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Khammam Collector plans large-scale water harvesting structures to increase groundwater

Khammam: The district administration has planned to take up digging of harvesting pits and farm ponds in the district on a large scale to address the problem of groundwater depletion. As many as 15 rain harvesting pits each should be developed in Khammam rural, Kusumanchi, Nelakondapalli, Tirumalayapalem, Wyra, Enkooor and Singareni mandals, where groundwater was decreasing, district Collector Muzammil Khan suggested. Agricultural extension officers should consult with farmers at the field level and take steps to develop farm ponds in the fields of those interested and at least five farm ponds should be dug up in each mandal. The works should be carried out under MGNREGS, the Collector said.

Thunderstorms in Telangana from Saturday

Hyderabad: People in Hyderabad and elsewhere in Telangana State are set to experience a major respite from the ongoing hot summer conditions with Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)-Hyderabad issuing an orange alert (high intensity) for thunderstorms accompanied with lightning, gusty winds (40 to 50 kmph) and hailstorms in several districts on March 23. The districts for which the orange thunderstorm alert has been issued include Nizamabad, Siddipet, Sangareddy, Medak and Kamareddy districts. The districts where a yellow thunder storm alert (medium intensity) with lightning and gusty winds (30-40 kmph) has been issued by IMD-Hyderabad for coming Saturday and Sunday are Adilabad, KomaramBheem Asifabad, Nirmal, Nizamabad, Siddipet, Sangareddy, Medak, Kamareddy, Jagtial, Rajanna Sircilla, Karimnagar, Peddapalli, Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Mulugu, Bhadradi Kothagudem, Khammam, Nalgonda, Suryapet, Mahabubabad, Warangal, Hanamkonda, Jangaon, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri, Rangareddy, Hyderabad, Medchal Malkajigiri, Vikarabad, Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool, Wanaparthy, Narayanpet, Jogulamba Gadwal districts.

Uttam hails Telangana Budget as transformational for farmers, welfare



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Minister for Irrigation and Civil Supplies N Uttam Kumar Reddy has hailed the Rs 3.04 lakh crore Telangana's budget for 2025-26, pre-

sented by Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu in Assembly on Wednesday, as a bold and progressive financial plan that will strengthen the state's economy, boost agriculture, and ensure social welfare for all sections of society. Speaking to media persons after the budget presentation, Uttam Kumar Reddy said the allocations made in the budget reflect the government's commitment to sustainable development, rural empowerment, and food security under the leadership of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. He emphasised that key investments in irrigation and civil supplies will drive long-term growth, benefiting farmers, rural communities, and the economically weaker sections. Expressing his strong approval of the Rs 23,373 crore allocation for irrigation and command area development, Uttam Kumar Reddy said the budget prioritises completing pending irrigation projects and launching new ones, ensuring that Telangana's farmers receive uninterrupted water supply. He highlighted the Udaya Samudram-Brahmana Velamala Lift Irrigation Project, which will lift 6.70 TMC of water from the Udaya Samudram Balancing Reservoir to the Brahmana Velamala Balancing Reservoir. The project is designed to

irrigate one lakh acres of land and provide safe drinking water to 107 fluoride-affected villages in Nalgonda and Yadadri Bhuvanagiri districts, bringing much-needed relief to drought-prone areas. He also welcomed the allocation of Rs 266.65 crore for the revitalisation of the Bunadigani Canal under the Musi Project, which will enhance water distribution for farmers in Yadadri district, ensuring better agricultural output. To ensure better management of water resources, Uttam Kumar Reddy praised the government's plan to implement a real-time telemetry system to monitor water usage, making the process more transparent and efficient. As the Minister for Civil Supplies, Uttam Kumar Reddy expressed satisfaction over the Rs 5,734 crore allocation for the Civil Supplies Department, which will ensure food security for millions of Telangana families. He particularly highlighted the Rs 500 per quintal bonus for fine rice procurement, which has encouraged an increase in fine rice cultivation from 25 lakh acres to 40 lakh acres. The Minister assured that the state's paddy procurement system is being strengthened, ensuring farmers get fair prices and are protected from market fluctuations. (NSS)

SC categorisation to provide more opportunities for community : CM Revanth



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Chief Minister A. Revanth expressed that the categorization of Scheduled Castes (SC) presents a significant opportunity for the community to gain greater prospects in the future. He emphasised the importance of community leaders managing their frustrations and approaching this situation with careful consideration to make the most of every opportunity for development. On Wednesday, leaders and representatives from SC organisations met Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to express their appreciation for the law passed regarding SC categorization in the Assembly. During the meeting, he remarked that the implementation of SC categorization will provide community members with increased opportunities moving forward. As the Chief Minister of Telangana, he affirmed his commitment to offering full support to the community. The Supreme Court verdict has not been implemented in any State in the country and Telangana is the first State. No BJP ruling State is implementing the verdict so far, Revanth Reddy said. On the occasion, the Chief Minister has appealed to all SC organisations to extend gratitude to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for fulfilling the aspirations of the SC communities by adopting a bill for SC categorisation. "I would not have had the power to find a permanent solution to the long pending demand of SC categorisation if Rahul Gandhi's support is not there," he said. The Chief Minister said the State government made strong arguments in the Supreme Court and worked hard for a judgement in favour of the SC categorisation.

Moreover, the State government has constituted a one-man commission to avoid legal hurdles in the future. The Commission submitted a 199 page report to the government. Based on the report, SCs have been divided into 3 groups to provide reservations. The SC Categorisation Act was not done against anyone. The government's intention is to render justice to SCs through classification," he explained. The Chief Minister stated that the government accorded priority to the Madiga community in the appointment of Council of Higher Education, Public Service Commission and Education Commission and assured that more opportunities will be given to the community in the days to come. (NSS)

Welcome home, Sunita Williams, Butch Wilmore



GNS News Agency, March 19

While the entire world heaved a sigh of relief over the safe homecoming of stranded astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, their nine-month-long ordeal has exposed the vulnerabilities of space missions and loopholes in the present system of planning, testing procedures and safety standards. What was originally planned as a brief eight-day mission intended to test the capabilities of the Boeing Starliner, a spacecraft developed as part of NASA's Commercial Crew Programme, turned out to be a nightmarish experience for the astronauts. They were stuck at the International Space Station (ISS) since June last year due to critical technical issues with the Starliner. The glitches in its propulsion system and thrusters prevented their safe return to the Earth. After overcoming several anxious moments and a few last-minute postponements, the stranded astronauts are finally back home. A SpaceX Dragon capsule, carrying them, splashed down in the Gulf of Mexico after a 17-hour descent. Both Boeing and NASA have egg on their faces, as the delayed mission raises several questions over human safety and exposes the dark side of space capitalism. Long been a monopoly player, Boeing has come under intense scrutiny due to the problems with Starliner, highlighting the challenges in the commercial space industry. A helium leak was detected in the Starliner even before its June 5 launch, but NASA and Boeing's leadership dismissed the issue as too minor to delay the mission. Williams and Wilmore lifted off in the Starliner from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Cape Canaveral, Florida, and were scheduled to return on June 14. But as the Starliner approached the ISS, it encountered multiple issues including further helium leaks and thruster malfunction, making it unsafe for the return trip.

