 30, resident of Sultanpuri in Delhi. A press release issued by the railway police stated that 73-year-old Shirish Vitthalrao Shitole, who is a resident of Anandpura in Madhya Pradesh, was travelling by Indore Daund express train in January. After reaching Pune railway station, four persons on the pretext of helping him in carrying his luggage, opened his bag and committed theft of a purse carrying gold and silver ornaments worth Rs 11.28 lakh. Shitole lodged a complaint at the railway police station in Pune. A team led by senior police inspector Pramod Khopikar checked videos captured by CCTV cameras at about 150 locations and got clues about the accused.

## Citizen group to urge Governor to not give assent to Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill



GNS News Agency, March 18

Opposition to the Greater Bengaluru Governance (GBG) Bill 2024, which was passed in the Legislative Assembly, is growing. The Bengaluru Town Hall, a citizen group that was recently formed to draft a shadow master plan for the city in association with urban planners and other experts, will meet the Governor on Sunday and submit a letter asking him to not give his assent to the Bill until it is changed to become constitutionally valid. The group convened an emergency meeting on Saturday to discuss the Bill.

The members of the Town Hall said that the speed at which the Bill was passed is alarming and requires immediate short-term actions to stall the government. They have also decided to take a multi-pronged legal approach and file around six to seven cases challenging the Bill in either the High Court or through an omnibus in the Supreme Court. "Decentralisation is very important and healthy. But we are worried if what the government is planning to do is

decentralisation or recentralisation, as the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) will have overriding power over all the other bodies. It sounds like they are putting officials who are accountable to the State for local administration rather than putting elected representatives in the council like in the mayoral system. They are violating the 74th Amendment of the Constitution," said actor-cum-activist Prakash Belawadi, who deliberated the meeting. On the other hand, the Citizens Action Forum (CAF) also plans to submit a letter to the Governor on Monday, while their legal strategy is in advanced stages. "We will write to the Governor by Monday and see what his reaction would be. If the Governor gives his assent to the Bill, then we are ready to file a case immediately. However, we will not be partnering with any other citizen groups," said Vijayan Menon from CAF. The Bill has been facing opposition from the citizens ever since the idea was floated in 2024 by the government. In the last week, after the GBG Bill was passed in the Assembly, it was widely criticised for granting the GBA the powers to nominate four members to the ward committees. Many felt that this would pave for MLAs to install their loyalists in the ward committees instead of citizen representatives.

Some changes were made to the Bill a few days later upon the suggestions of the Upper House and members of the Lower House. Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar clarified that the appointments to the ward committee will take place through a lottery system. The Bill was passed to establish the GBA to supervise the development of Greater Bengaluru area. It also seeks to split the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahangara Palike (BBMP) into multiple corporations. However, citizens say that this approach to decentralisation brings more political involvement into the local bodies and is thereby unconstitutional.

## Delhi HC set to hear ED's plea against bail granted to Kejriwal in excise police case



GNS News Agency, March 18

The Delhi High Court is expected to hear the Enforcement Directorate's plea challenging the bail granted to former chief minister and AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy case on Monday. The Supreme Court granted Kejriwal interim bail in July last year in the case filed by the ED. A trial court had earlier granted regular bail to Kejriwal in the same case, but the Delhi High Court had stayed the order.

On January 17, Kejriwal, through his counsel, had opposed the ED request, seeking an adjournment on the

probe agency's plea seeking cancellation of his bail in the liquor excise policy case. ED's counsel Zoheb Hossain requested the adjournment on the ground that Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, due to appear in the case on behalf of ED, was on his legs before the Supreme Court. "Veheemently opposing" the ED's request, senior advocate Vikram Chaudhri, appearing for Kejriwal, pointed out that the ED has sought repeated adjournment in the matter since July 2024. Kejriwal's opposition to the adjournment came ahead of the Assembly elections in the Capital. Kejriwal was arrested by the ED on March 21 last year in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy. Months later, CBI arrested him on June 26 in a corruption case. ED is seeking the cancellation of bail granted to Kejriwal by a trial court on June 20. On June 25, 2024, the High Court stayed a trial court order granting him bail in the ED case. In an affidavit in response to the plea on July 9, Kejriwal had told the High Court that the agency had implicated him in a "false concocted story" and his arrest was "absolutely illegal". The excise policy 2021 was scrapped in 2022 after the Lieutenant Governor ordered a CBI probe into alleged irregularities and corruption involving its formulation and execution. According to the CBI and the ED, irregularities were committed while modifying the excise policy, and undue favours were extended to the licence holders.

## West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee to visit Furfura Sharif days after meeting with ISF leader Naushad Siddique

GNS News Agency, March 18

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is expected to visit Furfura Sharif, a village in the Hooghly district considered a holy place for Muslims, on Monday. According to sources in the state secretariat Nabanna, there may be a meeting with Pirzada Toha Siddiqui during her visit. Banerjee is also expected to participate in an iftar organised by the government. The primary purpose of her visit, as stated by sources from Nabanna, is to discuss the development projects in Furfura Sharif and the proper utilisation of government funds for these initiatives. With Assembly elections scheduled for next year, many have questioned the timing of the chief minister's visit.

Last week, Indian Secular Front (ISF) MLA Naushad Siddique met Banerjee in Nabanna. Siddique later informed the media that he had met with the chief minister to discuss certain administrative matters. He expressed that he was unable to utilise the MLA's local area development funds. He clarified that there had been no political discussions during this meeting. According to him, Banerjee assured him all sorts of assistance. Before the 2021 Assembly elections, the state government allocated substantial funding to Furfura Sharif for installing LED lights and other beautification projects related to the shrine. Recently, some Pirzadas



have voiced concerns about the funds provided by the state and raised questions about the transparency of fund allocation. They have also expressed concerns about the development of Furfura Sharif. According to reports, steps are being taken to address these issues. Speaking to The Indian Express, BJP MP Shamik Bhattacharya said, "The Trinamool Congress engages in divisive politics, whereas we believe in decisive politics. We do not categorise voters as Hindus or Muslims; our approach is holistic. We develop our policies emphasising cohesiveness to maintain harmony in society."

## 100-year-old murder convict gets relief as Punjab and Haryana HC reduces life term

GNS News Agency, March 18

In a significant ruling, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has modified the life sentence of a 100-year-old murder convict, reducing his punishment to five years in prison while acquitting another accused in a 2004 murder case. The division bench of Justices Gurbinder Singh Gill and Jasjit Singh Bedi observed inconsistencies in the prosecution's case, leading to revised sentences for the convicts.

The case pertained to the killing of Tale Ram in Pakasma village, Rohtak, following an altercation on 6 March 2004. The deceased's son, Om Singh, alleged that a group of men attacked him and later assaulted his father inside their house, leading to his death. The trial court had sentenced six accused, including Jage Ram, who was 77 at the time, to life imprisonment in 2005.

Hearing the appeals, the high court noted discrepancies in the prosecution's version, particularly regarding Rajesh, one of the accused. The court highlighted contradictions in Om Singh's statements, which initially attributed a fatal head injury to Rajesh but later shifted the blame to Jage Ram. "The complainant has given conflicting versions as to the injury caused by Rajesh. Further, there is no cor-

roboration to the statement of this witness," the judgment stated, granting Rajesh the benefit of the doubt and ordering his acquittal. For Jage Ram, now over 100 years old, the court ruled that his role did not amount to murder. "He was using a lathi to support himself... It cannot be said that the accused had an intention to commit murder, but he had knowledge that such an injury could be fatal," the bench observed. Consequently, his conviction was altered from Section 302 (murder) to Section 304 Part II (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), and his sentence was reduced to five years' rigorous imprisonment. Two other appellants, Shree and Ram Bhaj, had their convictions under Section 302 set aside, as they were found guilty only of causing simple injuries. The court ruled that they did not enter the house to attack the deceased and had no common intention to kill. Having already served over two years in prison, their sentences were reduced to the time they had spent behind bars. The case, which had remained in litigation for over 20 years, saw multiple changes in testimonies and accusations. The court found that the prosecution failed to establish Rajesh's involvement beyond doubt, while Jage Ram's age and the nature of the attack were key factors in modifying his sentence.

## What's on the agenda of the Raisina Dialogue?



GNS News Agency, March 18

A month after this year's explosive Munich Security Conference, where U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance put Europe on notice, Delhi is set to host the annual Raisina Dialogue from March 17-19, where U.S. President Donald Trump's seismic foreign policy shifts are expected to be the big conversation points again.

What are the issues expected to make the headlines?

The 10th edition of the annual Raisina Dialogue will be inaugurated on Monday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, where the chief guest, New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, will deliver the keynote address, with the theme "Kalachakra" (wheel of time). However, a big contingent from the U.S. is expected to take the centre stage, given the twists and turns in American policy under Mr. Trump — from the Ukraine war, the talks with Russia, the new tariff regime that threatens ties between the U.S. and countries around the world, including India, the U.S.' fraying relations with its NATO and European allies, uncertainty around the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific policy, and new statements on China and Taiwan. Amidst the turmoil, U.S. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard is leading a team to Delhi for an intelligence chiefs' conference at the weekend hosted by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and will speak at the Raisina Dialogue. Apart from Ms. Gabbard, the Special Assistant to U.S. President Trump and National Security Council official, Ricky Gill, and Senior Counsellor to Mr. Trump, James Carafano, who was a key figure behind the Republican campaign document "Project 2025", are also listed as speakers and are expected to defend the U.S.' moves. A Quad panel with senior Navy leadership from the four countries, India, Australia, Japan and the U.S., is expected as India gears up to host the Quad leader summit this year, which is expected to see some announcements on expanding maritime cooperation.

What can be expected in Ukraine?

The Raisina Dialogue follows weeks of dramatic developments in the Russia-Ukraine war, including the showdown between Mr. Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Washington, followed by rounds of U.S.-Russia talks and then U.S.-Ukraine talks about a ceasefire, which will no doubt be a major point of discussion at the dialogue, and on its sidelines. Eleven of the 20 Foreign and other Ministers arriving for the dialogue are from

Europe, including Ukraine Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha. In 2024, the numbers were even more skewed, with chief guest Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and 15 of 21 Foreign Ministers present from Europe, making a concerted pitch for India to shift its position on Ukraine. This year, all eyes will be on discussions and debate that pit European leaders against those from the U.S., particularly Ms. Gabbard, who has in the past battled for better U.S.-Russia ties. However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who used to be a regular speaker, will not attend. At the Raisina Dialogue in 2023, Mr. Lavrov faced a barrage of questions over the war in Ukraine during a session, that got extremely heated over the question of Russia joining talks for a ceasefire. Also on the list is International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi, who will be an important speaker on the war in Ukraine, and the possibility of reviving nuclear talks with Iran.

Who else is coming?

The speakers' list at the Raisina Dialogue serves as a good barometer of India's relations with various countries, and which countries participate are often as important as those who miss the event. According to the list released by the Ministry of External Affairs, the Foreign Ministers of Bhutan, D. N. Dhungyel; Nepal, Arzu Rana Deuba; and the Maldives, Abdulla Khaleel, will attend the meet. Mauritius' Foreign Minister, Dhananjay Ramful, will also be present.

Given tense ties with India's western neighbour, Raisina Dialogue does not invite Pakistani delegates. However, it is notable that no speakers from Bangladesh or representatives of the Yunus government are listed this year. The programme lists a speaker from China's Fudan University, which reflects the thaw in bilateral ties after the meeting between Mr. Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping last October. Another country with which India may see a thaw this year is Canada, given the change in leadership. The Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Daniel Rogers, who is in Delhi, could also attend the Dialogue. In addition, former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, both regular attendees, will be present. Despite the Indian government's attempts at improving ties with West Asia (GCC) and South East Asia (ASEAN), both regions aren't well represented again, a trend visible for the last few years. The only exceptions are the Philippines' Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Enrique Manalo, and Thailand's Foreign Minister, Maris Sangiampongsa. Foreign Ministers from Ghana, Cuba, Peru, Antigua and Barbuda are the others attending from the Global South.

How did the Raisina Dialogue start?

Launched in 2016 by the Ministry of External Affairs as a "flagship Indian international dialogue", the Raisina Dialogue aims to bring together leaders and thinkers from around the world. Envisioned by the government as a potential rival to the Munich Security Conference and Singapore's Shangri-La Dialogue, the Indian version is named after the Raisina Hills, where Rashtrapati Bhavan, key Ministries and Parliament are located in the capital.

## In language debates, SC had voted for 'linguistic secularism'



GNS News Agency, March 18

The language debate over the National Education Policy rages on even as the Supreme Court had favoured "linguistic secularism" or the acceptance of the legitimate aspirations of the speakers of different languages in India in a 2014 judgment. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has accused the Centre of imposing Hindi through the National Education Policy at the cost of "totally destroying Tamil Nadu's progress in education".

The apex court in U.P. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan vs State Of U.P. in September 2014 had observed that the mode of development or evolution of both law and language in the country were "organic". Indian language laws, the court said, were "not rigid but accommodative — the object being to secure linguistic secularism". In a covering letter to the Law Minister on the 216th report of the Law Commission of India on the 'Non-feasibility of Introduction of Hindi as a Compulsory Language in the Supreme Court of India', then chairperson and former Supreme Court judge, Justice A.R. Lakshmanan, cautioned that "language is a highly emotional issue for the citizens of any nation. It has a great unifying force and is a powerful instrument for national integration. No language should be thrust on any section of the people against their will since it is likely to become counter-productive".

The judgment referred to Constitutional expert H.M. Seervai's commentary on the conflict which arose in the Constituent Assembly in 1949 over the question of Hindi as a "national language". A compromise proposed in the Munshi-Ayyangar formula led to the inclusion of Article 343 in the Constitution declaring Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of the Union. "Though Hindi was selected as the official language, it could not be described

as the national language, for, it was not the language generally spoken in all parts of India, and though spoken by the largest single group of people, that group did not constitute the majority of people in India. Besides, there were regional languages such as Bengali in Bengal, Tamil in Madras, Marathi and Gujarati in the erstwhile State of Bombay which were spoken by large populations and it was claimed for those languages that they were more developed than Hindi. Hindi was therefore described as the official language," the judgment quoted from Mr. Seervai commentary.

Former Supreme Court judge, Justice Krishna Iyer, in his remarks to the Law Commission in connection with the 216th report, wrote, "I am all for Hindi as a personal preference, but I am all against Hindi by compulsion... Linguistic militancy will alienate and divide but federal pluralism is democratic sensitivity."

Article 351 however imposes a "duty" on the Union government to promote the spread of the Hindi language. However, the Allahabad High Court, in its 1982 reported judgment in Sunil K.R. Sahastrabudhey vs Director, IIT Kanpur, observed that "although Hindi is the national language of India and Article 351 lays down a duty on the Union to promote the spread of Hindi language to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India, there is no right conferred on any citizen to compel an institution to impart education in that particular language".

Besides, Article 29(1) of the Constitution recognised that "every section of the society which has a distinct language script or culture of its own" has the fundamental right to conserve the same. "This is a right which is conferred on both majority and minority," the top court had underscored. The Supreme Court, while responding to whether a student or a parent or a citizen has a right to choose the medium of instruction at primary school level in State of Karnataka vs Associated Management of Primary & Secondary Schools, said the fundamental right to speech and expression under Article 19 included the freedom of a primary class student to choose the language of instruction. The court said the state cannot impose control over such a choice. In this, the court had taken a leaf from the U.S. Supreme Court's conclusion in Pierce v. Society of Sisters of Holy Names in 1924 that "a child is not a mere creature of the State. Those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right coupled with the high duty to recognise and prepare him for additional obligations".

## Cleric targets Shami yet again, calls Holi celebrations of the pacer's daughter against Shariat

Bareilly (UP): A cleric who had claimed cricketer Mohd Shami committed a sin by not fasting during Ramzan has described the Holi celebrations of the pacer's daughter as "illegal" and "against Shariat". In a video released late on Saturday, All India Muslim Jamaat president Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi said, "She is a small girl... If she plays Holi without understanding (it), then it is not a crime... "If she is sensible and still plays Holi, then it will be considered against Shariat," he added. Razvi said he had advised Shami to follow the tenets of Islam earlier as well. Despite that, a video was released of his daughter celebrating Holi. "I have appealed to Shami and his family members... Whatever is not in Shariat, do not let your children do it. Holi is a very big festival for Hindus but Muslims should avoid

celebrating Holi. If someone celebrates Holi even after knowing Shariat, it is a crime," he said. He also congratulated the Indian cricket team for its recent victory in the ICC Champions Trophy. "I congratulate Team India's captain, all the players, and Mohammad Shami from the bottom of my heart on their success," he said. Earlier this month, Razvi had said Shami committed a sin by not fasting during the Islamic holy month of Ramzan. In Saturday's video message, he suggested that those, including Shami, who could not keep fast should do it after Ramzan. Razvi also instructed Shami to urge his family members not to belittle Shariat. On March 6, after Shami was seen drinking from a bottle during an ICC Champions Trophy match against Australia, the cleric had said.

## Sixth accused arrested in Rs 122-crore New India Co-operative Bank scam in Mumbai



GNS News Agency, March 18

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai police has made the sixth arrest in the Rs 122-crore misappropriation case involving New India Co-operative Bank, after Arunachalam Ullahanathan Maruthuvar, who had remained at large, surrendered. According to the police, the main accused, Hitesh Mehta, a former general manager of the bank, had stolen money from the bank's safe over six years (between 2019 and 2025) and handed it over to his two close accomplices—Dharmesh Paun and Maruthuvar—who helped misappropriate the funds. While Mehta and Paun were arrested in February, Maruthuvar's role was identified soon after the scam came to light, the police added.

"It has come to our notice that Maruthuvar received approximately Rs 30 crore from the misappropriated funds

by Mehta. He helped the main accused route the funds," an officer privy to the investigation said on Sunday. The police said that after the fraud was discovered during an RBI inspection at the bank's Prabhadevi and Goregaon branches on February 12, Mehta confessed to the crime and revealed the roles of Paun and Maruthuvar. Accordingly, the EOW deployed multiple teams across various parts of India to trace him, but Maruthuvar was nowhere to be found.

"Maruthuvar then appeared before us and surrendered, following which he was placed under arrest and produced before a court. The court has granted police custody until March 18 for further investigation," a police officer said. The police said they were trying to determine whether Maruthuvar was aware that Mehta had misused his position to illegally collect and deposit cash in the safe of their head office between 2019 and 2020, further embezzling the funds in small amounts. The other accused arrested in the case are the bank's ex-CEO Ambhimanyu Bhoan, Maruthuvar's son Manohar, and Kapil Dedhia. At least two others—former bank chairman Hiren Bhanu and his wife, vice-chairperson Gauri Bhanu—are wanted in the case. While they are trying to ascertain the details, the investigators said the money was either routed or deposited into the bank accounts of the arrested people. "We also suspect that the money has been routed abroad through hawala channels," an officer said. Maruthuvar is a businessman who deals in solar panels and it is suspected that he helped Mehta route the embezzled money through his company.

## 15-gram MDMA seizure leads Karnataka Police to drugs worth Rs 75 crore, 2 foreign women drug peddlers

GNS News Agency, March 18

The Mangaluru Crime Branch recently seized 37.87 kg of MDMA worth Rs 75 crore and arrested two women foreign nationals in Bengaluru. The drug seizure — one of the biggest of its kind in the state till date — came during the follow-up of a six-month-old case wherein the police had seized 15 grams of MDMA. The arrested women have been identified as Bamba Fanta alias Adonis Jabulile, 31, a native of a Western African country, and Abigali Adonis alias Odijo Evans, 30, a Nigerian. The two women were intercepted at Neeladrinagar near Electronic City in Bengaluru. Fanta came to India in 2020 on a business visa. While Adonis, who first came to India in 2016 on a medical visa, has been illegally staying in the country. Anupam Agrawal, Police Commissioner, Mangaluru, explained that the arrest of drug peddler Haider Ali last year from a lodge near Pumpwell in Mangaluru led to the arrest of Nigerian national Peter Ikedi Belonwo, who was supplying drugs to Ali. During the investigation, the police observed that the two recently arrested women used to take a 9.50 pm flight at least once every 15 days from Delhi to Bengaluru, and return within a day. The women had allegedly travelled 37 times between Delhi and Bengaluru in the last six months. On March 13, the Mangaluru police received information that the accused women were again traveling to Bengaluru. They followed



the two women, hoping to get more leads, and arrested them the next day. The 37.87 kg of MDMA was seized from their trolley bags.

The police were yet to ascertain whether the MDMA was imported from another country or manufactured in India. They said it would have been impossible for the two women to transport such large quantities of the drug without help from any official. Agrawal said Fanta and Evans used fake passports and fake visas for their travel. The crime branch police are expected to take the accused into police custody for further probe.

## Maharashtra Legislative Council bypolls: BJP announces 3 candidates

GNS News Agency, March 18

The ruling BJP announced candidates for the upcoming Legislative Council bypolls in Maharashtra: Sandeep Joshi from Nagpur, Sanjay Kenekar from Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, and Dadarao Keche from Arvi in the Wardha district. Joshi is a close confidant of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, while Kenekar serves as the general secretary of the Maharashtra BJP. Keche was not given a ticket in the recent Assembly elections to allow Fadnis's former personal assistant Sumit Wankhede to run. However, Keche will now be given a chance to contest the Legislative Council bypolls.

The other two parties in the ruling Mahayuti alliance, Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), will share the remaining two MLC spots. The Election Commission of India (ECI) announced that bypolls would be held for five seats in the Maharashtra Legislative Council on March 27. If necessary, voting will occur the day after the four-week Budget Session of the Assembly concludes on March 26. These bypolls were prompted by the election of five MLCs as MLAs in the 2024 Assembly elections.

These five MLCs consist of three from the BJP—Praveen Datke, Gopichand Padalkar, and Ramesh Karad—along with one each from NCP (SP) (Rajesh Vitekar) and Shiv Sena (Amshya Padvi). Padvi's term in the Legislative Council lasts until July 7, 2028, while Vitekar's extends to



July 27, 2030. The tenures of Praveen Datke, Ramesh Karad, and Gopichand Padalkar will conclude on May 13, 2026. Nominations must be submitted by March 17, and the deadline for withdrawing nominations is March 20. If polling is necessary, it will take place from 9 am to 4 pm on March 27, and the votes will be counted at 5 pm the same day. The 288 MLAs will cast their votes, if necessary, for the appointment of MLCs. The strength of the state council is 78 members. Currently, the BJP has 19 MLCs, followed by the NCP, the Congress, and Shiv Sena (UBT) with seven each. Shiv Sena has six MLCs, while the NCP (SP) and Independents account for three each. There are also 26 vacant seats.

## Sharad Pawar's NCP latches on to discourse around Shivaji, embraces 'Jai Shivray' as greeting instead of 'hello'

GNS News Agency, March 18: Amid the ongoing political discourse in Maharashtra over Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Mughal rulers, the Opposition Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) has introduced a new directive for its workers—replacing the conventional phone greeting "hello" with "Jai Shivray", meaning "Hail Shivaji".

Speaking at a party review meeting in Sangli, senior MLC and former minister Shashikant Shinde informed workers about the decision. "As per the directive of our state party president, the first word when greeting anyone over the phone should be 'Jai Shivray'," said Shinde. NCP (SP) state president Jayant Patil was also present at the event. Shinde further emphasised the party's commitment to Shivaji Maharaj's legacy, stating, "People are trying to take Shivaji Maharaj away from us. But we are the true followers of his ideology. I urge everyone—including our sisters and mothers—to use 'Jai Shivray' as a greeting, starting from Sangli and spreading across Vidarbha."

According to party insiders, the move is part of a broader effort to reclaim Shivaji Maharaj's legacy, which they allege is being misrepresented by right-wing forces. "Recent comments by BJP leaders, including ministers, are distorting Maharaj's history. We cannot let this happen. By adopting 'Jai Shivray,' we reaffirm our commitment to his true ideology," said a senior NCP (SP) leader. This devel-



opment comes amid heightened political tensions in the state. Last week, Maharashtra minister Nitesh Rane controversially claimed that Muslims were never part of Shivaji Maharaj's army, drawing criticism from Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who called the statement misleading and warned against communal divisions. Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party (SP) MLA Abu Azmi was suspended from the Maharashtra legislative assembly until the end of the ongoing budget session on March 26 for his remarks praising Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Also, Women and Child Development Minister Aditi Tatkare recently organised a special screening of the Hindi film Chhava, based on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, for legislators.

## Did not want PM Modi, other world leaders to see tents, graffiti, potholes in Washington D.C.: President Trump



GNS News Agency, March 18

U.S. President Donald Trump said he did not want Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other world leaders who visited him to see the tents and graffiti near federal buildings in Washington D.C. and has ordered the cleaning up of the American capital. "We're cleaning up our city. We're cleaning up this great capital, and we're not going to have crime, and we're not going to stand for crime, and we're going to take the graffiti down, and we're already taking the tents down, and we're working with the administration," Mr. Trump said Friday (March 14, 2025) in remarks at the Department of Justice.

"We said there are tents galore right opposite the State

Department. They have to come down. And they took them down right away. And so far, so good. We want to have a capital that can be the talk of the world," Mr. Trump said. "When Prime Minister Modi of India, the President of France, and all of these people... Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, they all came to see me over the last week and a half. And when they come in... I had the route run. I didn't want to have them see tents. I didn't want to have them see graffiti. I didn't want to have them see broken barriers and potholes in the roads. And we had it looking beautiful," Mr. Trump said.

"And we're going to do that for the city, and we're going to have a crime-free capital. When people come here, they're not going to be mugged or shot or raped. They're going to have a crime-free capital, again, it's going to be cleaner and better and safer than it ever was and it's not going to take us too long," he said.

PM Modi visited the White House for a bilateral meeting with Mr. Trump on February 13, the fourth foreign leader hosted by Mr. Trump in just weeks after his inauguration in January 2025. Within less than a month of the start of Mr. Trump's second term in the White House, he had hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Jordan's King Abdullah II. French President Emmanuel Macron and U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer are among the other foreign leaders Mr. Trump has hosted in his second term so far.

## Houthis say they are ready to escalate after US strikes Yemen

WASHINGTON/ADEN, GNS News Agency, March 18 Yemen, Yemen's Houthi movement said on Sunday it was ready to "meet escalation with escalation" after U.S. strikes targeting the Iran-aligned group over its threat to resume Red Sea shipping attacks triggered a diplomatic backlash from Moscow and Tehran. The strikes - which killed at least 31 people at the start of a campaign that one U.S. official told Reuters might continue for weeks - are the biggest U.S. military operation in the Middle East since President Donald Trump took office in January. The Houthis' political bureau described the attacks as a "war crime". "Our Yemeni armed forces are fully prepared to respond to escalation with escalation," it said in a statement. Trump also warned Iran, the Houthis' main backer, that it needed to end support for the group immediately. He said if Iran threatened the United States, "America will hold you fully accountable and, we won't be nice about it!"

In response, the top commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards said the Houthis took their own strategic and operational decisions and Tehran would react decisively to any action against it. "We warn our enemies that Iran will respond decisively and destructively if they take their threats into action," Hossein Salami told state media.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to urge an "immediate cessation of the use of force and the importance for all sides to engage in political dialogue," Russia's foreign ministry said on Sunday. Lavrov's call to halt the strikes came as Trump has been pressing Moscow to sign a U.S. proposal for a 30-day ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, which Ukraine accepted last week, but Russia has said needs to be reworked. Trump is also trying to bring Tehran to the negotiating table over its nuclear programme, while also ramping up sanctions pressure. Most of the 31 people confirmed killed in the U.S. strikes were women and children, Anees al-Asbahi, spokesperson for the Houthi-run health ministry said in an updated toll on Sunday. More than 100 were injured, he said. Residents in Sanaa said the strikes hit a neighbourhood known to host several members of the Houthi leadership.

"The explosions were violent and shook the neighbourhood like an earthquake. They terrified our women and children," one of the residents, who gave his name as Abdullah Yahia, told Reuters. In Sanaa, a crane and bulldozer were used to remove debris at one site and people used their bare hands to pick through the rubble. At a hospital, medics treated the injured, including children, and the bodies of several casualties, wrapped in plastic sheets, were placed in a yard, Reuters footage showed. Strikes also targeted Houthi military sites in Yemen's southwestern city of Taiz, two witnesses said on Sunday. Another strike on a power station in the town of Dahyan in Saada led to a power cut, Al-Masirah TV reported early on Sunday. Dahyan is where Abdul Malik al-Houthi, the enigmatic leader of the Houthis, often meets visitors.

The Houthis, an armed movement that took control of most of Yemen over the past decade, said last week they would resume attacks on Israeli ships passing through Red Sea shipping lanes off Yemen if Israel did not lift a block on aid into Gaza. The Houthis had launched scores of attacks

## Israeli strikes kill 14 people in Gaza over past day, Palestinian medics say

CAIRO, GNS News Agency, March 18, Israeli military strikes have killed at least 14 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip over the past 24 hours, the enclave's Health Ministry said on Sunday, as Arab and U.S. mediators work to shore up a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Palestinian officials say dozens of people have been killed by Israeli fire despite the January 19 truce that halted large-scale fighting in Gaza. The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here.

Israel's military has said its forces have intervened to thwart threats by "terrorists" approaching its troops or planting bombs since the ceasefire took effect. Gaza's Health Ministry said most of the latest deaths took place on Saturday when an Israeli airstrike killed nine Palestinians including four journalists in the town of Beit Lahya in the northern Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military said six men that it had identified as members of the armed wings of Hamas and the allied Islamic Jihad militant group had been killed in the strike. It said some of the militants had operated "under the cover of journalists". Salama Marouf, the head of the Hamas-run Gaza government media office, said the military's statement about the incident included the names of people who were not present. An Israeli drone had fired a missile at a group of Palestinians in the town of Juhr Eldeek in central Gaza on Sunday, killing a 62-year-old man and wounding several others, the medics said. Several others were hurt

when an Israeli drone fired a missile towards a group of people in Rafah, they added. Persistent bloodshed in Gaza underscores the fragility of the three-stage ceasefire agreement mediated by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States, which have stepped in to hammer out a deal between Israel and Hamas over how to proceed. Israel wants to extend the ceasefire's first phase, a proposal backed by U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff. Hamas says it will resume freeing hostages only under the second phase that was due to begin on March 2.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said on Saturday negotiators had been instructed to be ready to continue talks based on the mediators' response to a U.S. proposal for the release of 11 living hostages and half of the dead captives. Hamas on Friday said it had agreed to release American-Israeli soldier Edan Alexander and four bodies of the hostages if Israel agreed to begin talks immediately on implementing the second phase of the agreement. Israel responded by accusing Hamas of waging "psychological warfare" on the families of hostages. The war began when Hamas carried out a cross-border raid into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and capturing 251 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Israel's subsequent assault on Gaza has killed more than 48,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, reduced much of the territory to rubble, and led to accusations of genocide and war crimes that Israel denies.

## 'Pray for us. They've arrived': How Syria descended into revenge bloodshed

GNS News Agency, March 18

Dozens of messages posted by various armed factions on social media, and shared with hundreds of thousands of Syrians, called for a "general mobilization" - or "al nafeer" - to help crush a fledgling insurgency by supporters of deposed and widely hated leader Bashar al-Assad.

Hundreds of pickup trucks full of fighters, as well as tanks and heavy weaponry, poured down major highways towards the coastal heartlands of the minority Alawite sect to which Assad belonged. They were seeking revenge against loyalists to the ousted president, mostly his Alawite former officers. Some of them had allegedly carried out a spate of hit-and-run attacks on the new military in an effort to stage a coup against the Sunni Islamist-led government. Overnight and in the early hours of March 7, pro-government fighters fell on the neighborhood of Al-Qusour in the city of Baniyas, among the first major highway exits, opening fire on residential buildings and killing families in their homes. Similar attacks unfolded in a string of towns and villages further north along the coast including Al-Mukhtariya, Al-Shir, Al-Shifatiyah and Barabshbo where the ethno-religious Alawite community is concentrated. "I heard children screaming, gunfire, and my father trying to calm down the children," said Hassan Harfoush, an Alawite from Al-Qusour who's now living in Iraq, describing a phone call with his family before his parents, brother, sister and her two children were shot dead in the town on the afternoon of March 7, a Friday. "My father was telling me: Pray for us. They've arrived."

Harfoush said he'd left Syria months earlier following Assad's ouster at the urging of his father who feared a wave of retaliation against Alawites: "He told me to at least have one of us alive." Within about six days, hundreds of Alawite civilians lay dead, according to Reuters reporting and several monitoring groups. Just three months after Assad's ouster in December ended his brutal rule and almost 14 years of civil war, parts of western Syria had descended into vengeful bloodletting.

Reuters pieced together the events that culminated in the deadly rampage from interviews with more than 25 survivors and relatives of victims, as well as drone footage and dozens of videos and messages posted on social media. The news agency was unable to determine if there was any coordinated plan by security forces to attack the Alawite enclaves or target civilians. Three videos posted March 7-13, 2025, to social media and verified by Reuters show the same scene on a residential street in the neighborhood of Al-Qusour in Baniyas, Tartous. Reuters confirmed the location by matching the road layout, cars, buildings and telephone poles to satellite imagery of the area.

The Syrian government, which is now run by former members of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rebel group, didn't respond to a request for comment for this article. Syria's interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa denounced the mass killings as a threat to his mission to unite the country. He has promised to punish those responsible, including those affiliated to the government if necessary. "We fought to defend the oppressed, and we won't accept that any blood be shed unjustly, or goes without punishment or accountability, even among those closest to us," he told Reuters in a previous interview this week. While he blamed Assad loyalists for provoking the violence, Sharaa acknowledged that in response "many parties entered the Syrian coast and many violations occurred". It became an opportunity for revenge for years of pent-up grievances, he said.

Reuters reached out for comment to several Assad loyalists who had posted messages online urging violence who didn't respond. Monitoring groups including Syria Network for Human Rights (SNHR) - an independent UK-based group - said over 1,000 people died in the violence, more than half killed by forces aligned with the new authorities and others by Assad loyalists. SNHR said the dead included 595 civilians and unarmed fighters, the vast majority Alawite. Reuters counted more than 120 dead bodies in at least six locations in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous by geolocating videos posted to social media by residents, family members and the killers themselves. The toppling of Assad, whose Alawite sect is an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam, saw the ascendancy of a new government led by HTS, a Sunni Islamist group that emerged from an organization once affiliated to al Qaeda.

Many of Syria's Sunnis, who make up more than 70% of the population, felt politically and economically marginalized by Bashar al-Assad and his father Hafez, who both harshly cracked down on Sunni-dominated protests against their rule. The new government is striving to integrate into its security forces dozens of rebel factions, born out of the long civil war. It relies on its own as well as newly recruited fighters in a group known as the General Security Service (GSS), other militias - including some foreign fighters - have been needed to fill a security vacuum left after the dismantling of Assad's defence apparatus.