"Batti Budget - Bada Jhoot Budget," says Harish Rao



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Former minister Harish Rao has strongly criticized the budget presented by the Congress government, calling it a political gimmick filled with blatant lies and unrealistic claims. He described it as a "Batti Budget - Bada Jhoot Budget," asserting that Congress has completely lost its credibility. Harish Rao pointed out that the budget is nothing more than a repetition of the hollow promises made before the elections, with no real intention of implementation. He accused Chief Minister Revanth Reddy of misleading the people both inside and outside the Assembly. The government initially promised ₹1 lakh crore interest-free loans to women, but later reduced the figure to just ₹20,000 crore. According to GO 27, interest-free loans are applicable only up to ₹5 lakh, while women are forced to pay interest on the remaining ₹15 lakh. If the government was truly committed to interest-free loans, this benefit should have applied to the entire amount. Instead, Congress has deceived women with misleading claims. The budget speech announced 75 for uniform stitching charges for students, but this is simply a copy-paste from last year's budget. In reality, the government is providing only 50, not 75. The Congress government stated in the budget that no new ration cards have been issued. This is an outright lie. Under the BRS government, 6.47 lakh ration cards were provided to eligible beneficiaries. Harish Rao also slammed Congress for failing to implement its six poll guarantees, which were personally endorsed by Sonia Gandhi in her letter to the people. The Mahalakshmi scheme has been completely ignored. Instead of providing ₹2,500 per month to women, the budget has allocated ₹2.50 crore for government-sponsored events and celebrations. The Cheyutha pension of ₹4,000 remains unfulfilled. Existing pensioners—including the elderly, toddy tappers, weavers, and AIDS patients—have been denied payments for two months

B.C. Employees' Association lauds CM Revanth on BC reservation bill

Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): The Telangana State B.C. Employees' Association has expressed its appreciation and thanked Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for passing a key bill to increase reservation for Backward Classes (BCs) to 42 per cent in government jobs, educational institutions, and local body elections. The Association's State leaders, including President M. Chandrasekhar Goud, general secretary Ramadevi, working president Srinivas, associate president Ramaraju Varma, advisors Sunkari Srinivas, vice presidents Narayana, Yadagiri, Sunkari Krishna, Sheshachari, Donthi Prasanna Kumar and Seetharam met Chief Minister Revanth Reddy in the Assembly on Wednesday and expressed their gratitude. To mark the occasion, they felicitated the Chief Minister. Describing the Bill as a historic moment, the Association leaders urged that pressure should be applied to implement this decision nationwide. They also requested that these reservations be extended to job promotions and teacher promotions. On the occasion, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy unveiled the 2025 Diary of the B.C. Employees'



Association. Ministers Captain N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, Ponnam Prabhakar, Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy and Konda Surekha, TPCC President Mahesh Kumar Goud, Government Whip Adi Srinivas, and senior Congress leader V. Hanumantha Rao, among others, participated in the event. (NSS)

Bhatti presents Rs.3,04,965 crore Telangana budget for 2025-26



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): The Telangana government on Wednesday unveiled its budget for the fiscal year 2025-26, totaling an estimated Rs.3,04,965 crore. Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka presented the budget during a session of the State Legislative Assembly. This budget includes a revenue expenditure of Rs.2,26,982 crore and a capital expenditure of Rs.36,504 crore. The Deputy Chief Minister emphasized that the State government is dedicated to development, welfare, and effective governance, aiming to make the Telangana model a source of inspiration for the entire country. "Our government is firmly committed to achieving the long-term development goals of Telangana. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, with the 'Telangana Rising 2050' vision, we are shaping our policies and programs to drive sustainable progress. Our strategic roadmap for the next decade envisions a five-fold expansion of the current \$200 billion state economy into a trillion-dollar economy," he disclosed. The Deputy Chief Minister said that to establish Telangana as a leader in modern technology, clean energy, and sustainable development, the State government has formulated the "Mega Master Plan

2050." As part of its initiative, the State government is actively promoting the establishment of solar and wind energy projects, driving the state towards a greener and more energy-efficient future," Bhatti Vikramarka said. He stated that Telangana's economy continues to achieve steady growth, effectively navigating the rapid changes in the global economic landscape. In the financial year 2024-25, Telangana's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current prices stands at Rs.16,12,579 crore, registering a growth rate of 10.1 percent compared to the previous year. During the same period, India's GDP was Rs.3,31,03,215 crore, with a growth rate of 9.9 percent, Bhatti Vikramarka disclosed. "In the financial year 2024-25, at current prices, Telangana's per capita income stands at Rs.3,79,751, with a growth rate of 9.6 percent. In comparison, India's per capita income is Rs.2,05,579, with a growth rate of 8.8 percent. Clearly Telangana's per capita income is higher by 1.8 times i.e., Rs.1,74,172, reflecting the state's strong economic progress," the Deputy Chief Minister said. Take a look at the department-wise budget allocations in Telangana State, Panchayat Raj department - Rs. 31,605 crore ; Agriculture department - Rs. 24,439 crore ; Education department - Rs. 23,108 crore ; Energy department - Rs.21,221 crore ; Women and Child Welfare department - Rs. 2,862 crore ; Animal Husbandry department - Rs. 1,674 crore ; Civil Supplies Department - Rs. 5,734 crore ; Industries department - Rs.3,527 crore ; Roads and Buildings department - Rs.5,907 crore ; Municipal Administration and Urban Development - Rs.17,677 crore ; Education department - Rs.23,108 crore ; Medical, Health and Family Welfare department - Rs.12,393 crore ; Irrigation department - Rs.23,373 crore ; Industries department - Rs.3,527 crore ; Tourism department - Rs.775 crore ; Home Department - Rs.10,188 crore ; Endowments department - Rs.190 crore ; Information Technology department - Rs.774 crore ; Forests and Endowment department - Rs.1,023 crore

Aurangzeb is irrelevant, says RSS as it condemns violence in Nagpur

GNS News Agency, March 19

Any type of violence is bad for the society, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) national publicity in-charge Sunil Ambekar said on Wednesday (March 19, 2025). On being asked if RSS thinks that Aurangzeb is relevant today and his tomb should be moved, Mr. Ambekar said its not relevant.