The mass killings were mostly carried out by gunmen from various factions aligned with the new government, including GSS, according to several of the witnesses. Video posted to Facebook and verified by Reuters showed some men in uniforms and arm patches similar to those worn by GSS participating in the violence in the coastal city of Jableh. GSS did not respond to a request for comment.

A member of the GSS said he and dozens of other members of the unit had been deployed to the coast on March 6 with the mission of rooting out pro-Assad fighters, and returned to their base in Aleppo this week. He said GSS fighters hadn't targeted non-combatants as far as he knew, adding that the general mobilisation calls on social media had drawn in other undisciplined fighters who had killed civilians en masse. "Anyone who had weapons joined," he added. Assad's 24 years in power has left a toxic legacy after his escape to Moscow in December. Many among Syria's Sunni community, which makes up the bulk of the population, harbour deep resentment at loyalists of the former president who have staged a low-level insurgency this month. The temperature rose on March 6, when the government said that fighters led by Alawite former officers in Assad's military staged one of their deadliest attacks yet, killing 13 members of the government-led security forces in Latakia province, a large Alawite centre. No one has claimed responsibility for the killings. Reuters was able to review several messages calling for Syrians to head to the coast for the general mobilization. For example, one Facebook page with more than 400,000 followers that says it is affiliated with GSS posted calls for Arab tribes in Syria to mobilize to support government fighters against Alawite insurgents. It also posted videos of armed groups sending fighters and vehicles to the coast to join the fight. Reuters could not immediately determine who runs the page.

Calls to arms also appeared in at least three WhatsApp groups each comprising hundreds of people in three different parts of northern Syria. The messages were localized, identifying specific meeting points in each area from which convoys would set off towards the coast. Reuters counted more than 120 dead bodies in at least six locations in the

coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous by geolocating videos posted to social media by residents, family members and the killers themselves. On the same day, residents in major cities Damascus and Aleppo told Reuters they heard some Sunni mosques blaring out the calls for jihad on their loudspeakers. One imam at a mosque in Damascus denounced the alleged attack on security forces by Assad's Alawite loyalists and called for Sunnis to take up arms against their sectarian enemies in a sermon broadcast on Facebook and seen by Reuters.

The Damascus imam, Mohsen Ghosn, didn't respond to a request for comment via his Facebook page. Syria's religious affairs ministry, which is in charge of all mosques, also didn't respond. Reuters was unable to determine how many fighters were mobilized to the cause. Drone footage of the highway east of the coastal city of Latakia, near the village of Al-Mukhtariya, shows hundreds of vehicles - including trucks with fighters in the back, some military vehicles and at least two tanks - were coming into the area in the morning of March 7. The U.N. Human Rights Office told Reuters its inquiries indicated the mobilisation of fighters in support of the security forces included armed groups and civilians and happened very fast.

"Many of the attackers were unidentified as they were masked, and it is therefore very difficult to tell who did what. It was very chaotic," a spokesperson said. "We don't have a clear picture of the structure of the chain of command inside the caretaker government's security forces."

FIGHTERS GO HOUSE TO HOUSE Al-Qusour neighborhood, where Harfoush's family met with tragedy, saw some of the worst massacres, according to six witnesses and relatives of those slain. One resident told Reuters fighters first fired heavy ammunition, artillery, and anti-aircraft guns at residential buildings. Shortly after, the militants began going house to house, killing civilians, he added.

The resident said about 15 militants stormed his home in three different groups, including some members of the GSS whom he identified by their uniforms as well as two Afghan fighters whose language he recognized. Only his identity as a Christian saved him and his family, he said. One GSS officer had discouraged the other militants from killing them, he added.

The resident's neighbours were less fortunate. Two other Al-Qusour residents said several of their family members were killed. Another woman listed about 50 people she said she knew were killed, including her parents, their neighbours and the neighbours' three-year-old child. A fourth resident said militants had dragged people from homes and killed them, including his 28-year-old nephew. Video posted on Facebook on March 8 and verified by Reuters shows men in uniforms and arm patches resembling those worn by the government-run General Security Service attacking shops in Jableh. Reuters confirmed the location by matching the road layout, businesses, solar panel and streetlights in the video to photos and satellite imagery of the area. Fighters stole cars, phones and money from residents, forced women to hand over their jewellery at gunpoint and torched houses, shops, and restaurants, according to survivors. Reuters was unable to independently confirm these accounts. That same day, March 7, and in ensuing days, militants also descended on a string of towns and villages further north along the coast and in hills around the city of Latakia. Reuters was able to verify footage of dozens of bodies lying in those villages that were shared online in the days after the killings.

One video posted online on March 7 showed the bodies of at least 27 men, many elderly, lying by a roadside in Al-Mukhtariya. On the same day in Al-Shifatiya, a 20-minute drive away, the bodies of at least 10 people in civilian clothing were laid out on the ground outside a pharmacy and along the road, a video posted to Facebook and verified by Reuters showed. Many were still bleeding. Reporting by Maggie Michael and Feras Dalati in Damascus, Maya Gebely in Beirut, and Reade Levinson and John Davison in London; Additional reporting by Eleanor Whalley, Fernando Robles, Mahezabin Syed, Inaki Malvido, Pola Grzanka, Sophie Royle, George Sargent and Milan Pavicic; Writing by John Davison; Editing by Pravin Charl Investigative reporter specializing in using data analysis and open source materials to break news and expose wrongdoing. Written about police violence and failings of the U.S. justice system; business interests of Myanmar military family members; and the largely unregulated U.S. trade in donated human bodies. Honors include a Loeb Award, Scripps Howard Award, Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics and Goldsmith Prize finalist, among others.

## Buddha statue's torso found at Cambodia's Angkor temple complex



GNS News Agency, March 18

Phnom Penh: Archaeologists in Cambodia are celebrating an unexpected find at the country's centuries-old Angkor temple complex: the torso of a statue of Buddha that matches a head found nearly a century ago at the same site. The torso, believed to be from the 12th or 13th century, was discovered during a dig by a team of Cambodian and Indian experts last month at Angkor's Ta Prohm temple. It was found along with 29 fragments that appeared to be part of the same statue. It stands at 3 3/4 feet tall and is in the Bayon art style, associated with Angkor's Bayon temple. The statue displayed carved jewellery and robe and sash, with a unique left-hand gesture across the chest - "an uncommon representation in Khmer (Cambodian) art."

The statue's presumed head was discovered at the same temple in 1927 during the French colonial era, and is currently kept at Cambodia's main National Museum in the capital Phnom Penh. The torso was found about 50 yards away from the site where the head was discovered, and that an optical electronic scan confirmed they were a match.

Now that only the right hand of the statue remains missing. The Angkor site sprawls across some 400 sq km, containing the ruins of capitals of various Cambodian empires from the 9th to the 15th centuries. Scholars consider it to be one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia.

## Russia, Ukraine trade overnight aerial attacks after Putin sets out conditions for ceasefire



GNS News Agency, March 18

Russia and Ukraine traded heavy aerial blows overnight, with both sides on Saturday (March 15, 2025) reporting more than 100 enemy drones over their respective territories. The attacks come less than 24 hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin met with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff to discuss details of the American proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in the war with Ukraine.

Mr. Putin told a press conference on Thursday (March 13, 2025) that he supported a truce in principle but set out a host of details that need to be clarified before it is agreed. Kyiv has already endorsed the truce proposal, although Ukrainian officials have publicly raised doubts as to whether Moscow will commit to such a deal. Speaking to reporters in Kyiv on Saturday (March 15, 2025), after virtual talks between Western allies hosted by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy voiced his country's support for the 30-day full ceasefire proposal to discuss a longer-term peace plan, but said Russia would attempt to derail talks with conditions and "buts".

Mr. Starmer has told allies to "keep the pressure" on Mr. Putin to back a ceasefire in Ukraine, hailing Ukraine as the "party of peace". Mr. Starmer said Mr. Putin will "sooner or later" have to "come to the table". In a statement earlier on Saturday (March 15, 2025), Mr. Zelenskyy had accused Moscow of building up forces along the border. "The build up of Russian forces indicates that Moscow intends to keep ignoring diplomacy. It is clear that Russia is prolonging the

war," he said. However, Mr. Zelenskyy stressed that if Russia did not agree with the U.S. proposal, there would be "specific, harsh and straightforward" response from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump. He also said that Kyiv's troops were maintaining their presence in Russia's Kursk region after Mr. Trump said on Friday (March 14, 2025) that "thousands" of Ukrainian troops had been surrounded by the Russian military. "The operation of our forces in the designated areas of the Kursk region continues," Mr. Zelenskyy said. "Our troops continue to hold back Russian and North Korean groupings in the Kursk region. There is no encirclement of our troops." U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke on Saturday (March 15, 2025) with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

In the call, they discussed next steps to follow up on recent meetings in Saudi Arabia and agreed to continue working towards restoring communication between the United States and Russia, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement. Ukraine's air force said on Saturday (March 15, 2025) that Russia had launched a barrage of 178 drones and two ballistic missiles over the country overnight. The attack was a mixture of Shahed-type drones and imitation drones designed to confuse air defences. Some 130 drones were shot down, while 38 more failed to reach their targets. Russia attacked energy facilities, causing significant damage, striking energy infrastructure in the Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa regions, Ukraine's private energy company DTEK said in a statement on Saturday (March 15, 2025). Some residents were left without electricity. "The damage is significant. Energy workers are already working on the ground. We are doing everything possible to restore power to homes as soon as possible," the energy firm said. Falling drone debris in Russia's Volgograd region sparked a fire in the Krasnoarmeysky district of the city, close to a Lukoil oil refinery, according to Governor Andrei Bocharov, who provided no further details. Nearby airports temporarily halted flights, local media outlets reported. No casualties were reported. The Volgograd refinery has been targeted by Kyiv's forces on several occasions since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than three years ago, most recently in a drone attack on February 15, 2025.

## Trump invokes 18th-century law to speed deportations, judge stalls it hours later

GNS News Agency, March 18

A federal judge on Saturday (March 16, 2025) barred the administration of President Donald Trump from deportations under an 18th-century law that Mr. Trump invoked just hours earlier, asserting the United States was being invaded by a Venezuelan gang and that he had new powers to remove its members from the country. James E. Boasberg, Chief Judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, said he needed to issue his order immediately because the government was already flying migrants it claimed were newly deportable under Trump's proclamation to El Salvador and Honduras to be incarcerated there.

"I do not believe I can wait any longer and am required to act," he said during a Saturday evening hearing in a lawsuit brought by the ACLU and Democracy Forward. "A brief delay in their removal does not cause the government any harm," Boasberg added, noting they remain in government custody. The ruling came hours after Mr. Trump claimed the Venezuelan gang, Tren de Aragua, was invading the United States and invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, a sweeping wartime authority that allows the president broader leeway on policy and executive action to speed up mass deportations of people — potentially pushing his promised crackdown on immigration into higher gear. Mr. Trump's declaration targets Tren de Aragua, contending it is a hostile force acting at the behest of Venezuela's government. The declaration comes the same day that a federal judge in Washington barred the administration from deporting five Venezuelans under the expected order, a hint at the legal battle brewing over Trump's move. The judge was scheduled to consider expanding the prohibition on deportation just minutes after Trump's afternoon announcement.

"Over the years, Venezuelan national and local authorities have ceded ever-greater control over their territories to transnational criminal organisations, including TdA," Mr. Trump's statement reads. "The result is a hybrid criminal state that is perpetrating an invasion of and predatory incursion into the United States, and which poses a substantial danger to the United States." The act was last used as part of the internment of Japanese-American civilians during World War II and has only been used two other times in American history, during World War I and the War of 1812. Trump argued in his declaration that it is justified because he contends the Tren de Aragua gang, a common talking point on the campaign trail, has ties to the regime of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

The Tren de Aragua gang originated in a prison in the South American country and accompanied an exodus of millions of Venezuelans, the overwhelming majority of whom were seeking better living conditions after their nation's economy came undone last decade. Trump and his allies

## U.S. sends alleged gang members to El Salvador despite court block

GNS News Agency, March 18

The United States has sent over 200 alleged members of a Venezuelan gang to be imprisoned in El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele said Sunday (March 16, 2025), after U.S. counterpart Donald Trump invoked wartime authorities to expel migrants. Mr. Trump signed an order invoking the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 on Friday, but it was not publicly announced until Saturday. The wartime authority allows a President to detain or deport citizens of an enemy nation, but has been invoked only three times before during major international conflicts, including World War I and II. Civil rights groups sued to block the order, with a federal judge on Saturday granting a temporary suspension of the order, apparently as planes were already headed to El Salvador. "Today, the first 238 members of the Venezuelan criminal organization, Tren de Aragua, arrived in our country," Mr. Bukele said Sunday morning on X, sharing a video of several men in handcuffs and shackles being transferred from a plane to a heavily guarded convoy. Mr. Bukele, in a meeting last month with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, had offered to house prisoners from the United States in his country. The iron-fisted leader has seen soaring popularity in his Latin American country for a successful crackdown on criminal groups, but has faced criticism from hu-

man rights groups. He said in his post that the alleged gang members had been sent to the country's maximum security Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT). Mr. Rubio said in a separate statement Sunday that "hundreds of violent criminals were sent out of our country." "I want to express my sincere gratitude to President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador for playing a pivotal role in this transfer," Mr. Rubio said. He added that as part of the transfer, the United States had also sent two "top leaders" of another gang, MS-13, to El Salvador, "plus 21 of its most wanted to face justice in their homeland." Mr. Trump, in his order, said Tren de Aragua is "conducting irregular warfare against the territory of the United States both directly and at the direction, clandestine or otherwise, of the Maduro regime." The statement gives Mr. Trump's Attorney General Pam Bondi 60 days to enact the ruling making all Tren de Aragua gang members "subject to immediate apprehension, detention and removal." The detention and expulsion order will apply to all Venezuelan Tren de Aragua members who are over 14 and not naturalized U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents. But the ACLU and an allied group, Democracy Forward, asked the U.S. District Court in Washington to bar the deportations — arguing that the 1798 act was not intended for use in peacetime. Judge James Boasberg on Saturday issued to a 14-day halt to any deportation under the new order.

It said district courts might then issue temporary restraining orders on actions such as drone strikes, sensitive intelligence operations, or terrorist captures or extraditions. The court "should halt that path in its tracks", the department argued. The unusual flurry of litigation highlights the controversial act, which could give Mr. Trump vast power to deport people in the country illegally. It could let him bypass some protections of normal criminal and immigration law to swiftly deport those his administration contends are members of the gang. The White House is preparing to move about 300 people it identifies as members of the gang to detention in El Salvador.



## Bangladesh HC upholds 20 students' death penalty for lynching university mate



GNS News Agency, March 18

The High Court on Sunday (March 16, 2025) upheld a trial court verdict handing down the death penalty to 20 students of an elite university in Dhaka for beating to death a fellow second-year student over his alleged political affiliation in 2019. Court officials said the two-Judge Bench of Justice A.K.M. Asaduzzaman and Justice Syed Enayet Hossain pronounced the verdict simultaneously wrapping up the hearing on the mandatory death reference and convicts' appeals against the lower court judgment. All the convicts, students of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), belonged to the now disbanded Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. They lynched Abrar Fahad, a second-year student

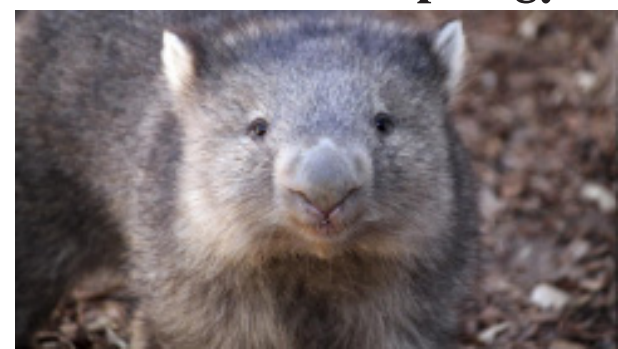
of BUET's electrical and electronics department on October 7, 2019 over a Facebook post by him criticising the government. Fahad's battered body was found in his university dormitory the next morning. Investigations later found that he was beaten to death with a cricket bat and other blunt objects for almost six hours by 25 fellow students. Both the BUET and BCL immediately expelled these students after Fahad's murder. A Dhaka court sentenced to death the 20 convicts on December 8, 2021 when Awami League was in power. Apart from upholding the death penalty for 20 students, "the court also upheld the life term imprisonment for other five convicts, who too were BUET students," Attorney General M. Asaduzzaman said. Fahad's father told reporters after the High Court verdict, "We are satisfied with the High Court's ruling. However, the verdict must be implemented swiftly." His brother Faiyaz said, "We did not expect to receive such a swift verdict from the High Court. We are satisfied with this ruling, although there are still many legal procedures remaining." Defence lawyer Azizur Rahman Dulu said the verdict disappointed him and added, "We will appeal to the Appellate Division, hoping to receive justice there." The convicts were tried in person but one of the death row inmates in the case, Muntasir Al Jamie, had fled a high-security prison at suburban Kashimur Central Jail last year. He fled the facility along with 86 other death row convicts, including some militants, on August 6, 2024, a day after the fall of Hasina's regime in a massive student-led mass protest taking advantage of the chaos.

## American influencer who caused outrage after snatching baby wombat in Australia issues apology

GNS News Agency, March 18

An American influencer who sparked outrage after posting a video of her snatching a baby wombat from its mother while in Australia apologised on Saturday (March 15, 2025), saying she had acted out of concern for the young animal's welfare. Australian authorities had threatened Sam Jones with deportation after she posted a video on her Instagram account of her running with a wombat joey in her hands from its mother on a roadside at night. "I ran, not to rip the joey away from its mother, but from fear she might attack me," Ms. Jones, who also uses the name Samantha Strable, posted on social media. "The snap judgement I made in these moments was never from a place of harm or stealing a joey," she added. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the video of the young wombat being grabbed was "just an outrage."

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said his department was investigating whether Jones had breached the terms of her visa before she left the country on Friday. "There's never been a better day to be a baby wombat in Australia," Burke said after she left Australia voluntarily. Mr. Burke said he did not expect Ms. Jones would apply for an Australian visa again. The animal appears to be a common wombat, also known as a bare-nosed wombat. It is a protected marsupial found only in Australia. Montana-based Jones claimed she became "extremely concerned" when she found the two wombats on a road not moving. "As wombats are so often hit on Australian roads, I stopped to ensure they got off the road safely and didn't get hit," Jones said. "However, as is seen from the video, when I walked up to them, the



joey did not move or run off. I was concerned it may have been sick or injured, and made a snap judgement to pick up the joey and see if that was the case," she added.

An unidentified man laughs as he films Jones saying: "I caught a baby wombat." They both note the mother's sounds of aggression. Animal welfare experts said Jones could have harmed the joey by dangling it by its two forelegs. Ms. Jones said she returned the joey to its mother and ensured they both left the road. "I have done a great deal of reflection on this situation and have realised that I did not handle this situation as best as I should have," she said. "I have learned from this situation, and am truly sorry for the distress I have caused," she added. Ms. Jones did not immediately respond on Saturday to The Associated Press's questions, including where and when the baby wombat was captured. A wombat expert said the video revealed the joey had the skin disease mange and would die without treatment.

## Who is Ranjani Srinivasan, the Indian scholar at Columbia University who self-deported after US visa revocation?



GNS News Agency, March 18

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has announced that an Indian doctoral student from Columbia University, whose visa was revoked for allegedly supporting Hamas, has voluntarily left the United States.

Who is Ranjani Srinivasan?

Ranjani Srinivasan, a citizen and national of India, entered the United States on a F-1 student visa as doctoral student in Urban Planning at Columbia University. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Srinivasan was involved in activities supporting Hamas, a designated terrorist organization. On March 5, 2025, the Department of State revoked her visa. The Department of Homeland Security has obtained video footage of her using the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Home App to self-deport on March 11. In a post on X, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem issued a statement regarding the deportation: "It is a privilege to be granted a visa to live and study in the United States of America. When you advocate for violence and terrorism, that privilege should be revoked and you should not be in this country."

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security had, on March 10, launched the CBP Home app with a self-deportation reporting feature for those illegally staying in the country. Individuals illegally staying in the country can use the CBP Home mobile phone application to submit their intent to depart the country. The CBP app gives such individuals the option to "leave now and self-deport, so they may still have the opportunity to return legally in the future and live the American dream. If they don't, we will find them, we will deport them, and they will never return", the Homeland Security Department said. Another student Leqaa Kordia, a Palestinian from West Bank, was arrested by immigration officers for overstaying her student visa. She was the sec-

ond person arrested who participated in Pro-Palestinian protests at Columbia University. The announcement comes after the recent arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist who helped lead student protests at the school and is facing deportation. Earlier this week, U.S. President Donald Trump heralded Mr. Khalil's arrest as the first "of many to come," vowing on social media to deport students he said engaged in "pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity."

## Pope Francis to miss Angelus delivery at St. Peter's Square since hospitalisation

GNS News Agency, March 18

Pope Francis continues his recovery from double pneumonia at Rome's Gemelli hospital with the Vatican expected to issue the traditional Sunday Angelus prayer as a written text for the fifth straight week.

The Pope typically delivers the Angelus from a window overlooking St. Peter's Square to the gathered faithful, who have grown more numerous due to the Jubilee year that Francis inaugurated in December. Along with a stop at St. Peter's to seek indulgences by walking through the basilica's Holy Door, pilgrims are now also adding a stop at Gemelli, a 15-minute train ride from the Vatican. Doctors this week said the 88-year-old pontiff was no longer in critical, life-threatening condition, but have continued to emphasize that his condition remained complex due to his age, lack of mobility and the loss of part of a lung as a young man.

Still, they are issuing fewer medical bulletins as the pontiff has been on an upward trajectory. An X-ray this week confirmed that the infection was clearing. Pope Francis has not been seen publicly since he was admitted to the hospital February 14 after a bout of bronchitis that made it difficult for him to speak. Doctors soon added a diagnosis of double pneumonia and a polymicrobial (bacterial, viral and fungal) infection.

The first three weeks of his hospitalization were marked by a rollercoaster of setbacks, including respiratory crises, mild kidney failure and a severe coughing fit.

Doctors in the most recent medical update on Saturday said they were working to reduce the pope's nighttime reliance on the non-invasive ventilation mask, which will allow his lungs to work more. Doctors underlined that while the Pope's condition is stable, he still requires hospitalization for both physical and respiratory therapy, which are "showing further gradual improvements", the Vatican said Saturday in the first medical update in three days.

# A gig that provides, and traps

## Environmental mapping reveals melioidosis in Odisha peak during monsoon

Globally, research on climate/environmentally driven infectious diseases has been largely biased towards vector-borne diseases like malaria, dengue, etc. Melioidosis is a bacterial infectious disease caused by *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, and is primarily acquired by inoculation, inhalation and/or ingestion of soil- and water-dwelling environmental saprophytes.

The disease is strongly influenced by environmental factors such as rainfall, temperature, and humidity. In 2016, The Lancet based on a prediction modelling study reported that about 1.65,000 people contract melioidosis annually worldwide, of which South Asia, including India, contributes to 44% of the global burden of melioidosis. The report attracted enormous scrutiny and attention by the medical fraternity, and microbiologists and clinicians in a few selected centres across India took cognisance of the situation to further unravel the mysterious disease.

There are many reasons why the melioidosis-causing bacteria, described over a hundred years ago, has continued to baffle the medical fraternity. First, the bacteria has a unique ability to cause a plethora of clinical manifestations ranging from a trivial skin infection to unresolved pneumonia and fulminant sepsis. With fatality as high as 50% in septicemic cases, melioidosis is a medical conundrum. Second, the *B. pseudomallei* bacteria requires prolonged incubation conditions, and can escape detection in inexperienced microbiology laboratories, as chances of misidentification with common bacteria like *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* are quite common.

Third, the treatment of melioidosis is quite different from other infectious diseases as it requires an initial intravenous therapy followed by a prolonged eradication phase of 12-20 weeks. This puts a significant emphasis on correct diagnosis, as inadequate treatment runs a risk of recurrence.

In India, melioidosis research has mainly focused on understanding the disease from the host perspective like presence of comorbidities like diabetes, chronic renal diseases etc and occupational factors like farming and behavioural factors like alcoholism, which increases the likelihood of diseases. In Odisha, melioidosis cases are being reported at AIIMS Bhubaneswar, with cases increasing over the years.

Odisha with vast agricultural areas and extreme weather events present ample opportunities for human exposure to the bacteria. Environmental conditions are primarily responsible for the survival of the melioidosis-causing bacteria, thus making a strong case for investigation. With this in mind, microbiologists at AIIMS Bhubaneswar and climate scientists at IIT Bhubaneswar have collaborated to identify and track the conditions that may facilitate the occurrence of melioidosis in Odisha.

To investigate this, the team tracked each reported disease case, correlating it with the patient's home location and possible incubation periods to identify the most common environmental conditions that may have facilitated disease transmission. The study focused on 144 disease cases over a nine-year period from 2015 to 2023. The team analysed meteorological parameters, including rainfall, temperature, humidity, and solar radiation, across more than 3,024 days during this period to identify the most favourable conditions for bacterial survival and, consequently, transmission. Using this information, the team created a map identifying potential regions for disease occurrence, using 10 km grid sizes to cover the entire State of Odisha.

show that most don't take leave, and sometimes work on all days of the week, ruining the work-life balance. The survey was done by Sivaranjani M., a final-year student of M.Sc. Counselling Psychology, University of Madras, and Harini S., Guest Lecturer, Department of Counselling Psychology of the university. While delivery work has provided unemployed youths with an opportunity to earn, not all of them are happy with their working conditions. They say they need to wrap up at least 20-25 orders in 10 hours to earn a meagre incentive of over ₹200 a day. Chithra, a food delivery worker in Coimbatore for three years, says that on days when she takes up around 25 orders, she cannot even use toilet facilities or fill up her water bottle at restaurants. "But you earn more during such busy days. The pressure to take more orders is mostly personal — having to clear debt, pursue studies, and manage a household." Extra distances driven because of temporary traffic diversions, jams, or protests are not factored into the travel allowance. Ajith Kumar, an app-dependent autorickshaw driver in Chennai, says the poor road conditions make it challenging to reach passengers quickly once a ride is booked. However, after covering one or two kilometres, passengers often cancel the ride, citing that the 'wait time was too long'. "These 2 km are covered in vain. In total, we drive about 10 km every day without earning any money," he adds.

Prem Kumar K., a bike-taxi driver, says long empty trips make rides unprofitable in Tiruchi. "I travel four kilometres to pick up a passenger who rides just 1 km. I earn ₹22. But I am not paid for 8 km of riding," he says. Many drivers The Hindu spoke to in various cities say the app fails to accurately reflect the distance covered to deliver what has been ordered. Though the system allows them to raise a ticket whenever there is an issue in the recorded distance, they often receive no response.

T. Vaitheeswaran, a 36-year-old delivery executive with 85% disability, says, "There are neither special IDs nor facilities for workers with disabilities." The cash on delivery system is particularly problematic for drivers like him. According to activists and policy experts, the lack of collective bargaining rights weakens gig workers' ability to negotiate fair wages, unionise, or get their working conditions improved. The platforms also have stringent rules. Food delivery workers are given bags to carry the food and T-shirts. "But we need to pay ₹2,000 for them, though we indirectly advertise for the company with those T-shirts and boxes as we move around the city," says one of them.

Many food delivery workers complain that they are penalised by the companies through hefty fines when eateries mix up the food items or fail to pack some items ordered. If such complaints are received more than 10 times, the company blocks their account and the workers have to pay a penalty to reopen it. Mr. Muthukumar of Tiruchi says he takes only two days off a month and recently lost four days of earnings under a new 10-minute delivery service that mandates Sunday shifts. Under this system, missing a day, even after working five days, cuts the entire week's pay.

Shalaka Chauhan, a labour policy researcher, says that though the Code on Social Security recognises gig and platform workers as distinct categories and mandates social security schemes for them, it lacks the understanding of the nature of work, the conditions, and the overall demands of the workers. "The enforcement mechanism of the code is weak and unclear and does not grant them 'employee' or 'formalised' status, which leaves them without access to minimum wages, regulated working hours, collective bargaining rights, protection from termination, and workplace safety protections," she says. Women gig workers face heightened risks of harassment and violence while

entering private space for work, especially beauty services. Platforms often lack robust mechanisms to address these safety issues or provide redress, Ms. Chauhan points out. Lack of maternity benefits also leaves women without adequate financial or job security during critical stages. In the Union Budget 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said gig workers employed by online platforms would be registered on the e-Shram portal and granted access to public health insurance under the PM Jan Arogya Yojana. While this is a welcome first step, there is still a long way to go, say experts.

Ms. Chauhan says platforms often fail to provide adequate climate-resilient measures like cooling gear, hydration stations, sheds, or paid sick leave during extreme weather events. "If the government doesn't put out an order, how will the corporates do it on their own," asks Mr. Anbarasan, the ride-hailing app driver in Chennai. In December 2023, the Tamil Nadu government established the Tamil Nadu Platform-Based Gig Workers' Welfare Board. Sources indicate that around 4,000 are registered, a small fraction of the more than 4.5 lakh delivery workers in the State. "We tried pushing for legislation, but we got a welfare board instead," says S. Ramakrishna, leader of the Tamil Nadu Food and Allied Delivery Personnel Union. For drivers, the agency to negotiate employment wages is non-existent. "I understand that asking passengers to pay an extra ₹100 for long distances may seem unfair, but the per-kilometre rate is extremely low. The company refuses to revise the rates, so how else are we supposed to offset the cost," asks Mr. Anbarasan. Mr. Ramakrishna explains that the temporary nature of the work makes it difficult to mobilise people. "In the first year after registering our union, we recruited around 2,000 members. However, when we asked them to renew their membership with a small fee after the first year, we found that 67% of them had left the gig workforce," he says. Anousha P., a member of the national coordination committee, Gig and Platform Services Workers Union, acknowledges that the temporary nature of the work and the fact that many workers are migrants pose challenges. However, she believes a union can aid in collective bargaining and mobilisation, as workers often lack a human recourse for complaints. It can also facilitate direct communication between employers and employees.

Presenting the Budget for 2025-26 on March 14, Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu announced a scheme to offer a ₹20,000 subsidy each to 2,000 registered gig workers for buying an e-scooter. Mr. Ajith Kumar, who has been in the gig workforce for four years, says, "We drive more than 120 kilometres a day. If it is an e-scooter, how will we recharge it?" The State government also plans to introduce a group insurance scheme, covering accidental death and disability, for around 1.5 lakh workers. S.A. Raman, Commissioner of Labour, Tamil Nadu, acknowledges that the on-boarding of gig workers into the Tamil Nadu Platform-Based Gig Workers' Welfare Board has been slow. He adds that a common issue the workers face while accessing schemes through welfare boards under the Labour Department is the OTP verification of their Aadhaar numbers. To address this, the authorities plan to register workers through a biometric system. The drive is to be launched soon. Experts, however, argue that at the State and national levels, regulations should mandate rest periods, health insurance, and workplace safety, with comprehensive benefits, including pensions, disability coverage, and maternity leave. For short-term workers, scaled-down protections, like proportional social security contributions, should apply. Platforms must also provide workers with accessible systems to report issues such as non-payment or unfair treatment, says Ms. Chauhan.



For 25-year-old M. Anbarasan, a driver for a ride-hailing app in Chennai, the day begins at 6 a.m. and ends at 10 p.m. He drives a rented autorickshaw, and has been on the job for four years. Every day, he faces poor roads, difficult customers, frustrating traffic, and the relentless heat or rain. Asked how he manages to cope, Mr. Anbarasan replies, "What choice do we have?" The 'choice' perfectly encapsulates the irony of gig work. While one could argue that gig work offers flexibility — something that has attracted many young and middle-aged individuals who struggle to find traditional employment — activists and workers point to the staggering lack of agency these 'delivery partners' have.

According to the Code on Social Security 2020, a gig worker broadly means someone engaged in work or a work arrangement outside the traditional employer-employee relationship and earns an income from such activities. For the purpose of this article, however, it refers to ride-hailing app drivers and food or grocery delivery workers. According to a 2022 report by NITI Aayog, there were more than 10 million gig workers in India, and the number may rise to 23.5 million by 2030. None of them, termed 'partners' by the contracting firms, is entitled to the social security benefits provided to formal employees.

"Six years ago, I earned ₹600 for 10 orders; now, it's just ₹250," says S. Muthukumar, a full-time worker for food delivery apps in Tiruchi for seven years. Riding 200 km daily, he makes ₹20,000-₹23,000 a month. But he spends ₹300 daily on fuel and ₹2,500 monthly on maintenance. The delivery workers also complain about long rides on bad roads. It takes its toll on their health. "Often, I have to put up with shoulder pain and backache. But I have to pull along to make ends meet. Other jobs would not fetch me even 20,000-₹30,000 a month," says a youth from Madurai.

For A. Priyalatha, a 35-year-old single mother from Laigudi in Tiruchi, food delivery is a lifeline as well as a risk. She works at an Anganwadi from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and gets busy delivering orders with her two-wheeler from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. She works 13-hour shifts on Sundays to support her family. Safety is a major concern. "Drunk customers abuse us, and returning late can be terrifying," she says, citing threats from stray dogs and intoxicated men. D. Chithra, of Tambaram, a driver of an online ride-hailing service, says men book the bikes meant only for women to travel with female two-wheeler drivers. "Many travel properly, but some indulge in indecent behaviour. I'm not scared of them, and I ask them not to sit too close. But having to do that every day is uncomfortable. I now call up the customer to check whether it is a woman before accepting the ride," she says.

Though some workers say they face no pressure over timely delivery, the nature of the job itself pushes them to complete each delivery as quickly as possible to receive the next as soon as they can. The preliminary results of a survey of 82 food and grocery delivery workers in Chennai

## A threat to all sexes



A reel that I saw triggered many questions within me. It portrays a woman who wants a girl child and is sad when she gives birth to a boy. However, after seeing news about girl children and women being raped, she feels relieved to have given birth to a boy.

This reel disturbed me as it raises numerous questions. Why does society reach the conclusion that a rape victim is always a woman? Why are rapists predominantly perceived as men? The truth is that rape victims include men. Studies show a good percentage of men above and below the age of 18 have been victims of sexual assault. Yet, most individuals are unaware that men can also be victims of rape. The societal image of men is that they should be "alpha males". Many stereotypes persist — "Boys don't cry", "Men are the ultimate protectors", and so on.