The tomb of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb who died 300 years ago which is located in Khuldabad in Maharashtra is under the storm since the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal, both affiliates of the RSS, had demanded

its removal. The demand sparked nationwide protests. After one of such protests that was held in Nagpur on March 17 left the city under communal tension. Curfew has been imposed in the town, which is also the RSS headquarters, and the situation is now under control says police. Mr. Ambekar, who was addressing a press conference in Bangalore ahead of RSS's annual executive meeting, the highest decision making body, which is scheduled to take place here from March 21 to 23, said that RSS is set to pass two resolutions in the meeting, one on the atrocities committed against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh.

TGPSC releases general ranking list for extension officer grade-IV posts

GNS News Agency, March 19

Hyderabad: The Telangana Public Service Commission (TGPSC) on Wednesday released the general ranking list (GRL) for recruitment to 181 extension officer (supervisor) grade-IV vacancies in the Women Development and Child Welfare Department. The list was released for 10,459 candidates who attended the recruitment examination in both papers on January 6 and 7. The final keys and response sheets of the candidates were also released, and they will be available on the website www.tspc.gov.in until April 17. Candidates can download/view their response sheets from individual logins by entering their TGPSC ID, hall ticket number, date of birth and OTP received on their registered mobile number on the Commission's website. No further objections would be entertained on the final keys. Based on the GRL, the required number of candidates would be picked for certificate verification. Such candidates would be informed individually and also through the TGPSC website, the Commission said. The TGPSC advised candidates to keep all the required original certificates and documents ready as mentioned in the recruitment notification.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Mere assurances

The Modi government never tires of affirming its commitment to good governance (sushasan). Providing a transparent and accountable administration that works for the welfare of citizens has avowedly been its guiding principle from the outset. Walking the talk is supposed to be a key element of this people-centric approach, but the ground reality is not so reassuring. Nearly 75 per cent of the assurances made by Union ministers in Parliament in 2024 have not been fulfilled, the government told the Rajya Sabha on Monday. The situation was hardly better a decade ago; during 2015 and 2016, two-third of the assurances given by Central ministers in Parliament were either dropped or left pending.

It was in 2018 that the Online Assurances Monitoring System was rolled out by the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs to ensure that promises made by ministers in Parliament were systematically tracked, monitored and fulfilled. The overarching aim was to enhance accountability, transparency and efficiency, but the implementation has left a lot to be desired. Ministers are expected to keep their word within three months, but their apparent lethargy and apathy are undermining the government's credibility. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has assured the Rajya Sabha that the government takes all assurances made by ministers on the floor of both Houses of Parliament seriously. If that is indeed the case, why are erring ministers not being hauled up or replaced? It is also a poor reflection on the functioning of the Standing Committee on Government Assurances, which is tasked with holding ministries/departments accountable for lapses in timely implementation. The promises and pledges made by political leaders during election rallies are usually taken with a pinch of salt. However, the people expect at least a modicum of commitment when such assurances are made by elected representatives in Parliament.

ED attaches properties worth Rs 51.29 lakh from HCA office-bearers



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): ED Hyderabad has attached properties worth Rs 51.29 lakh in the case of misappropriation of funds of Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) by its office-bearers. Office bearers of HCA gave contracts for supply of cricket balls, bucket chairs and gym equipment to Messrs Sara Sports, Messrs Excellent Enterprises and Messrs Body Drench India Pvt. Ltd respectively at highly inflated prices. The illicit financial gains received by the suppliers, were transferred to Surrender Agarwal (Ex-Vice President and Treasurer of HCA) and his family members as quid pro quo. ED investigation revealed that as quid pro quo, Messrs Sara Sports transferred Rs 17 Lakh to Messrs KB Jewellers, a proprietorship firm of Surrender Agarwal's wife as well in the personal bank account of Surrender Agarwal's son, Akshit Agarwal by layering the same through the bank accounts of several entities on the pretext of sponsoring a music show, event management and so on. Similarly, Messrs Excellent Enterprises transferred POC amounting to Rs 21.86 Lakh to the personal bank account of Surrender Agarwal's son Akshit Agarwal on the pretext of loan as well as to Messrs KB Jewellers on the pretext of purchase of diamonds. Cash withdrawals of POC from the bank accounts of Messrs Excellent Enterprises was also revealed to have been transferred to Surrender Agarwal as quid pro quo for supply of bucket chairs at exorbitant prices. By using the same modus operandi, Messrs Body Drench India Pvt, supplier of gym equipment at highly inflated prices, transferred POC of Rs 52 Lakh directly to the personal bank accounts of Surrender Agarwal and his daughter-in-law as well to Messrs KB Jewellers on the pretext of purchase of diamonds. The ED investigation revealed that POC totalling Rs 90.86 Lakh were received by Surrender Agarwal and his family members as illegal pecuniary gain from the suppliers of cricket balls, bucket chairs and gym equipment to HCA. (NSS)

Victim made to transfer Rs 2,53,420 to scamsters



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Victim a 43-year-old private employee from Hyderabad, in January 2025, was contacted via WhatsApp number 6000862741 and was offered a part-time work-from-home job. The job required the victim to provide Google reviews and feedback on restaurants, for which they initially received some payments.

After gaining the victim's trust, the fraudsters introduced an investment opportunity, promising high returns. The victim was then instructed to contact a person with the Telegram ID @Aarnababe14522, who explained the job details and payment process. Later another scammer, using the Telegram ID @TeacherRathor, guided the victim to create an account on a suspicious trading platform (-victim was added to a group named Weex Data Task 18 (B), where several other victims were also present. Under false promises and coercion, the victim transferred a total amount of Rs. 2,53,420/- from their Axis Bank Ltd account to various bank accounts and UPI IDs provided by the scamsters.