When male rape victims come forward, they are often

ignored or mocked as weak, and this societal behaviour hurts them even more. Whether the victim is male or female, society labels them as weak while the perpetrators go scot free. Many victims choose not to speak up because of the stigma and mistreatment they face. Parents, too, often prioritise the perceived dignity of their children, regardless of gender, over seeking justice. As a result, many rapists remain free while victims suffer in silence. We need to stand by the victims and support them in seeking justice to put the perpetrators behind bars. The stereotype that only men are rapists needs to be challenged, as the harsh truth is that male victims are those raped by men and women. There are helplines and communities dedicated to supporting those who have been sexually assaulted. While it is true that women experience a higher rate of sexual violence, we must not turn a blind eye to the suffering of male victims. Gender-based stereotypes must be broken. The issues faced by both men and women should be acknowledged transparently. A victim is a victim, let it be male, female, or non-binary. It is crucial to create an environment in which victims feel comfortable to file complaints rather than pitying themselves. This could prevent further assaults and protect others. When you learn that someone has been raped, support them mentally instead of pitying them. Be there for them, offer encouragement, and help them overcome their suffering. Everyone processes grievances differently. As such, if there is a victim, do not make them feel weak. Instead, show them that they are strong and resilient.

## The unending cycle of deprivation



Lubunga hesitated. He was clearly nervous and unsure. This was his first visit after appointment to the Ambassador's residence. In a Francophone country, he spoke remarkably good English.

Lubunga hesitated. He was clearly nervous and unsure. This was his first visit after appointment to the Ambassador's residence. In a Francophone country, he spoke remarkably good English. He was the office assistant and was tasked with supervising some work in India House, the residence of the Ambassador. My wife and I tried to put him at ease and had him come inside and seated in the waiting hall. My wife asked our domestic help to give him a glass of juice and some biscuits. "Are you sure ma'am that this will be correct as it is not mentioned in my contract," he asked surprise writ large on his face. I assured him that it's all right. Only after this did he start sipping the juice.

Such is the simplicity of the local Congolese that they can stump one with innocence and straightforwardness. The ravages of war, disease colonisation, and exploitation have wrought havoc in this hugely resource-rich country. I am saddened to note that the country is once again in the grip of war with nearly 3,000 deaths reported in less than two months. This was a country where six million people had died or been displaced or struck by diseases during the period from 1997 to 2003. Pogroms carried out by one ethnic group against another led to mass migration. Poverty worsened. Not much had changed during my nearly three-year tenure in the Congo. People were mired in abysmal poverty. There was no organised industry. Jobs were hardly there, and youngsters simply lazed around, sniffing anything from glue to drugs.

I remembered the Tarzan comics which had the jungles of Congo as a backdrop. I vividly recall the adventures of Tintin and V.S. Naipaul's A bend in the river set in Congo. While in that country, I visited the dense jungles

near the Virunga National Park, which was home to the extremely intelligent silver mane gorillas. In Kinshasa, I got to see cute and adorable bonobos which would clap their hands in delight at getting to munch some plantains. It is said that both the gorillas and bonobos have a remarkably similar genetic make-up (around 98%) to that of humans.

It is indeed a terrible pity that this country with its flora and fauna, its rich tribal culture, and its incredible resources ranging from copper and gold to tungsten, tantalum and tin (also often referred to as "conflict minerals") has always been seen as a "trophy" to be milked and exploited. Corruption is rampant and anyone with the scope of making some money does so with impunity.

I was once amazed and saddened to know that one of my domestic helps had lost his son to malaria (rampant throughout the country) and yet he showed no visible signs of despair or sadness. After completing the last rites of his son, when he got back to the residence, I asked him why he did not show any sadness at his loss.

His response, by and large, captured the sentiments and mindset of most Congolese. "Patron, that is all right. I have eight children and even the loss of one or two does not matter as there are fewer mouths to feed," he said.

The Congolese are remarkably skilful in their athleticism. Their sense of music is incredible. My domestic help picked up the tune of the Gayatri Mantra in a matter of a few days by just listening to the chant of my wife. Once he had picked the tune up, he was forever humming this hymn. One sincerely hopes for the sake of this country and its beleaguered citizens that things stabilise quickly and the local people find some food on their plates.

## Why has India got another tiger reserve?

On March 9, Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav announced that the Centre had declared the Madhav National Park in Madhya Pradesh as the country's 58th tiger reserve. This is the ninth tiger reserve in the State, the highest among the States. Maharashtra has six; Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka have five each.

What is the rationale behind setting up tiger reserves?

While tigers were historically abundant in India, hunting, poaching and the colonial exploitation of forests for timber started a precipitous decline in their numbers in the early 20th century. It was estimated in 1964 that there would have been around 40,000 tigers in the country at the turn of the 20th century. By the 1960s, these numbers were down to between 2,000 and 4,000, attributed to wanton hunting aided by a proliferation of gun licences issued in the years following 1947, improved access to the forest, clearing of large tracts of forests for various purposes, mushrooming of the new businesses of "Shikhar Companies" and fur trade.

Following an alarm raised by naturalists, the Indian Board for Wild Life (IBWL) — the earlier avatar of the National Board for Wild Life — in a meeting in New Delhi in July, 1969 recommended a total ban on the export of all wild cat skins, including tigers. The same year, the 10th Assembly of International Union for Conservation of Nature met in Delhi and included the tiger in its "Red Data Book" as an endangered species and adopted a resolution calling for a ban on the killing of tigers. When numbers further



dwindled to nearly 1,863, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi commissioned an 11-member Task Force to investigate the problem and prepare a project to preserve the tiger in the wild in India. In August 1972, the Task Force recommended eight tiger forests spread across India to be brought under the purview of 'Project Tiger', as this mission came to be called. On April 1, 1973, Project Tiger was inaugurated at Corbett tiger reserve with nine tiger reserves announced across India — Corbett (then in Uttar Pradesh, now in Uttarakhand), Palamau (then in Bihar, now in Jharkhand), Simlipal (Odisha), Sundarbans (West Bengal), Manas (Assam), Ranthambore (Rajasthan), Kanha (Madhya Pradesh), Melghat (Maharashtra) and Bandipur (Karnataka) — which were representative of the various tiger habitats in the country.



## No medicine, no care: Haemophilia patients struggle as budget cuts leave them without treatment



gling for treatment. A doctor from Sassoon Hospital highlighted the financial strain: "If we have to purchase these injectables for our patients, it would cost nearly Rs 6-7 crore per year, as each dose is priced between Rs 10,000 and Rs 20,000."

The decision to discontinue haemophilia treatment at KEM Hospital has further aggravated the crisis. "KEM plays a crucial role in treating severe haemophilia cases, and shutting down its government-supported treatment means abandoning patients," Kotecha warned. The society has urged the government to reverse this decision immediately and resume procurement of AHF to ensure uninterrupted treatment. The worsening crisis has also affected haemophilia treatment centres (HTCs) across the state. While the government previously committed to supplying AHF to three municipal haemophilia centres, the supply has been stalled for over two to three months. With no proper monitoring mechanism, patients are left in distress. Municipal hospitals, another key support system for haemophilia patients, remain critically underfunded. Despite government assurances, AHF stock has been depleted, and replenishment has been indefinitely delayed. "There is no clarity on when the next batch of life-saving drugs will arrive. In the meantime, patients continue to suffer," the society stated.

Repeated tender cancellations have only worsened the crisis. "Companies bid for tenders without maintaining stock, and the government allows it. As a result, patients are left without crucial medications," Kotecha said. The society has demanded stricter procurement policies, approval for Extended Half-Life Factor VIII, and the introduction of non-factor replacement therapy for inhibitor patients who currently have no treatment options.

Mumbai's lack of a Civil Hospital has worsened the crisis. "In a city this large, not having a dedicated Civil Hospital for haemophilia care is unacceptable," Kotecha said. He urged Maharashtra to adopt successful protocols from Gujarat, Goa, Telangana and Rajasthan. "These states have proven that structured systems work. Maharashtra must act before more lives are lost," he said. They have also warned that the state government is disregarding recommendations from its own technical committee, resulting in flawed policies that fail to meet patient needs.

Dr Mahendra Kendre, Assistant Director (Blood Cell) at the State's Directorate of Health Services, acknowledged the difficulties arising from the policy shift. "With funding redirected from medical colleges to district hospitals, maintaining consistent haemophilia care has become a challenge," he said. "KEM Hospital, a key treatment centre for haemophilia patients across Maharashtra, is no longer eligible for funding. We have raised this issue with the Centre and are working towards a solution."

For thousands of haemophilia patients in Maharashtra, every injury poses a life-threatening risk, yet access to treatment is vanishing. Budget cuts have left many—especially children—suffering prolonged bleeding, crippling joint pain, and the fear of fatal haemorrhages. With essential medications unavailable and emergency treatment centres shutting down, patients are being pushed to the brink.

"Maharashtra has no dedicated budget for haemophilia treatment. Patients are suffering due to funding gaps, and uninterrupted care has become a distant dream," said Jigar Kishore Kotecha, Secretary of the Haemophilia Society Mumbai Chapter. The National Health Mission (NHM) budget for haemophilia has been slashed from Rs 91 crore to just Rs 25-27 crore, severely restricting access to clotting factors. "We're not just asking for funds, we're asking for survival," he added. The society has written to the state health department last week. Despite a large portion of the Rs 91 crore budget remaining unspent, the State Health Coordinator has requested additional funds for Extended Half-Life Factor VIII while patients struggle with shortages of standard clotting factors. "Even NHM officials have questioned why new funds are being requested when allocated money remains unused. Patients are being neglected, and accountability is missing," the society said.

In Mumbai alone, nearly 950 registered haemophilia patients rely on KEM Hospital's International Treatment Centre (ITC) for Anti-Haemophilic Factors (AHF). However, procurement delays have caused a severe shortage, putting patients at risk of life-threatening bleeds. The Haemophilia Society Mumbai Chapter has demanded immediate action to restore AHF supply at KEM, warning that further delays will lead to medical emergencies. The crisis extends beyond Mumbai. Pune's Sassoon General Hospital and BJ Medical College, both crucial haemophilia treatment centres, are also facing shortages. NHM recently ceased funding for anti-haemophilia injections at these hospitals, shifting financial responsibility to the Department of Medical Education and Research (DMER). This abrupt change has left nearly 250 registered patients in Pune strug-

## What's the rice-roti link to heart attack? Know how excess carbs are adding to bad cholesterol

When you consume excess carbohydrates and simple sugars, your body converts them into triglycerides and stores them as fat in your body. Excess Carbs could affect the heart. When you consume excess carbohydrates and simple sugars, your body converts them into triglycerides and stores them as fat in your body.

In recent times, there has been a lot of talk about reducing oil consumption in our diet. But we need to reduce another macronutrient as much — carbohydrates. We suggest that the daily recommended intake of cooking oil for an adult should be four teaspoons or around 20 g. But what good is restricting oil when you don't restrict carbohydrates? Considering Indians have mostly sedentary lives, their overall calorie intake should be between 1,400 to 1,600 calories per day unless they have very high activity. So for your total calorie allowance during the day, reserve 30 per cent from carbohydrates, 15 to 20 per cent from fat, 30 to 40 per cent from protein and the remaining from fibre, which though low in calories can give you energy when it is fermented by gut bacteria. But a typical Indian diet has a high proportion of carbohydrates, between 50 and 70 per cent of daily carbohydrate allowance.

How do carbs impact the heart?

The logic is simple, excess calories get converted to fat. So even if you are controlling dietary fat intake, unless you stop limiting your carbs, your body fat is still high. When you consume excess carbohydrates and simple sugars, your body converts them into triglycerides and stores them as fat in your body. This process happens in the liver when you eat more calories than you burn. This fat is the reason for abdominal obesity. Triglycerides can trigger inflammation of your arteries that leads to plaque buildup or atherosclerosis. Excess carbs over time can lead to insulin resistance, when the body stops responding to insulin as it should. Chronic high blood sugar can promote inflammation in the body, which is again linked to atherosclerosis.

Triglycerides and high density lipoprotein (HDL) or good cholesterol are inversely related, so when the former



goes up in the body, the latter falls. Triglycerides also convert the large, buoyant and not so risky low density lipoprotein (LDL) or bad cholesterol molecules into small, dense and sticky ones harmful to the heart. Carbohydrates with a high glycaemic index, or the rate at which sugary foods break down in the body, like white bread and sugary drinks, are more likely to cause rapid blood sugar spikes and contribute to formation of "sticky" LDL. This can penetrate the lining of arteries easily, form plaques, harden arteries and trigger inflammation, even if the overall LDL cholesterol level seems normal in test reports. Soluble fibre blocks the LDL absorption in the body and that's why we insist on including fibre in your diet. Studies have shown that mortality is higher in those who consumed excess carbohydrates, beating saturated fats.

What should be your triglyceride limit?

A triglyceride level over 200 mg/dL raises your risk for a heart attack or stroke. You should try to keep your triglycerides below 100 mg/dL to reduce your risk of heart disease.

## Are your lights making you sick? The shocking truth about LEDs

Hyderabad: LED lighting has become the preferred choice for public places, households, and workplaces, offering convenience and efficiency. However, many overlook its potential impact on human health.

While research highlights the energy and cost efficiency of LEDs, experts warn that they may also be one of the most harmful sources of non-native electromagnetic field (EMF) radiation, posing serious long-term health risks. LEDs function as fluorescent lamps containing a blue LED, a driver LED, and a fluorescent sheet that converts blue light into longer wavelengths, creating a yellowish hue. The combination of blue and yellowish light results in



the white light perceived by the naked eye.

According to experts, prolonged exposure to high levels of blue light can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to eye strain, headaches, and hormonal imbalances.

Blue light wavelengths are also known to generate high levels of Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS), which contribute to increased cellular damage. Over time, this exposure may elevate the risk of chronic diseases while

reducing the body's ability to heal. Despite these biological risks, LED lighting has been mandated in the U.S. and much of Europe for "energy conservation," with little regard for its potential health hazards.

## Novel cancer therapy works for 73 per cent Indian patients in clinical trials: Why the Lancet report is significant



The clinical trial results of India's first CAR T-cell therapy, published in The Lancet, show that it worked for nearly 73 per cent of patients. These results come from the Phase I and II trials of the therapy, where researchers assess its safety and effectiveness against a given condition.

This is the first clinical trial of a CAR T-cell therapy from India to be published in an international journal. "This is really a world class innovation done within the country. The treatment has been found to be comparable to others approved globally and the cost is 1/20th of those therapies. This will improve access and affordability of such high-end cancer treatments," the Lancet commentary said.

CAR T-cell therapy, or chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy, trains the body's own immune cells to identify and destroy cancer cells. This treatment is designed for specific types of blood cancer and is given to patients whose cancer has either relapsed or not responded to first-line treatment. Based on unpublished, yet-to-be peer-reviewed results, India's drug regulator had granted approval for this therapy in 2023. It is now available at several hospitals across India, including Apollo, Fortis, Amrita and Max, among others.

Given that the treatment is novel and intended for cancer patients with no other options, the regulator allowed the company — a start-up incubated in IIT Bombay called ImmunoAct — to forgo a large Phase III clinical trial to demonstrate its efficacy in a broader population. However, the company must follow up with all patients who receive the therapy for 15 years. Along with a response rate of 73%, the study reported an average six months survival without any progression in acute lymphoblastic leukaemia patients and

four months in lymphoma patients.

Are there side-effects?

While the response rate was found to be similar to other therapies approved across the world, there was high incidence of haemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis — a serious but known complication of CAR T therapies where the immune cells get uncontrollably activated leading to hyperinflammation and organ damage. This complication was seen in 12% of the study participants, leading to the death of at least one of the patients. The study reported one other treatment-related death caused by bleeding in the lungs and multi-organ failure. The most common side effects reported by the study were anaemia in 61% participants, thrombocytopenia (low platelet count increasing the risk of bleeding) in 65% patients, neutropenia (low count of white blood cells called neutrophils) in 96% patients, and febrile neutropenia (neutropenia along with fever) in 47% of the patients. These were already extremely sick cancer patients who failed to respond to other treatments.

How does the therapy work?

For any CAR T-cell therapy, a patient's immune T-cells are collected by filtering their blood. These cells are then engineered in a lab to add receptors that can bind with cancer cells. These cells are then multiplied and infused in the patient. Usually, the cancer cells are adept at evading the unmodified T cells. The treatment developed in India is meant for patients with two types of blood cancers that affect the B cells — acute lymphoblastic leukemia and large B cell lymphomas.

Why is the treatment important?

Access to cutting-edge cancer treatment like CAR T-cell therapy remains restricted to a handful of countries owing to the technological challenges as well as the cost associated with the treatment. "The only countries or regions with access to at least one anti-CD19 CAR T-cell product are the USA, EU, UK, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Israel, Switzerland, Brazil, South Korea, Canada and China," the commentary said. The commentary states: "Approved CAR T-cell products cost US\$373,000-475,000, and clinical care and possible relocation expenses bring the total treatment cost to over US\$1,000,000... (This therapy) was marketed at a relatively low cost of approximately US\$30,000." This translates to around Rs 25 lakh.

## Husband turns kidney donor for wife without a blood match: How transplants are easier, give another shot at life for those with kidney failure

Dr Saroj Ghaskadbi, 65, has never felt a stronger bond with her husband Dr Surendra Ghaskadbi, who donated his kidney to her after their tissue matched perfectly. "I live to see another day, hear the sounds of nature and feel the warm sunlight coming in through the window," says Dr Saroj, a former Emeritus professor of molecular biology at Savitribai Phule Pune University. The couple now share more than walks and yoga, they follow a clean, healthy lifestyle.