MG Comet EV 2025 introduced with enhanced Convenience and Comfort

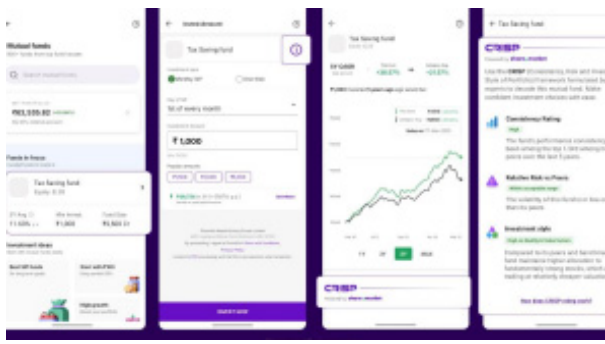


Hyderabad: Enhancing the style and appeal of India's street-smart car, JSW MG Motor India introduces the Comet EV 2025. Starting at an attractive price of ₹4.99 lakh (with Battery-as-a-Service at ₹2.5/km), this car features a futuristic design with enhanced convenience and advanced tech features. Car buyers seeking a tech-savvy and practical city commute can visit their nearest MG dealership to book the new MG Comet 2025 and the recently launched Comet BLACKSTORM edition for ₹11,000.

The MG Comet EV 2025 comes in five distinct variants—Executive, Excite, Excite Fast Charge, Exclusive, and Exclusive Fast Charge—each designed to offer a tailored driving experience. The Excite and Excite FC variants now come equipped with a Rear Parking Camera and Power-folding Outside Rear View Mirrors (ORVMs), en-

hancing both convenience and safety. The Exclusive and Exclusive FC variants are upgraded with premium leatherette seats and a 4-speaker audio system, elevating the in-cabin experience for a more premium feel. Fast Charging variants are powered by a 17.4 kWh battery pack, providing a driving range of up to 230 km** on a single charge. Rakesh Sen, Head - Sales, JSW MG Motor India said, "MG Comet EV's innovative design and user-friendly features have made it a preferred choice among city dwellers seeking practical mobility solution for daily commute. The increasing acceptance of the Comet EV corresponds to the impressive 29% growth in sales in CY'24 compared to CY'23. The MG Comet EV 2025 highlights our dedication to meeting evolving consumer needs." In February 2025, JSW MG Motor India introduced the Comet BLACKSTORM Edition, further expanding the Comet EV lineup. Priced at ₹7.80 lakh with Battery-as-a-Service at 2.5 per km, the BLACKSTORM Edition features a sleek 'Starry Black' exterior with dark chrome, black badges and red accents. Inside, it offers Leatherette seats with 'Blackstorm' embroidery, a 10.25-inch touchscreen infotainment system, a 10.25-inch instrument cluster, wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, electronically adjustable ORVMs, and four-speaker audio system. The Comet EV offers smart ownership package with MG e-Shield, covering repairs and service costs. The special 3-3-3-8 service package provides: 3 years or 1 lakh km warranty, 3 years Roadside Assistance (RSA), 3 free labour services- First 3 scheduled services and 8 years or 1 lakh 20 thousand km warranty.

PhonePe Wealth launches CRISP: An Advanced Mutual Fund Selection Tool



Hyderabad: PhonePe Wealth today announced the launch of CRISP, a unique tool designed to help investors make more informed mutual fund investment decisions. The tool comes at a time when unique mutual fund investors in India have grown from 20 million as on December 31, 2019 to 53 million as on December 31, 2024 (Source: AMFI), but choosing the right funds still remains a significant challenge for most investors.

The CRISP (Consistency, Risk and Investment Style of the Portfolio) tool addresses this critical challenge by offering a holistic solution for investors to select appropriate funds beyond just looking at past returns. Retail investors, especially those investing via wealthtech platforms, have been largely relying on past point-to-point performance of funds to make their investment choices. This has often led to investors making wrong investment choices. CRISP simplifies investing decisions by converting performance, risk and portfolio data of mutual funds into actionable insights.

"The mutual fund industry is experiencing significant

growth due to industry's investor awareness initiatives and democratization of mutual fund investing by wealthtech platforms. At PhonePe Wealth, our focus is on supporting investors on our platform through innovative tools like CRISP. We are committed to developing research and technology-driven solutions that help investors embrace core investing principles and prudently navigate their wealth creation journey," said Nilesh D Naik, Head of Investment Products, Share.Market (PhonePe Wealth).

The CRISP framework assesses funds based on the following parameters:

Consistency in Performance: CRISP assesses a fund's performance consistency relative to its peer group based on rolling returns over a five-year period, assigning a score of "High," "Medium," or "Low." This approach helps investors identify funds that have consistently outperformed, rather than those with sporadic or unpredictable performance. **Relative Risk vs. Peers:** The tool demarcates risk for the fund compared to peers and categorizes it as "Within acceptable range" or "Too High". This enables investors to spot risk outliers and avoid investing in funds that take extreme risks.

Investment Style or Factor Analysis: CRISP analyzes a fund's style exposure across factors like Value, Quality, and Momentum, over a five-year period, providing insights into the fund's management style. This is presented in an easy-to-understand investment style classification of "High", "Medium" and "Low" across the three factors. This becomes an extremely important input for investors while constructing their mutual fund portfolios, to ensure desired level of exposure across different styles or factors and to achieve diversification.

Under the auspices of the Congress party, the portrayal of the CM.