It has been over ten years since Dr Surendra Ghaskadbi, a former Emeritus scientist with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), became a donor for his wife. Now both are healthy. On average, a kidney transplant from a living donor lasts 15-20 years, while a kidney from a deceased donor lasts 8-12 years. "Life expectancy after a kidney transplant is significantly improved compared to staying on dialysis, and some people live for many years with a transplanted kidney," says their nephrologist, Dr Bharat Shah, Director, Institute of Renal Sciences at Gleneagles Hospital, Mumbai. Donating a kidney doesn't shorten a donor's lifespan either. In fact, some studies suggest living kidney donors may even outlive non-donors because of stricter lifestyle discipline post-donation. Trouble started in 2008 when Dr Saroj experienced prolonged and heavy menstrual bleeding. An abdominal sonography showed that one of her kidneys had shrunk, the first signs of chronic kidney disease (CKD), a progressively degenerative condition. However her blood creatinine level — a key indicator of kidney health — was normal at the time (below 1.1 mg/dL). Despite keeping a close watch, her creatinine levels rose gradually, reaching 2.2 mg/dL by 2010. "However, I remained largely asymptomatic and continued with my daily routine without any significant health concerns. From early 2013, my creatinine levels began to rise more rapidly, reaching 6.0 mg/dL. That's when I first felt fatigue," says Dr Saroj. Dr Shah first tried the conventional approach, putting her on a low-protein diet, limited to rice and vegetables. To get essential amino acids, she had to take amino acid supplements everyday in the form of 16 tablets. Despite sticking to the format, Dr Saroj's creatinine levels kept rising, reaching a dangerous level of 10 mg/dL by December 2013. "My doctor told me dialysis would temporarily manage the symptoms of kidney failure but would not address the underlying problem or fully restore my quality of life. I was told a transplant offered a more sustainable solution and would help me return to a more normal and active life," she says.

CKD patients are no longer the exception. Around 2.5 lakh people are detected with the condition every year. "This is a lower estimate because many do not register for transplant. There are at least 20,000 patients with CKD who require a kidney transplant. CKD is directly related to the rising number of people with diabetes and hypertension. These two damage the kidneys gradually and people need to be aware of that. In serious cases, transplant is a good option as patients have an improved quality of life after it," says Dr Shah. Dr Saroj's mother was a natural match but her kidneys weren't functioning optimally and had to be ruled out. The waiting list for a kidney from a deceased donor was also long. Dr Surendra volunteered when Dr Shah said that a blood match wasn't necessary to donate a kidney.

Why kidneys are crucial Donating a kidney doesn't shorten a donor's lifespan.

Four days before the transplant, Dr Saroj had to undergo plasmapheresis, a process that filters the blood and removes harmful antibodies. "Since the couple's blood types were different, plasmapheresis before the transplant was essential. The husband's blood group is A Rh+ve and the wife's is O Rh+ve, so it was crucial to remove the antibodies against antigen A from her blood before the transplant. This step was vital to reduce the risk of organ rejection," says Dr Shah. Dr Surendra's kidney was removed using laparoscopic surgery, a minimally invasive technique that



reduces recovery time and minimizes post-operative discomfort.

Post-surgery, Dr Shah allowed Dr Saroj to choose the food she wanted most as she had been on a restricted diet for years. "I wanted a glass of milk and never forget its creamy taste," she says, adding she took measured steps towards normalcy. Hospital stays last about five days with patients needing to remain in intensive care for 24-48 hours. Most kidney recipients can resume a normal life within six to eight weeks, but they must take care not to endanger themselves or contract any infection. The body takes time to adjust to a new kidney and medications and some activities should be restricted initially. "Post-surgery care is the most important part of recovery and I kept to my room that was sanitised in the first few months," says Dr Saroj. When she resumed teaching, it was like she had found herself again. Dr Saroj cherishes her life even more, taking precautions like drinking boiled water and avoiding raw food outside home. Now the couple spreads awareness on transplantation as a solution for CKD and dispels fears around it. Dr Shah says every discussion on lifestyle management for diabetes, cholesterol and blood pressure should now include kidneys. "Exercise daily, eat healthy food and avoid taking unnecessary medication. Pill-popping without consulting a doctor damages kidneys the most. Annually, take a basic test to check serum creatinine levels and do an ultrasound of the kidneys. People with diabetes and hypertension should not skip these tests at all," he adds. Meanwhile the Ghaskadbis have found that it is never too late to take informed decisions or as Dr Saroj says, "lose faith in the power of love, support and resilience."

## Syneriq Global opens GCC for AI products, solutions and consulting services

Hyderabad: Syneriq Global opened its new AI products, solutions and consulting services GCC in Hyderabad, enabled by Mergen Global. The new state-of-the-art 40,000 sq ft facility, established with an investment of Rs 50 crore will strengthen Syneriq Global's position in the global digital sector.

Additionally, the group launched new AI platform, Zyrix, focused on driving innovation and advancing product engineering. A press release said, for more than 10 years, Syneriq Global has led digital transformation efforts, offering specialised services in product engineering, quality engineering, and expertise in Salesforce, ServiceNow, Databricks, and Snowflake. The company demonstrated its latest AI-powered digital platform and solutions (Zyrix, KITAP and DQ Gateway) developed by its innovation team in Hyderabad.

## US top market for India's aluminium, new tariffs threaten \$1-billion exports



The Donald Trump administration's decision to raise tariffs on aluminium imports from 10 to 25 per cent starting March 12 is set to hit Indian exporters, for whom the United States has become the largest international market for aluminium products. In 2023-24, India's aluminium exports to the US stood at \$946 million (Rs 7,831 crore), after exceeding \$1 billion in each of the previous two financial years, according to official trade data. Exports have surged in recent years, up from just \$350 million in 2016-17, when Trump began his first term as US President.

While India accounts for only 3 per cent of US aluminium imports, it is the largest supplier of aluminium conductors — stranded wires and cables used in electrical applications. India is also the world's second-largest aluminium producer after China, though much of its output is consumed domestically. As the new 25 per cent tariffs are significantly broader than those imposed in 2018, covering a wider range of semi-finished and finished aluminium products, it may disrupt the recent growth momentum of firms with strong export focus on the US. However, while some may see a hit in revenues, the overall impact is expected to be limited, as aluminium exports form a small share of business for most companies. The US, despite being India's top market, accounts for around 12 per cent of total aluminium exports. In 2024, the US imported nearly 38 per cent of aluminium conductors by weight from India, valued at \$130 million. In 2023, imports peaked at \$261 million, rising from just \$40 million in 2021, data from the United States International Trade Commission (USITC) showed.

Aluminium conductors, used in high- and medium-voltage cables, efficiently transmit power to the grid due to their lightweight and durable properties. Indian exporters have been keen on the US market, driven by rising demand in states like California, Texas, Nevada and Arizona, where infrastructure spending and grid modernisation efforts have

accelerated. In addition to aluminium conductors, the US also imports other products from India, including unwrought aluminium (\$185 million in 2024), nails and fasteners (\$107 million), and wire (\$98 million), USITC data showed. India also accounted for 26 per cent of all aluminium tube and pipe fittings imported into the US in 2024, valued at \$16 million.

In 2018, Trump had imposed 25 per cent tariffs on steel and 10 per cent tariffs on aluminium imports. "But exemptions and loopholes have permitted evasion of the tariffs and weakened the effectiveness of the programme," the White House said in a release on February 11, soon after Trump's second term started. "The countries of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, the European Union, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom had received exemptions, which prevented the tariffs from being effective," it said. India did not receive any exemptions, and export of aluminium conductors saw an increase despite tariffs. The impact of the latest tariffs is likely to be higher on the aluminium industry as compared to the steel industry.

The new 25% tariffs imposed by the US cover a wider range of semi-finished and finished aluminium products, along with derivative goods — from machinery components to knitting needles — posing challenges for India's fragmented downstream aluminium industry.

"India exports primary aluminium (around 40% of our domestic aluminium production is exported). India's direct aluminium exports to the US are around 6-8%. Consequently, the surge in tariff in the US is likely to have a relatively higher impact on export volumes and its realisations for Indian aluminium manufacturers than steel manufacturers," CareEdge Ratings noted in a recent analysis. The spillover effect on India's steel industry could be more pronounced if China, also hit by the latest tariffs, diverts excess steel into the Indian market.

"India's direct steel exports to the US are relatively low, constituting around 4% of its total exports in CY24. As a result, the direct impact on the steel sector's sales volume due to the imposition of tariffs by the US is not expected to be significant. However, there is likely to be an indirect effect on realisations if major steel exporters to the US divert some of their supplies to India," CareEdge said. While the US ranked only sixth among destinations for India's iron and steel exports — valued at \$476 million (Rs 3,935 crore) in 2023-24 — it was the largest market for iron and steel articles, with exports touching \$2.8 billion (Rs 23,128 crore) in the same period. As with aluminium, the Trump administration's latest tariffs extend beyond raw steel to include steel products as well.

## Women hold just 1 in 5 blue collar jobs, wage gap and career barriers persist: Study



Women in India's blue-collar workforce hold just one in five jobs, according to the latest survey by Indeed, a job matching and hiring platform. Despite increasing hiring intent, challenges ranging from wage disparities to poor sanitation continue to hold women back. According to the survey, while 73% of the surveyed employers said they hired women for blue-collar roles in 2024, female participation remained stagnant at 20% across the country.

The study covered 2,673 blue-collar women workers and 1,262 employers across 14 industries, including automobile, BFSI, e-commerce, travel & hospitality, FMCG, and manufacturing. The cities surveyed included Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Chandigarh, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai and Pune. More female presence in retail, pharma and construction industries such as retail (32%), healthcare and pharmaceuticals (32%), construction and real estate (30%), and travel and hospitality (28%) showed increase female representation. However, telecommunications, BFSI, and IT/ITeS lagged behind, with female participation below 10%.

During the survey, 78% of employers revealed plans to hire more women in blue-collar roles in 2025, an encouraging 5% increase in hiring intent compared to the 73% in 2024. Industries like retail (94%), healthcare and pharma (93%), and e-commerce (93%) showed the strongest demand. As per the survey, while more women are seeking blue-collar jobs primarily for financial independence

(70%), workplace realities remain harsh. It identified three major challenges that continue to push women to the margins. These were rigid work schedules, wage inequality and lack of upskilling opportunities. More than half of the surveyed women cited a lack of flexible shifts as a barrier. Several blue-collar jobs often demanded strict shift timings, making it difficult for women to balance work and personal responsibilities.

Around 42% of women reported being underpaid compared to their male counterparts, with fewer opportunities for promotions. In industries like automobile, FMCG, and travel & hospitality, more than half of the women surveyed felt their wages did not reflect their work. Every second woman surveyed preferred upskilling, but access to relevant training remained a challenge. Without structured learning pathways, career progression remains limited. The employer perspective on the other side, the employers cited a 'limited talent pool' (52%) and high attrition as major obstacles. While women workers' critical workplace expectations include healthcare benefits, such as insurance and paid medical leave, the employers reported rising healthcare costs as a challenge. Sashi Kumar, Head of Sales, Indeed India, said, "Our report highlights a pressing reality — 71% of women in blue-collar jobs feel undervalued. Not because they lack ambition, but because job opportunities and growth pathways are limited. While businesses are making efforts to hire more women, true progress depends on better retention strategies, career growth opportunities, and policies that ensure financial security, flexibility, and healthcare. Employers must invest in skilling, mentorship, and leadership pipelines tailored for blue-collar women. Increasing women's participation today is more than just about diversity, it's an economic necessity." According to another survey by Indeed, India's blue-collar sector is expected to see more than 2 million job seekers in 2025. According to the company, "The real measure of progress will not just be how many women join the workforce, but how industries take decisive action to break systemic barriers, ensure fair wages, and provide women with the flexibility and career mobility they need to thrive."

## Despite the market volatility, inflows into mutual fund beat bank FDs

Despite volatility in the equity market, mutual fund inflows over the past 11 months have far exceeded bank deposits. In the last 11 months of the current fiscal, growth in banks' time (fixed) deposits slowed to 9.2% (or up by ₹17.29-lakh crore) against 11.2% (₹18.69-lakh crore) in the year ago period, per RBI data. In the same period, inflows into mutual funds were up 90% at ₹9.79-lakh crore (₹5.14-lakh crore), according to the Association of Mutual Funds in India data. In fact, the growth in overall bank deposit slowed compared to that of mutual funds. Bank deposits, including savings bank and time deposits, have grown 8% year-on-year to ₹231-lakh crore against ₹213-lakh crore as at February-end 2024.

Sunil Subramaniam, CEO of an independent think-tank Sense and Simplicity, said mutual funds will continue to attract more money than bank deposit as young investors are willing to take the additional risk for creating long-term wealth. Even after all the noise and the recent fall in equity markets, the three-year MF equity returns are positive and investors are confident of beating market volatility through SIPs, he said.

Also, the new tax regime has some what eased investor concern on tax implications and made young investors bet big on mutual funds. The new tax regime has taken away the 80C tax benefit and made 5-year bank FDs unattractive. While Equity Linked Savings Scheme (ELSS) has also become less attractive under the new tax regime, people are no longer considering MFs from a tax savings



perspective alone, said Subramaniam. Despite having the same taxation rate, debt MFs are better than savings and FDs because tax is payable only on redemption. Whereas in the case of FDs, the accrued income is taxed and TDS deducted every year, he added. The emergence of low risk equity taxation products such as arbitrage, equity savings schemes and balanced advantage have also eaten into bank deposits. Ankit Shah, an individual financial advisor, said that unlike one-size-fits-all strategy of bank FDs, the MF industry has products that suit every investors risk appetite, and technology has played a major role in taking MFs to even smaller towns. Distributors have done a commendable job in making investors understand MF investments are subject to market risks, he added.

## 40km in 11 minutes: Virgin Atlantic, Joby partner for air taxis in UK

British airline Virgin Atlantic and commuter aviation startup Joby Aviation have partnered to offer seamless booking and quicker travel to and from airports in the UK using air taxis. The country's government is yet to approve air taxis. "We are going to launch it together in the UK as soon as we practically can," Virgin Atlantic CEO Shai Weiss said in an interview, Bloomberg reported. "The simple way of thinking about it is: Canary Wharf to New York," he said, referring to the London district that's home to major financial institutions.

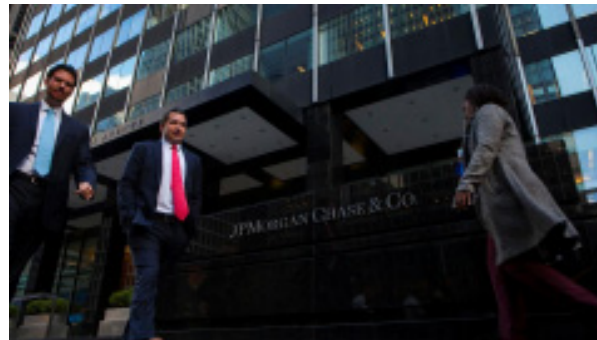
In London, Job Aviation said it is planning 11-minute short trips connecting London Heathrow Airport and Canary Wharf, at a distance of about 40 kilometres from one another, at prices "comparable with existing premium ground risharing options". Joby is one of several manufacturers of electric vertical takeoff and landing, or eVTOL, aircraft designed to fly customers on short commuter journeys. It plans to start its first commercial service operations in Dubai later this year or early in 2026. The company expects concurrent validation by the UK's Civil Aviation Authority of its application for certification with the US Federal Aviation Administration, which is currently pending.

One of the issues is securing take-off and landing sites, or vertiports. Joby will own and operate some of these, but



also is looking to municipalities and third-party investors to help build out the infrastructure. "That may be the longest-lead item in getting this service launched, just like it is today in Dubai," Joe Ben Bevirt, Joby's chief executive officer, said in the joint interview. Commercial terms of the Virgin partnership with Joby were not disclosed. Delta Air Lines Inc, which owns stakes in both Virgin Atlantic and Joby, has a similar partnership with the Santa Cruz, California-based air taxi company. Virgin had announced a partnership in 2021 with rival eVTOL startup Vertical Aerospace Ltd., but Weiss said that ended last year.

## JPMorgan engineers' efficiency jumps as much as 20% from using coding assistant



Tens of thousands of JPMorgan Chase software engineers increased their productivity 10% to 20% by using a coding assistant tool developed by the bank, its global chief information officer Lori Beer said. The gains present "a great

opportunity" for the lender to assign its engineers to other projects, Beer told Reuters ahead of DevUp, an internal conference hosted by JPMorgan, bringing together its top engineers in India this year. The largest lender in the U.S. had a technology budget of \$17 billion for 2024. Its tech workforce of 63,000 employees, with a third of them based in India, represents about 21% of its global headcount. The efficiency gains from the coding assistant will also allow JPMorgan's engineers to devote more time to high-value projects focusing on artificial intelligence and data, Beer said. The bank already has about 450 potential cases for which it could use AI, and CEO Jamie Dimon expects those potential applications to surge to 1,000 by next year. The bank is focused on areas where it can use AI to make money for its businesses, Beer said. "I wouldn't say success is if we get 1,000 done," she said. "Success is if we continue to articulate that it's not just an incremental shift with AI."

## Implement dynamic pricing for AC classes, review fares to align with cost: House panel to Railways

GNS News Agency, March 18

While reiterating its earlier recommendation to increase passenger revenues by reviewing AC class fares, the parliamentary standing committee on Railways has said that the government should implement a dynamic pricing model for AC classes and premium trains. It must also ensure affordability for low-income passengers to balance "social obligations", the committee said. It added that a comprehensive fare review should be undertaken from time-to-time to align AC class fares with costs and ensure gradual, affordable adjustments for non-AC classes.

"The committee, therefore, recommends that Indian Railways should adopt a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy to enhance net revenue while ensuring affordability for low-income passengers. This includes implementing dynamic pricing models for AC classes and premium trains, regularly reviewing flexi-fare schemes based on demand, and expanding non-fare revenue through initiatives like e-auction policies, advertising, and commercial utilisation of railway assets," said the parliamentary committee in its report on action taken by Government on 'Demands for Grants (2024-25) of the Ministry of Railways', which was presented in the Lok Sabha on March 10, 2025. The committee added: "The Committee also feels that in order to balance social obligations, Indian Railways should continue targeted subsidies for suburban and non-AC travel. However, operational efficiency must be improved through accelerated electrification and energy efficient technologies."

The standing committee on Railways gave similar recommendations in its first report on Demands for Grants (2024-25) of the Ministry of Railways in December 2024. As reported by The Indian Express on February 24, in the five years since the Covid-19 pandemic, the revenues from AC class and all Second Class tickets including Sleeper Class (which offer a berth), have more or less flipped. In 2019-20, revenues from passengers travelling in AC (AC First Class, AC 2-Tier, AC 3-Tier and AC Chair Car), were just over one-third or 36 per cent of the total passenger revenues of Rs 50,669 crore. Passengers travelling by non-AC (excluding sub-urban) accounted for a bulk of 58 per cent revenues. This trend has almost reversed now. In 2024-25, those travelling by AC classes in the Railways are expected to have contributed 54 per cent of total passenger revenues of Rs 80,000 crore. Those in non-AC classes (excluding suburban) are estimated to have contributed just 41 per cent of Railways' passenger revenues. According to an analysis of Budget documents by AC 3-tier witnessed a fundamental transformation in five years by displacing the sleeper class



to become the highest revenue-generating class of the Indian Railways.

The number of passengers travelling by AC 3-tier is just 26 crore, or 3.5 per cent of the total 727 crore passengers (including suburban), but generates Rs 30,089 crore or 38 per cent of the Rs 80,000 crore total passenger revenues estimated in 2024-25. The standing committee also noted that the passenger segment of the Indian Railways is heavily subsidised since suburban services recover only 30 per cent of the cost, non-AC travel recovers 39 per cent of the cost and AC travel generates only a marginal surplus of 3.5 per cent. In their action-taken reply, the Ministry of Railways said that the net revenue of the Indian Railways was negative in 2021-22 and it improved to Rs 3,260 crore in 2023-24. The Indian Railways' net revenue is expected to remain marginal for financial year 2024-25 (FY25) also since it has been revised downward to just Rs 1,341 crore and the projection for financial year FY26 is Rs 3,041 crore.

On the question of steps taken to increase Indian Railways' passenger revenues, the ministry said that the introduction of premium trains such as Vande Bharat Express and Amrit Bharat trains, rationalisation of flexi-fare schemes, and the expansion of freight and non-fare revenues through policies such as the Gati Shakti cargo terminal and e-auction for commercial contracts, etc., are among the initiatives to maximise traffic receipt. The ministry also said that the fares across travel classes were reviewed in 2020 for non-suburban trains, where 1 paisa per km was increased in ordinary non-AC classes and 2 paisa per km was hiked in Mail/Express non-AC classes. Fare for AC Classes was raised by 4 paisa per km, according to the railway ministry. Budget projections for FY26 indicate passenger revenues of Rs 92,800 crore, significantly lower than the estimated freight revenue of Rs 1,88,000 crore.

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

GNS News Agency, March 18

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 a 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.

# PV Sindhu and Datta Sai Venkata interview – ‘Building an academy is her dream’

GNS News Agency, March 18

Marriages are made in heaven, the cliché goes. In PV Sindhu and Datta Sai Venkata's case, it happened a few thousand miles below, in an airplane. "We were family friends, not super close but well acquainted," says Datta. "Then in December 2022 or January 2023, we started talking. We actually 're-met', on a flight. She was travelling for an event and I, on work." They got talking and decided to take the next step. "It took a year, it wasn't a one-month decision," adds Datta. "He is very passionate about every sport he follows. Since he married a badminton player, he's deeply into badminton now, which is good," says Sindhu, as she breaks into a smile. "He provides a lot of input from his perspective. He doesn't hold back and wears his heart on his sleeve. It's good to have married someone outside the sport who also knows a lot about it. He doesn't get bored. I'm really lucky that way."

It is not easy for a female athlete in India to get married while still being an active professional, especially if she's marrying someone outside the sport. There are, of course, examples of athletes marrying each other and that comes with a level of understanding that their careers will still be a priority. Post-Paris Olympics, Sindhu took a break from the sport to assess her future. Datta says she felt the need for stability in her personal life to continue performing well on the professional front. "Having stability around her helps take her mind off difficult decisions. She needs to focus on her performance. In the recent past, I have started taking all strategic calls for team PVS while all professional calls are taken by the coach," says Datta.

Datta, 30, might be from 'outside' badminton but he is a sports nerd. His love for sports started with following Formula 1 with his father. His uncle then introduced him to cricket; he remembers watching the 2003 World Cup. "I am a purist, so I loved Dravid but you can't not be a Sachin fan." Currently, he follows at least eight different sports. "I am a big Manchester United fan, sadly things are not good at the moment," he chuckles. At a professional level, Datta also had the chance to dabble in the private sports industry around 2017-18 as a part of JSW Sports. He has been an

executive director at Posidex (a data management tech enterprise) in Hyderabad since December 2019, and is all about Team Sindhu. It took him a while to warm up to badminton. "My dad played a lot at a club in Mysore. I remember the biggest argument between my parents was that my dad loved his badminton more than my mom. For me, it took a while because you need a hero to fall in love with the sport. Indian badminton didn't have that initially," says Datta. He then discusses Saina Nehwal being the 'quintessential trailblazer' and that 'she doesn't always get the respect she deserves'. As far as Sindhu is concerned, he vividly recalls the Rio 2016 final against Spain's Carolina Marin. He chuckles at how both the shortest and longest finals of her career came from playing against her good friend Nozomi Okuhara of Japan. He remembers meeting Sindhu after Rio 2016: "She told me, 'Yeah, I have won silvers and bronzes, but I need to win a goddamn gold too'. Then, in 2019 World Championships, she changed that, and how."

In the Indian Olympic sports landscape, Sindhu has always been cut from a different cloth. She tasted success at the highest level of her sport very young. She brought her A-game to the big events. She was a natural athlete who was destined to take up sport as her career and rarely ever complained publicly about the road to the top. While playing a sport where in-competition earnings are minimal, she (and her team over the years) carefully constructed her brand off the courts, which has seen her consistently feature among the top-earning female athletes globally. She won a World Championship and an Olympic medal on her debut and didn't stop there. In a country where such high-level success is both rare and late, Sindhu made it frequent and early. As she starts writing another chapter in her career — closer to the prologue than the foreword — Sindhu is aiming differently. The desire to win is there, of course, but the focus now is more on picking and choosing the right tournaments, the big ones, and mainly keeping her body healthy. After a few changes in the last couple of years, 2025 began with another new coach in her corner — Indonesia's Irwansyah — who she hopes can help unlock

new facets of her game. And a little bit behind the coaching chair, Datta is another addition to her team, taking up front-row seats for her matches — he was at the Syed Modi International tournament in Lucknow last year when Sindhu won, on the down-low before the wedding announcement was made.

With Datta's inputs, by the end of next year, Sindhu hopes to have her academy up and running in Visakhapatnam; work is already under way. "Badminton has taught me a lot and I want to give back," says Sindhu. "When I thought about constructing an academy, I wanted something world-class with good infrastructure. I have a lot of ideas about coaching, mindset and different strategies. It's important to have more Sindhus out there, so I will do my bit for that." "The academy is her dream," Datta chimes in. "She told me very clearly on day one. 'I want to produce talent, not make money on this'. So I want to work with partners, subsidise and provide things for free to set up a high-performance academy where kids come to become players. We are not trying to make it a financial model. We're blessed to have partners enabling this, so it can be free for kids."

The centrepiece of the plan, Datta says, is the Sindhu Mentorship Programme, designed for the top eight girls in the country, covering all costs, including stay, food, nutrition and travel. Sindhu and Datta will handle raising the money for about 15 tournaments a year. "We don't want to draw a single rupee from the academy, we want kids to benefit. We also aim to bring about three foreign coaches. One doubles coach, one singles coach and some sort of a head coach." Datta talks about a few talented youngsters he has had the chance to observe from close quarters, lamenting that sometimes India's juniors get exposed for lacking in some fundamental aspects of the sport. One kid is so good with the basics, but just the backhand is lacking. Another kid has all the shots in the book but lacks the temperament sometimes to win longer rallies. "When you can win a point after 40 shots, why rush into it at the 7th or 8th? Anyway, I will stop here, else I will continue talking for a long time. Over to Sindhu."



It helped Sindhu that success came early. At 18, on her World Championships debut, she navigated a tough draw beating two top Chinese players on the way to a bronze medal. That run in Guangzhou gave her the belief that she could do more. "It was a huge reward, especially at that point in my career. It was a starting point where I realised I could achieve more. That's where it all began, it set the stage for my future success," says Sindhu. That is where the void of the next generation is being felt. Sindhu has won five World Championship medals, including the famous gold at Basel 2019, but after her and Saina Nehwal, no other women's singles player has managed to impress at the major tournament. At 29, Sindhu continues to be the poster athlete for India in a discipline where success usually comes early and weary bodies struggle.

"Everyone progresses differently, so I will not comment on the age factor," Sindhu says, when asked if it is worrying for Indian women's singles that teenagers haven't hit the level she managed. "I don't say you have to win at a young age, but if you do, it's important to maintain it. It shouldn't be a one-off. They need to work hard and have the right guidance. It's important to improve, this is the age for it, keep growing, work hard. There's a bit of a gap, for sure, but I see potential."

## Nat Sciver-Brunt wins Orange Cap with 523 runs



GNS News Agency, March 18

WPL 2025 Orange Cap List, Most Runs in Women's Premier League 2025: The third edition of the Women's Premier League ended with season one champion Mumbai Indians claiming their second title in three seasons after beating Delhi Capitals by eight runs in the final of WPL 2025 at the Brabourne Stadium in Mumbai. Nat Sciver-Brunt was tremendous with both bat and ball. The Englishwoman also contributed in the final by scoring a crucial 30 runs with the bat before picking three big wickets. She is also the Orange Cap holder with 523 runs in 10 matches at an average of 65.37 in addition to her 12 scalps which puts her fourth in the list of highest wicket-takers in this season. Sciver-Brunt is also the Most Valuable Player in WPL 2025. In Hayley Matthews and Harmanpreet Kaur, MI have two more representatives in the highest run-scoring chart. Matthews is third with 307 while Harmanpreet has scored 302. Silver lining Ellyse Perry of the defending Champion, Royal Challengers Bengaluru — which had a poor outing in WPL 2025 and finished second last in the table — sits second with 372 runs in eight matches.

Delhi, too, have two players in the runs leaderboard. Opener Shafali Verma on fourth (304) and skipper Meg Lanning is in sixth with 276 runs. Here is the list of players with the most runs in the Women's Premier League 2025:

**'I will find my process, rhythm as soon as I can': Karun Nair hopes to carry forward domestic form into IPL for Delhi Capitals**

GNS News Agency, March 18

After a fantastic domestic season where he helped Vidarbha win the Ranji Trophy, batter Karun Nair said that he wants to replicate that success and help Delhi Capitals win the Indian Premier League, which is set to start in less than a week. "I am really happy to back at the Delhi Capitals, I am excited to join the side and to play with everyone. I will treat the game as important as the last one. I didn't change much at all, I just trusted the process and kept it going throughout the tournament and that's what was planned for this season," Nair said during an interaction with media.

"I will find my process, my rhythm as soon as I can and I will like to start well early and will try to get better as the tournament goes on. The only thing that I have done is playing according to the situation, added a few shots and built the confidence to execute them when needed. I also now try to stay relaxed," he added. Nair smashed 779 runs in nine games, laced with five centuries and one fifty at a mind-boggling average of 389.50 and carried the momentum into red-ball cricket. The unbeaten 132 on the fourth day of the Ranji Trophy final against Kerala was his fourth ton in the tournament, where he amassed 860 runs at 57.33. He was roped in by Delhi Capitals for Rs 50 lakh for the upcoming season of IPL.

The Capitals, who will be led by Axar Patel after former skipper Rishabh Pant was released, will start their IPL campaign against Lucknow Super Giants on March 24.

Speaking about his new captain, Nair said, "Axar has been around for a long time now and he is going to be a great captain. He is someone who knows all the facets of the game and understands everyone's situation and roles. He will be versatile like he is always, looking forward to meet him and know a lot of things."

## 'If I score more goals than Cristiano Ronaldo, it doesn't mean I'm bigger': Kylian Mbappe

GNS News Agency, March 18

After a sedate start to his Real Madrid season, Kylian Mbappe has rediscovered his goal scoring touch, netting 31 goals in all competitions for the club. With at least 12 games remaining in the season, he is touted to surpass his idol Cristiano Ronaldo's debut season haul of 33 strikes. But the Frenchman shies away from comparisons with the Portuguese legend. "If I score more goals than Ronaldo and Cristiano it doesn't mean that I am better, just that my first season is better. Scoring goals is important, but it is even more so if we win La Liga, the Champions League and the Copa del Rey," he told reporters after securing



a brace that notched three points against a resilient Villarreal, whom they beat 2-1 after conceding an early goal.

"The adaptation period for me has ended and now I have to show my quality. I want to play well here, I want to make a mark on the season," he had said earlier. He already bettered the record set by Brazil's Ronaldo (30), and could even eclipse the

all-time debut-season record set by Chilean Ivan Zamorano (37 in 1992-1993). Again, he laughed off the likening. "They are legends who marked eras with the club," he would say. He would be happier that he has struck a rich vein of form that has taken his club to the top of the pile, clear of rivals Barcelona by three points, though the latter has two games in games. He, though,

was furious at Arda Guler, who did not pass to him for what could have been his third Madrid hat-trick later in the game. It could have given Madrid more breathing space as Villarreal threatened to claw back into the game, only to be saved by the goalkeeper Thibault Courtois, who made a total of nine saves. Mbappe, at only, is a long way from scaling the stratospheric peaks of Cristiano Ronaldo in the iconic white shirt (422 goals, 116 assists, and 14 major trophies). But manager Carlo Ancelotti believes he could. He has the quality to reach his (Ronaldo's) numbers, but he has to work, because Cristiano set the bar very high. He is so excited to play here, and he can reach Cristiano's level."

## Delhi Capitals Head Coach emphasises 'no mental block' after losing third WPL final in a row

GNS News Agency, March 18

On Saturday Mumbai Indians clinched their second Women's Premier League title and on the contrary, Meg Lanning's Delhi Capitals have now lost the third WPL final in a row. However, Head Coach Jonathan Batty would emphasize that there is no mental blockage and would take a more jovial route in the press conference after the loss and would give the reason for the defeat as "the opposition got more runs than we did!"

"The players were up for it, they were fine and I think there was no mental block at all. But it's just full credit to the opposition, they outplayed us and deserved to win the game" Batty would say. "It will take time to think through what went wrong," Batty said. "Two great quality teams going head-to-head and it was such a tight game. To lose by eight runs, which is two boundaries, we lost it by two balls in the end. That game can go either way from there. I don't think there was a common denominator. You always have a side that wins and a side that loses, and we have been on the losing side three times, unfortunately." Winning the toss and opting to bowl first Delhi did manage to restrict Mumbai for 149 runs on a good batting wicket however, in the chase they



fumbled and could only manage 141/9 at the end of 20 overs. Though Delhi Capitals have not won silverware yet they have been able to manage to top the league stage group in all the three WPL seasons thus far. "To finish top of the table three years running, we have played some amazing cricket. You don't get over the line until [you win] the final. Everyone's hurting a huge amount at the moment. I think 99% of the time you back yourself to chase 150 on that wicket there. Big match finals, maybe the occasion got to the players."

## Virat Kohli takes a swipe at BCCI for not allowing families on tour: 'I don't want to go to my room and just sit alone and sulk'

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Virat Kohli plays a shot during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri) Virat Kohli plays a shot during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan

Virat Kohli on Saturday pointed out the importance of having family on the long tours and reasoned how it helps players to deal with the tough and intense days on the field. After India's 1-3 Test series defeat against Australia, a BCCI directive was issued which curtailed the family time of players for no longer than 14 days on tours exceeding 45 days. The new rules were drafted after India's horror tour of Australia, leading to speculation about lack of discipline and

cohesion in the dressing room. "The role of family is very difficult to explain to people... how grounding it is to just come back to your family every time you have something which is intense, which happens on the outside," Virat Kohli said during RCB's Innovation Lab summit in Bengaluru on Saturday. "I don't think people have an understanding of what value it brings." Kohli said having the family around would help a player to recover from on-field disappointments that much quicker. "I don't want to go to my room and just sit alone and sulk. I want to be able to be normal. Then you can really treat your game as something that is a responsibility." "Not in a vague sense, but in a very real way that you finish your commitment and then you come back to your house, you're with family, and absolutely normalcy in your house and normal family life goes on." "So, for me, that is absolutely a day of immense pleasure."

## 'Today is the last time that we'll play a game before 72 hours': Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti slams LaLiga



GNS News Agency, March 18

With Real Madrid having to play a LaLiga match against Villarreal on Saturday getting just a 66-hour rest period after their gruelling Champions League pre-quarterfinal clash against Atletico Madrid on Wednesday which went to a penalty shootout, manager Carlo Ancelotti said that this was the last time the Los Blancos play a match without having a 72-hour rest period. "I think today is the last time that we'll play a game before 72 hours," he said. "We won't do it again, without 72 hours of rest. We asked LaLiga to change the time of the game twice, and they didn't do anything. But this is the last time. I don't understand it. The minimum is 72 hours, money, television rights are prioritised, not the players' recovery. Money is prioritised, not the players' rest," Ancelotti said in a press conference after the Villarreal match which Real won 2-1. Madrid's game at Villarreal game kicked off at 6:30 p.m. local time (1730 GMT) on Saturday. Madrid had played a Champions League game against Atletico on Wednesday that started at 9:00 p.m. and lasted 120 minutes plus a penalty shootout.