The aim of the Congress party is the development of social justice and the weaker sections "Koyada Srinivas Parakala Urban Congress Party Presidents" "Parakala, March 19, Indian Chronicle": "State Government in Parakala constituency, under the auspices of the Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, under the auspices of the town and Mandala Congress party, on Wednesday, on the occasion of the BC Caste Classification and SC caste classification bills. The Palabhishekam program was organized. Under the direction of Parakala Legislators Revuri Prakash Reddy, Urban Congress Party President Koyyada Srinivas, Mandala Congress Party President Katkuri Devender Reddy and AMC Chairman Chandupatla Raji Reddy have come to the forefront of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy had done. Speaking on the occasion, Rahul Gandhi said that as part of the election campaign, Rahul Gandhi had given the people of Telangana to pass the BC Caste Program when the state's Chief Minister's honorary Shri Revant Reddy came to power, as well as the Supreme Court's SC



classification Chief Minister Revant Reddy, who has been honored by the SC classification bill for the first time in the country, thanked Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka on behalf of the Congress party, as well as self-employment to the unemployed youth Chief Minister Revant Reddy said that Rajiv Young Development for Fiction, providing employment opportunities by the banks by providing employment opportunities by the banks by giving them 80 % subsidy and providing employment to them. The event was attended by members of the Parakala Coordinating Committee, Kunkumeshwar Temple Committee Chairman Koluguri Rajeshwara Rao, Former Councilors Panchagiri Jayamma, Madikonda Sampath Kumar, Former MPP Rammurthy, Nalubolu Krishnaya Ghanadi, Dasarayan, Band Ramesh, Mark Raghupathi Goud, Nallela Anil Anil Doll Chandramouli Dubasi Venkataswamy, Ambiru Mahender, Sunkari Dilip, MD Tajuddin MD Aji Fur Gemini, Macha Sumani, Congress Party affiliated leaders and others participated.

Under the auspices of the Congress party, the portrayal of the CM.

Parakala, March 19, Indian Chronicle
State Government in Parakala constituency, under the auspices of the Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, under the auspices of the town and Mandala Congress party, on Wednesday, on the occasion of the BC Caste Classification and SC caste classification bills. The Palabhishekam program was organized. Under the direction of Parakala Legislators Revuri Prakash Reddy, Urban Congress Party President Koyyada Srinivas, Mandala Congress Party President Katkuri Devender Reddy and AMC Chairman Chandupatla Raji... Read more

Tata Play and FanCode Partner to launch Tata Play FanCode Sports, Bringing Unparalleled Sports Action to Indian Fans



Hyderabad: Fans in India are in for an exciting experience as Tata Play teams up with FanCode to deliver action-packed sports coverage for its Direct-To-Home and Streaming subscribers. With this partnership, Indian fans can expect a front-row seat to all the drama and excitement of cricket, football, kabaddi, golf and motorsports including Formula 1.

Tata Play and FanCode's partnership will give viewers access to a wide range of sports entertainment content. The newly launched Platform Service, Tata Play FanCode Sports is set to air over 100+ hours of LIVE sports month-on-month, in over 8 major sports and across major tournaments including the Carabao Cup, Copa Del Rey, Concacaf Champions Cup, Australia Tour of West Indies, South Africa Tour of Zimbabwe and host of domestic & international T20 leagues. In a landmark move for DTH subscribers, FanCode Sports will also feature Formula 1 content, bringing exhilarating action of 24 Grand Prix weekends like never before. In addition to witnessing Lewis Hamilton make his Ferrari debut and resuming his battle with Red Bull's Max Verstappen, subscribers can also catch global sporting icons like Cristiano Ronaldo, Kylian Mbappé, Mohammad Salah, Lionel Messi, Nicholas Pooanan, Pat Cummins, Kagiso Rabada, Aiden Markram and many more across the best sporting events. Sharing this new development, Tata Play's Chief Commercial and Content Officer, Pallavi Puri, said, "We are thrilled to expand our partnership with FanCode. This exciting collaboration marks a significant milestone, enabling us to offer a seamless viewing experience to multiple sporting events like Formula 1, PGA Tour, Carabao Cup, world class cricket and other football action across screens, enhancing diversity and accessibility of live sports content for our Tata Play Direct-To-Home and Tata Play Binge subscribers. Together with FanCode we are redefining the way fans engage with their favourite sports."

Shabbir Ali hails budget as historic



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Advisor to Telangana Government (SC, ST, OBC & Minorities) Mohammed Ali Shabbir has lauded the Rs 3.04 lakh crore Budget for 2025-26, presented by Deputy Chief Minister & Finance Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu, as a historic milestone in ensuring social justice, empowerment, and inclusive development. He emphasised that the budget reflects Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's unwavering commitment to the uplift of marginalized communities, ensuring that Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Backward Classes (BCs), and minorities receive their rightful share in Telangana's progress. Shabbir Ali stated that this budget stands as a beacon of hope for disadvantaged communities, as it allocates record-breaking funds to education, employment, entrepreneurship, housing, and financial security for SC, ST, BC, and minority communities. He called it a direct reflection of the government's dedication to bridging historical inequalities and fostering economic empowerment. "This is not just a budget; it is a promise of justice. A promise that the dreams of SCs, STs, BCs, and minorities will not be ignored. A promise that every Dalit, Adivasi, Backward Class, and Minority youth will have the opportunity to succeed. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Telangana is proving that true development is not just about infrastructure and industry."



KFI assessment on Hyderabad home market



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Knight Frank India's latest assessment highlights Hyderabad's ongoing shift toward premium homes. Registrations of homes priced above Rs 1 crore rose by 1% year-on-year (YoY), even as overall registrations declined 16% YoY. However, the market showed signs of recovery, with registrations increasing 10% month-on-month (MoM) and the total registered home value rising 13% MoM. In recent months, registrations for homes priced below Rs 50 lakh, which still makes up for more than half of the total transactions—have steadily declined. In February 2025, this segment saw a 20% YoY drop.

The Hyderabad residential market covers Hyderabad, Medchal-Malkajgiri, Rangareddy, and Sangareddy, includ-

ing both primary and secondary real estate transactions. Properties priced under Rs 50 lakh dominated registrations, but a strong shift toward premiumisation has emerged. Homes priced at Rs 1 crore and above increased by 1% YoY, accounting for 18% of total registrations in February 2025, reflecting a growing preference for higher-value properties. This comes despite overall registration numbers being higher in February 2024. Majority of the registered properties in Hyderabad were concentrated in the range of 1,000 to 2,000 square feet (sq ft), accounting for 67% of all registrations. Units sized >2000 sq ft accounted for 17% of the total registrations as compared with the 13% registered during February 2024. At the district level, Rangareddy accounted for 44% of property registrations, closely followed by Medchal-Malkajgiri at 41%. Hyderabad district contributed the remaining 15% of total registrations. The weighted average price of transacted residential properties witnessed a YoY increase of 6% during February 2025. Among the districts, Rangareddy experienced the most increase of 9% YoY. Beyond the concentration of bulk transactions, homebuyers also purchased plush properties that are larger in size and offer superior amenities. The top five deals in February 2025 involved properties exceeding 3,000 sq ft and valued above Rs 6 crore. Four of these transactions were recorded in Central Hyderabad, while one was in Western Hyderabad. (NSS)

Preparations on for IPL matches in city

Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): In preparation for the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) matches scheduled from March 22 Bhatti Airtel has made comprehensive arrangements at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium. Its efforts will ensure a seamless network experience for the anticipated crowd of nearly 100,000 cricketing fans during the matches.

Airtel has deployed ten additional sites around the stadium vicinity and this augmentation will significantly improve voice and data connectivity for Airtel customers attending the matches. The network upgrades have been strategically planned to accommodate the expected high volume of spectators.

Ajay Ananthapadmanabhan, CEO – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Bhatti Airtel, said "Understanding the significance of the upcoming IPL season, we have amplified our mobile network capabilities at the Rajiv Gandhi International stadium. As thousands of passionate fans gather, we aim to provide uninterrupted connectivity, ensuring they can stay in touch and capture every exhilarating moment." To offer a seamless and ubiquitous network experience across Hyderabad city, extensive network optimization has been



conducted at the railway stations, premium hotels & all other key locations. Mobile coverage extended fully in new Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad new terminal and capacity enhanced inside airport and in parking area to cater to high traffic. Airtel has taken measures specifically for the IPL and have augmented its network across all the stadiums in the country to cater to the cricket fever starting from March and continuing on till May 2025. (NSS)

Telangana wins major McDonalds deal



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): In a red-letter day for Telangana as a global investment destination, growth of industries and empowerment of people through opportunities, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Chris Kempczinski, Chairman and CEO of McDonalds, closed a major partnership spanning several areas. In a meeting with Chris Kempczinski, who was accompanied by Skye Anderson, President Global Business Services, Jon Banner, Chief Global Impact officer and Deshant Kaila, Head of GBS India, the two sides reached a final agreement on Wednesday. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy expressed delight that the McDonalds Global Office in India was going to be located in Hyderabad, after he personally ensured the state gave the best offering to the multinational to ensure a positive outcome in the backdrop of stiff competition from several other Indian states, and cities. Kempczinski explained that Hyderabad was selected over other competing cities like Bangalore because of the high quality talent, better in-

frastructure, and superior quality of living.

The Global Office is being planned with an initial headcount of 2,000 employees. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy reinforced to the delegation the matchless skilling initiatives of the State government in the last 15 months and encouraged McDonalds to benefit from the Young India Skills University in getting trained employees not just for its Global Office, but also for its restaurant operations throughout the country. McDonalds, through their Indian business partner, currently has 38 outlets in Telangana and is planning to add 3-4 new ones every year, including in tier two and three towns. Chief Minister offered to source the entire agriculture produce required by McDonalds from the local farming community, which would also give a big boost to the agricultural economy of the State and augment farmers' incomes. Kempczinski briefed about the community development programmes McDonalds runs worldwide and assured of deepening such programmes further in Telangana in consultation with the government Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari, Special CS IT Jayesh Ranjan and Secretary to CM Ajith Reddy were present at the meeting.

Highlights:

-Partnership will see McDonalds investing in Global Capability Center (GCC)

-Global major to harness Telangana as a Skilling Zone to train human resources for entire McDonalds India centres, overseas-Procurement from farmers and local produce for national, global market a major win for Telangana. Rising will lead to several thousands of jobs, and indirect business and work opportunities for youth. (NSS)

Talk on Gau Kripa Kathas at Sankirtan Bhavan here from March 21

Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): The cow is a universal mother, says Shradhe Gopal Saraswatiji Didi, an IAS aspirant turned Gau Premi and Pracharak who has been travelling all over India creating awareness about the importance of India's most sacred animal cow.

She was here in connection with Gau Kripa Katha, a five-day spiritual talk and storytelling, a rare collection of facts from our ancient scriptures about Gau Mata. The 'Gau Kathas' are being decorated by her at Hare Krishna Golden Temple (Sankirtan Bhavan), Road No.12, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad. The 29-year-old Sadhvi from Indore, Madhya Pradesh is on her maiden visit on a six-day tour to the city at the invitation of Dhyana Foundation (DF), a volunteer spiritual and charitable NGO. She visited a Gaushala being run by the Dhyana Foundation for the past five years at Dhyana foundation at Peddeshapur, Goluru Road, Shamshabad which is home to 3000+ rescued, abandoned, sick galvanises. Interacting with the media at the Gaushala, she said India was home to 80 crore cows before Britishers invaded India. Now, the population of the gau vanish has



come down to nine crore. Similarly there used to be Gau Kripa, an ancient tradition and culture of conserving the Holy Cow. But that disappeared ever since the Britishers invaded India. In a bid to revive the ancient Indian tradition and culture of conserving the Holy cow, the 'Gau Katha' Dhyana Foundation is organising a five-day oration till March 21 between 4 to 7 pm at Hare Krishna Golden Temple with great fervour and enthusiasm. (NSS)

522nd Death Anniversary of Sri Thallapaka Annamacharya from March 25 – 29



Tirupati, March 19 (NSS): The 522nd Death anniversary celebrations of Telugu Saint Poet Thallapaka Annamacharya will be grandly celebrated from March 25 to 29 at Annamaiah's birthplace Dhyanamandiram, Thallapaka, at the 108-feet Annamaia statue of Annamaiah district, Narayanagiri Gardens at Tirumala, Annamacharya Kalamandiram in Tirupati. The Melotsavam will be held on March 25 at 6 am at Alipiri Padala Mandapam in Tirupati. On March 26, Saptagiri Sankeertana Gostiganam will be held in Tirumala at 6pm in Narayanagiri Gardens. For four days from March 26 to 29, spiritual and devotional musical programs will be organized at the Annamacharya Kalamandiram in Tirupati, the Dhyanamandiram in Thallapaka and also at the 108-feet Annamaya idol in the evening. (NSS)

19 projects to be completed within stipulated period through SPEED: Bhatti



Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka has announced that the State government has initiated SPEED (Smart, Proactive, Efficient, and Effective Delivery) to expedite the completion of 19 significant projects within the designated timeline. He stated, "This program emphasizes real-time monitoring, proactive execution, and efficient resource management to ensure projects are delivered on time and maximize benefits for the public."