In Saturday's match, Kylian Mbappe scored twice to help Real Madrid fight back to beat Villarreal and move provisionally top of the LaLiga standings. The hosts opened the scoring in the seventh minute when Alex Baena's corner was deflected by Aurelien Tchouameni, allowing Juan Foyth to score from close range. Real Madrid levelled 10 minutes later when Mbappe pounced on Brahim Diaz's blocked shot and the ball landed at his feet for a close-range finish. Six minutes later, the French international scored his 20th league goal of the season, latching on to Lucas Vazquez's through ball and slotting home.

## 'You have only one star': Former Pakistan player attacks PCB over treatment of player

GNS News Agency, March 18

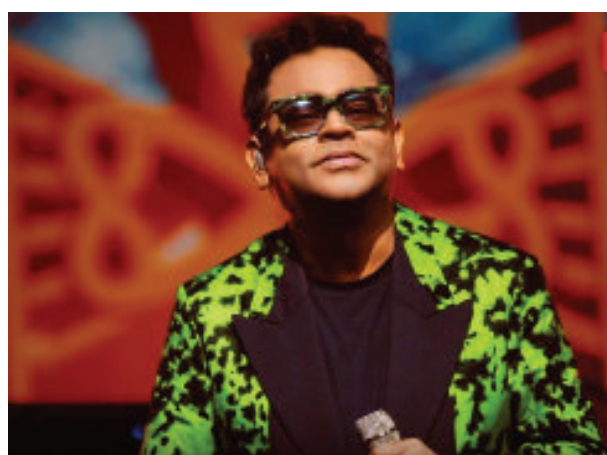
Former Pakistan spinner Saeed Ajmal called out the Pakistan Cricket Board over their treatment of batsman Babar Azam and said that the way they were treating him, would leave no one at the mantle of Pakistan cricket.

Azam was singled out in how he approached his batting during Pakistan's disastrous campaign at the Champions Trophy. Hosting an ICC tournament after a long period of time, early losses to New Zealand and India relegated them out of the semifinal stage of the tournament. Many former Pakistan cricketers took the opportunity to lambast the players and most singled out Azam and his approach.

"Aapke paas ek hi toh star hai (You have only one star). If you degrade him also, then how will your cricket run? These are the big issues. Our former cricketers should keep their mouths shut," Ajmal said to Sportstar. "As a cricketer, one must realise that bad patches are part of a player's career. You can't play cricket the same way all your life. Even if you were Sachin Tendulkar, you couldn't score 100 runs in every match," he added.

The PCB made immediate changes, as they've been known to do after a poor tournament. This time it led to the axing of Mohammad Rizwan as captain of the T20 team and then dropping both him and Azam.

## AR Rahman hospitalised due to dehydration; condition stable



Oscar-winning composer AR Rahman has been hospitalised in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, due to health issues. Upon hearing the news, Chief Minister MK Stalin reached out to the doctors treating him to check on his condition. Later, he reassured fans on social media that the music legend was doing well. "As soon as I heard the news that Isaipujay AR Rahman had been admitted to the hospital due to ill health, I contacted the doctors and inquired about his health. They said he is fine and will be back home soon," Stalin wrote on X (formerly Twitter). AR Rahman's sister Fathima Shekhar later confirmed to the media that he was admitted due to dehydration. "He experienced slight discomfort and it was later determined that it was caused by dehydration. He has been travelling extensively. He is currently receiving drips (IV fluids) and is doing fine," she said in a voice note shared with the media.

Rahman's spokesperson stated that he had felt unwell the previous night and decided to go for a check-up. Speaking to NDTV, he confirmed that doctors attributed the condition to dehydration, worsened by fasting for Ramadan. "He returned from London yesterday and felt unwell, so he went to the hospital for a check-up last night. However, according to the doctors, it was due to dehydration, as he has also been fasting for Ramadan," he added. One of the most successful and influential composers in Indian cinema, AR Rahman has won numerous prestigious acco-

lades, including two Academy Awards, two Grammy Awards, a BAFTA Award, a Golden Globe and six National Film Awards, besides the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian award. In November 2024, AR Rahman and his wife Saira Banu announced their separation after 29 years of marriage. In a joint statement, they revealed that the decision followed "significant emotional strain in their relationship." Rahman and Banu, who tied the knot in 1995, are parents to their daughters Khatija and Raheema, as well as son Ameen.

## Vicky Kaushal's film beats Ranbir Kapoor's Animal after month-long run



Chhaava box office collection day 30: With no major competition in sight, Laxman Utekar's historical action film Chhaava continues to dominate the domestic box office. The film, starring Vicky Kaushal in the lead role, has completed a month in theatres. In the historic 30-day run, it has broken several records and outperformed multiple recent blockbusters, cementing its position in the history of the Indian box office.

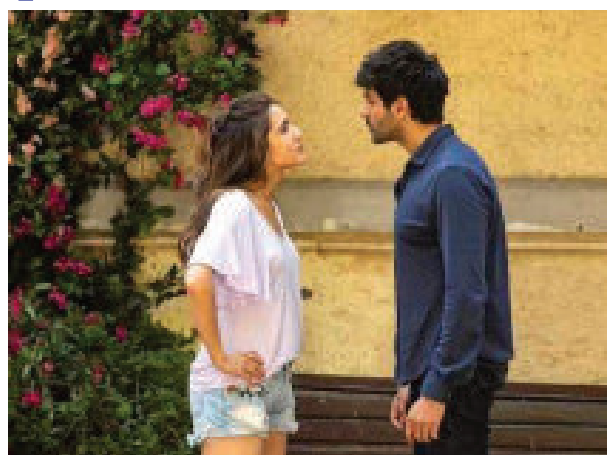
On its 30th day, Chhaava added another Rs 8 crore to its domestic haul. The performance on Saturday was marginally higher than that of Friday, when Chhaava collected Rs 7.25 crore on the occasion of Holi. On Saturday, the Hindi version of the film earned the lion's share with Rs 7.35 crore, and its dubbed Telugu version contributed Rs 0.65 crore. Thus, the current domestic box office collection of Chhaava stands at Rs 554.75 crore (Rs 541.55 crore Hindi + Rs 13.2 crore Telugu) after 30 days, as per Sacnilk. In the process, Chhaava has now surpassed the domestic box office collection of Sandeep Reddy Vanga's 2023 blockbuster family crime drama Animal, which was headlined by Vicky's Sanju and Love & War co-star Ranbir Kapoor. Animal had earned Rs 553.87 crore in its theatrical run across all five languages (Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam). This milestone comes a day after Chhaava broke the domestic box office record set by Siddharth Anand's 2023 spy thriller Pathaan, starring Shah Rukh Khan. It had earned Rs 543.09 crore during its run.

With its Saturday collection, Chhaava has not only crossed the Rs 550 crore mark, but also established itself as the eighth highest grossing film ever at the Indian box office — all within a span of 30 days. It has held on its momentous run despite fresh competition from Shivam Nair's The Diplomat, starring John Abraham, which earned Rs 4 crore on Friday and Rs 4.5 crore on Saturday, resulting in

Rs 8.5 crore collection at the domestic box office so far. In comparison, Chhaava earned almost twice that of The Diplomat in the last two days.

Chhaava will face a formidable competitor only at the end of this month, in AR Murugadoss' action drama Sikandar, starring Salman Khan and Rashmika Mandanna, who also plays the leading lady in Chhaava. That film will release on the occasion of Eid, which has been Salman's home ground for years. With the next 15 days in its favour, Chhaava can add many more crores to its box office haul. Its next target is to become the seventh highest grosser of all time at the domestic box office. For the same, it'll have to dethrone Amar Kaushik's blockbuster horror comedy from last year, Stree 2. The Rajkumar Rao and Shraddha Kapoor-starrer sits at Rs 597.99 crore. Interestingly, it was backed by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films, which also backed Chhaava. Chhaava also stars Akshaye Khanna, Vineet Kumar Singh, Divya Dutta, and Diana Penty, among others.

## Imtiaz Ali admits Sara Ali Khan and Kartik Aaryan's Love Aaj Kal lacked freshness, was heavy on audience: 'Tried to put too much into it'

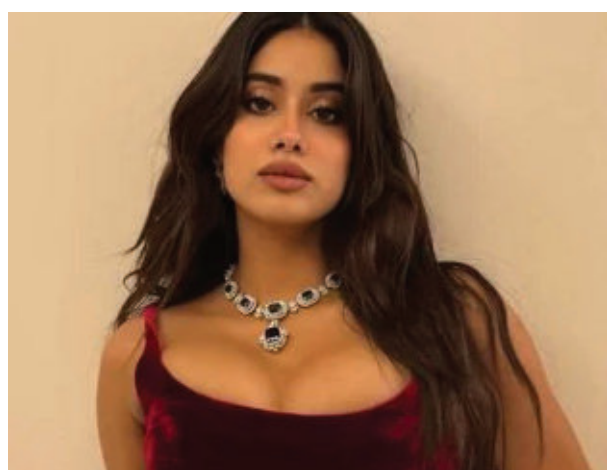


After the success of Love Aaj Kal (2009), which starred Saif Ali Khan and Deepika Padukone in the lead roles, Imtiaz Ali decided to direct a sequel to the film, also titled Love Aaj Kal, featuring Saif's daughter Sara Ali Khan and Kartik Aaryan in the lead. While the first film was a massive success, even earning the status of a classic, Love Aaj Kal (2020) did not have the same journey. It was panned by critics and failed to perform at the box office. In a recent interaction, Imtiaz opened up about the film's failure and declared that he would largely stay away from sequels.

Speaking on the YouTube channel Game Changer, Imtiaz admitted to his mistakes in Love Aaj Kal (2020) and said, "I could have done 2-3 things differently. I tried to put too much into it, and that's why it became heavy. The ease of the film was compromised. It became thick, people didn't understand what happened. It seemed like this didn't come from the heart. Secondly, I feel the film lacked freshness."

When asked whether the film's failure was due to its casting, Imtiaz Ali refuted the notion. Sara Ali Khan had received negative reviews for her performance in the film and had also become a target for trolls. However, the filmmaker did not blame the actors. He explained, "Not because of casting, but whenever you are making a sequel, you should

have a proper reason to make it. I had that reason, but I wasn't able to express that. At least, it didn't get expressed in the publicity of the film." When asked if the film's failure made him hesitant to direct sequels, he responded, "In a way, yes. Though I had a new story in Love Aaj Kal 2, still, the film didn't work. So unless it is really necessary, I am not interested in making sequels. But never say never—Rockstar 2 may be nice."



Actor Janhvi Kapoor has expressed her anger at the Vadodara road accident which occurred earlier this week. A woman was killed and seven others were injured after a speeding car crashed into three two-wheelers and passersby in the posh Karelbaug area of Gujarat's Vadodara late on Thursday night. Rakshit Chaurasia, who was driving the car, and his co-passenger Praanshu Chauhan, both reportedly students, have been arrested. Calling it 'enraging' and 'appalling', the actor re-shared a video about the accident on her Instagram story and wrote, "This is appalling and enraging. Sick to my stomach about anyone thinking this kind of behavior is something they can get away with. Intoxicated or not." In a video of the accident widely shared on social media, Rakshit Chaurasia is purportedly seen stepping out of the damaged car at the accident spot. While Chauhan is purportedly seen trying to free himself from Chaurasia's grip and blaming the accident on him, Chaurasia is heard repeating, "Another round".

## First journalist to uncover Kim Soo Hyun–Kim Sae Ron's relationship mysteriously died 2 years ago: Report



Kim Soo Hyun and Kim Sae Ron's dating scandal has rocked the Korean entertainment industry. From alleged photos to text messages and secret letters, disturbing revelations have emerged since the popular YouTube channel Garosero Research Institute first accused the Queen of Stars actor of dating a minor back in 2015. Now, a new development has triggered more conspiracy theories online. According to K-media outlet K-14, the founder of the Garosero Institute, Kim Yong Ho, was the first reporter to uncover the relationship between the two stars before his sudden death two years ago. On March 14, netizens uncovered a post from 2021 which referenced statements made by the late journalist Kim Yong Ho. He had reportedly claimed that Kim Soo Hyun and Kim Sae Ron were once involved in a romantic relationship. Yong Ho tragically passed away in October 2023. His body was discovered in a hotel room in Busan. Authorities later ruled his death a suicide.

However, as reported by KBIZOOm, before his passing, Kim Yong Ho had been embroiled in a sexual harassment case in Busan. This resulted in a "two-year suspended prison sentence, alongside 120 hours of community service and mandatory sexual assault prevention education." As the details of his tragic end resurfaced online, the case surrounding the Garosero reporter made its way to the top of Weibo's trending entertainment searches. Kim Yong Ho made a name for himself covering high-profile celebrity scandals, though his line of work was often steeped in controversy. Over the years, he reported on some of the biggest cases in South Korea, involving A-list stars like Jun Ji Hyun, Han Ye Seul, Choi Ji Woo, Seo Ye Ji, and Song Hye Kyo. He was best known as the founder and operator of the YouTube channel Garosero Institute. The channel first gained major attention for its explosive coverage of Song Joong Ki and Song Hye Kyo's highly publicised divorce. The former couple, who tied the knot after starring together in the 2016 K-drama Descendants of the Sun, shocked fans when they parted ways shortly after. Garosero started rumours about Joong Ki's alleged new relationship. Garosero has also been involved in other scandals, including the con-

troverly surrounding Kim Soo Hyun's former co-star, Seo Ye Ji. In early 2021, the channel made headlines by accusing Seo Ye Ji of manipulative behavior towards her then-boyfriend and those around her. Fast forward to now. The YouTube channel has allegedly threatened to expose private photos of Kim Soo Hyun with Kim Sae Ron unless he comes forward and apologises for his actions. According to the channel, Soo Hyun and Sae Ron had an affair that lasted six years. However, Soo Hyun's agency, Goldmedalist, denied the claims. In a detailed statement released on March 14, the agency clarified that the two were only involved from 2019 until the fall of 2020. Tragically, Sae Ron passed away on February 16, 2025.

## Despite working with Shah Rukh Khan in Baazigar, co-star couldn't even afford milk for his baby at one point



Baazigar, starring Shah Rukh Khan, Kajol, and Shilpa Shetty, was a huge box office hit, amassing a worldwide gross of Rs 32 crore on a Rs 4 crore budget. While many members of its star cast would go on to become megastars of the Hindi film industry, Adi Irani, who played the role of Vicky Malhotra, seemingly fell through the cracks. In a recent interview with Filmytantra Media, Adi Irani recalled his struggles post films like Anari (1993) and Baazigar (1993). "My first daughter was born in 1995, and at that point in time, milk cost Rs 5, and sometimes I did not even have that. Every day I had to go out into the city and meet people for jobs and roles, and I had borrowed my friend's scooter. Sometimes I did not even have money to fill up the tank," said the actor.

"I used to walk from my house to the bus stop on the days I couldn't afford petrol. People used to ask me, 'What are you doing at a bus stop?' and I used to lie and say that I was just wait-

ing for a friend. They used to say, 'Why would you need to travel on a bus?' And then I used to sneak home," recalled the actor.

He also mentioned how he did not have a phone at his house, and had a nearby PCO booth take his messages for him. "I used to pay the guy Rs 1 for each message he got for me and an additional rupee to call

back." The actor added that he said yes to a lot of uncredited extra roles because he needed the money. When asked about whether his sister, actor Aruna Irani, knew about his situation, he said, "My sister knew about my situation and offered her help many times, but I refused. I am her brother, but that doesn't mean that she will take

care of me all her life; that was my own struggle, and moreover, she had a family of her own to care for." The actor also mentioned the role of his wife and how she helped him recover from the bad times.

"People should look up to my wife; without her, I would have never gotten back up. Ours being a love marriage, sometimes

## 'Salman Khan didn't care if my parents were around, he refused to let me go, got so fond of me,' recalls Kichcha Sudeep's daughter



Salman Khan and Kichcha Sudeep worked together in the 2019 film Dabangg 3, and in a recent interview, Sudeep's daughter, Sanvi Sudeep, recalled spending time with Salman during the film's production. Sanvi said that she was 14 at the time, and was completely in awe of the star. Sanvi said that Salman is a "very misunderstood man" and recalled that he invited her to his farmhouse for three days, and didn't care if her parents were around.

Talking on Jinal Modi's YouTube channel, Sanvi, 21, recalled her memories from the time, and said, "That was the most fun I have had in my life when Dad was shooting that film." Sanvi recalled that as a child, she had made a bracelet for Salman and he wore it on Bigg Boss as well, so when she met him during Dabangg 3, he remembered her. She shared that after the shoot, her father took her to Mumbai and they went to Salman's house for dinner, which was a surprise for Sanvi. "I saw him and I was like, 'Oh my god, it's Salman sir'. I was fully sh\*tting myself because he has such superstar aura," she recalled.

"He got so fond of me that day. He made me sing. So I sang for him, and at 3 am, he has called his music directors and he said, 'I am sending this girl. I want you to record her on track, keep her voice, in case we need her for something. I have gone the next day'. After that, he has invited me back to his farmhouse. He didn't care if my parents were around."