While presenting the annual budget for 2025-26 in the Assembly on Wednesday, Bhatti Vikramarka noted that

some key projects under SPEED include the Musi Riverfront Development, Metro Rail Expansion, Regional Ring Road construction, the construction of Telangana Bhavan in Delhi, a new building for Osmania Hospital, and the implementation of Anti-Narcotics Strategies. He further informed that the State government is pioneering the development of India's first Net-Zero Future City, setting a new standard in sustainable and smart urbanisation. Designed to rival the world's top cities, this eco-friendly, ultra-modern metropolis will feature state-of-the-art infrastructure, cutting-edge technology, and a pollution-free environment. Spanning 765 sq. km across 56 villages between the Srisaillam and Nagarjuna Sagar highways, this transformative megaurban project is meticulously planned to drive innovation and economic growth, Bhatti Vikramarka said. To ensure its seamless execution, the Future City Development Authority (FCDA) has been established. This next generation city will be equipped with multimodal connectivity, an electric public transport network, and green buildings, fostering a sustainable and smart living ecosystem, he said. The Deputy Chief Minister said the FCDA will house specialised zones such as an AI City, Pharma Hub, Sports City, and Clean Energy Innovation Zone, making it a global hub for technology, industry and sustainable development. (NSS)

VIT-AP University inks MoU with Cyient Foundation

Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Vellore Institute of Technology - Andhra Pradesh (VIT-AP) University, Amaravati, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Cyient Foundation, the CSR arm of Cyient Limited, in collaboration with the Dr BVR Mohan Reddy School of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (BVR SCIENT) at IIT Hyderabad. This strategic partnership aims to advance innovation, entrepreneurship, and skill development through a series of collaborative initiatives targeting students and faculty.

The MoU marks the beginning of a long-term collaboration between VIT-AP and BVR SCIENT, with the support of Cyient Foundation, to support innovation and entrepreneurship training, and the creation of a robust innovation ecosystem. The partnership will include hands-on boot camps, hackathons, mentorship programs, IP and product management workshops, and faculty development programs to enhance entrepreneurship education. "We are delighted to collaborate with Cyient Foundation and BVR SCIENT to enhance innovation-led education at VIT-AP. This partnership will provide our students and faculty with invaluable exposure to real-world entrepreneurial experiences, helping us shape a new generation of technology-driven innovators and changemakers," said Dr S.V. Kota Reddy, Vice Chancellor, Vellore Institute of Technology - Andhra Pradesh University.

Regarding the collaboration, Dr Sudhakar Potukuchi, CEO, BVR SCIENT, said, "Through this partnership, we aim to inspire a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs by offering access to cutting-edge tools, mentoring, and real-world insights. BVR SCIENT brings the right blend of expertise and infrastructure to help transform ideas into impactful ventures. With VIT-AP, we are excited to nurture



entrepreneurial aspirations and increase the capacity and capabilities of entrepreneurship." Dr Jagadish Chandra Mudiganti, Registrar of VIT-AP University, expressed his enthusiasm regarding the significant association, stating that it paves the way for strengthening efforts to expand the network of experts for the university's incubates. Dr PNSV Narasimham, President & Head of Corporate Functions, Krishna Mohan Deevi, Director Programs – CSR, Cyient Limited; Manoj Kaushal, Senior Program Manager, Cyient, Sumita Thakur, Head Programs and Outreach, BVR SCIENT School of Entrepreneurship and Dr Ameet Chavan, Director, Innovation, Incubation and Entrepreneurship Cell (IIEC) were also present on the occasion. With this collaboration, both institutions envision the creation of a vibrant dual-region network connecting students, entrepreneurs, mentors, and industry leaders across Hyderabad and Amaravati. This network would accelerate impactful ventures and contribute to India's innovation economy. (NSS)

Telangana to implement HAM for road infrastructure development: Bhatti

Hyderabad, March 19 (NSS): Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka announced that the State government has taken a decision to implement the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) to enhance road infrastructure development in Telangana. During the presentation of the annual budget for 2025-26 in the Assembly on Wednesday, Bhatti Vikramarka explained that this model would see the government contributing 40 percent of the funding, while private developers would supply the remaining 60 percent. This approach is designed to optimize resource use and expedite project completion. As part of this effort, the government plans to construct 17,000 kilometers of rural roads by 2028, with an estimated investment of Rs.28,000 crores, he noted. The Deputy Chief Minister mentioned that the State government has received administrative approval for the development of 769.35 kilometers of new roads, backed by an investment of Rs.3,725.22 crores, aimed at enhancing connectivity and modernizing transportation infrastructure. As part of this initiative, 55 kilometers of roads and 9 bridges have already been completed, he said. Bhatti Vikramarka said the State government has undertaken a major initiative to improve rural connectivity by ensuring that every panchayat is connected with a BT (Bituminous) road, facilitating smoother transportation and accessibility. In addition to this, large-scale repairs and restoration of damaged rural roads have been carried out. The government has granted administrative approval for the construction of modern court complexes in 12 district headquarters, with an allocated



budget of Rs.972 crore, ensuring better legal facilities and improved access to justice across Telangana State, he informed.

The Deputy Chief Minister stated that a Regional Ring Road plan has been developed to fill the gap in the national highway network on all sides of Hyderabad city and it is proposed to lay four lanes initially and based on the future traffic requirements will expand to eight lanes. "The land acquisition process for the northern part of the project has already commenced. For the southern part, the NHAI has appointed consultants to prepare a detailed project report. The government considers this project to be a game-changer for the development of Telangana," Bhatti disclosed. (NSS)

EAM Jaishankar on tariffs, sanctions: 'Like it or not, they are a reality'

GNS News Agency, March 19

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar highlighted the reality of there being increased use of tariffs and sanctions by various countries to protect one's economic interests, and that developing international relations has "eroded" the lines which divide the different domains across countries. "Tariffs, sanctions, I think, whether we would like it or not they are a reality, countries use them. In fact, if one looks at the last decade, I would say we have seen a much greater weaponization of pretty much any kind of capability or any kind of economic activity. It could be financial flows, it could be energy supplies, it could be technology," EAM Jaishankar said, as he was asked on India's refusing to use tariffs and sanctions on other countries. Mr. Jaishankar made the remarks during the panel discussion "Commissioners and Capitalists: Politics, Business and New World Order," during the Raisina Dialogue held in New Delhi on Wednesday (March 19, 2025). His remarks come amidst the United States announcing various tariffs on the import of goods from various countries, including from India.

"This is a reality of the world. You fight for your business, because you are fighting for your employment, you are fighting for your comprehensive national power, of which business makes a very important contribution," Mr.



Jaishankar said. Underlining the developing international relations across the globe, he added, "I think today, the lines dividing different domains have eroded. If you see in international relations, I think it's a less restrained culture today than it was a decade ago." Earlier on March 13, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, while lamenting the tariffs imposed by various nations on the United States, referred to the tariffs imposed by India on American alcohol and agricultural products. "I have a handy chart here that shows not just Canada but the rate of tariffs across the board. If you look at Canada, since you brought it up, American cheese and butter have a nearly 300% tariff."

Tribal man kills self over 'police harassment', triggers protest in Gujarat's Bharuch; 'suicide note' names 3 cops

GNS News Agency, March 19

A 45-year-old tribal man allegedly died by suicide in Gujarat's Bharuch on Friday, triggering protests by the tribal community at the local Civil Hospital after a suicide note, purportedly written by him, accused three police personnel of harassment. The deceased was identified as Kirtan Vasava of Kavitha village, who was the sole breadwinner of his family. He was found unresponsive in an agricultural field and rushed to Jeevan Jyot Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Vasava's family members found the suicide note, written in Gujarati, in his pocket. The note, a copy of which is with The Indian Express, named Nabipur Police Inspector M K Parmar and head constables Rajendra Singh and Sandeepbhai. Late on Friday night, Vasava's body was taken to Bharuch Civil Hospital by the police. On Saturday, a large number of tribal people from Kavitha and neighbouring villages gathered at the hospital to collect the body for cremation. They protested outside the hospital demanding action against the three policemen.

On Saturday, Vasava's daughter Hiraben lodged a complaint against the three policemen with the Nabipur police, following which they registered an offence under section 108 (abetment of suicide) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and sections of the SC/ST Act. Bharuch Deputy Superintendent of Police C K Patel had started an investigation.

C K Patel, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Bharuch, said, "Kirtan Vasava was earlier arrested in two cases of prohibition and gambling. Nabipur police had seized his car in the prohibition case.... We have registered an offence against the three policemen and started investigation." In the purported suicide note, Vasava accused the policemen of harassing him over a "false" case. "I was selling liquor earlier but stopped four months ago. They took a forceful confession from me, made a case and seized my car, which they are not releasing. They come home regularly and use abusive language in the presence of my wife, sister and daughter. A couple of times, I went with them to the police station," the note read.

It went on, "They wanted me to continue illegal liquor sales. They regularly demand money and threaten me, even though I stopped the illegal activity. I am fed up and have no hope... Nobody should harass my family after my death. This suicide note should reach the Bharuch Superintendent of Police and strict action should be taken against M K Parmar, Sandeep and Rajendra Singh." BJP, Congress demand justice. Meanwhile, Gujarat Congress leader Sandeep Mangrola wrote to the National Human Right Commission (NHRC) in New Delhi, seeking strict action against the accused and compensation for the tribal man's family.

Bharuch MP Mansukh Vasava uploaded the purported suicide note on social media on Saturday morning. He also reached out to the community to pacify them. Arunsinh Rana, the MLA from Vagra, visited the hospital. Both BJP leaders met the family members of the deceased in the afternoon and assured all possible help. The MP said, "Parmar and the two policemen have entered many homes in the area, destroyed household items and left. Around one month ago, they disrupted a wedding function in the family of district panchayat member Bhavnaben Vasava in Nikora village. They even damaged household items at the house of the sarpanch in Angareshwar village. We complained to the Bharuch SP about Parmar and his team one month ago. If steps were taken against them back then, Kirtan Vasava would not have died by suicide." "Fed up with police harassment, a tribal man has ended his life. We want strict action, including the suspension of these policemen," he added. MLA Rana extended support to the victim's family and said, "The incident is painful... We want these policemen to be dismissed from the job, and an example should be set so that in future, no policemen would dare to do such things. We are sure the government will listen to us and act appropriately."

Supreme Court posts challenge to new CEC/EC appointments law to April 16, petitioners say case goes to the very roots of democracy

GNS News Agency, March 19

The Supreme Court on Wednesday (March 19, 2025) scheduled a detailed hearing of a challenge to a law giving the Central government a dominant role in the appointments of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners on April 16. A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant listed the case in mid-April following an oral mentioning made by advocate Prashant Bhushan, who appeared for petitioner-NGO Association for Democratic Reform (ADR).

The case was originally listed before the Bench for hearing on March 19, but placed towards the far end of the board. Mr. Bhushan voiced the possibility that the case would not come up for hearing on March 19, and sought a future date. "This case goes to the very roots of democracy," he submitted.

The case hearing was similarly adjourned in February. At that time, it was on a request from Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, who said he was appearing in another courtroom before a Constitution Bench. The case was pushed to March 19. Meanwhile, a new Chief Election Commissioner, Gyanesh Kumar, was appointed under the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act of 2023. The apex court had in the past refused a plea to stay the implementation of the law. The petitioners have argued that the law was introduced to dilute a Constitution Bench delivered in March 2023 in Anoop Baranwal versus Union of India, which had included the Chief Justice of India as a member of the high-powered selection committee involved in the appointments of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs). The bone of contention is under the validity of Section 7(1) of the statute. The provision mandated that the President would appoint the CECs and ECs on the recommendation of a selection committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister. The statute, in short, had replaced the CJI on the selection panel with a Union Minister, giving the government an upper hand in appointments to the Election Commission of India.

Abducted IT park employee's funeral in Mohali sees emotional farewell, 3 more suspects nabbed from Nepal border



GNS News Agency, March 19

With roses in hand and grief-stricken hearts, family members and local people marched in protest on Saturday, demanding the arrest of all accused before performing the last rites of a 23-year-old woman, who was abducted from Badal Colony in Mohali on March 7. Mitali, who worked at an IT park in Panchkula, was found dead in a drain in Banur three days later. As Mitali's body arrived from

Derabassi Hospital, an overwhelming sense of sorrow spread among the crowd who came to attend the funeral at Zirakpur. According to the family, four men abducted Mitali and the police failed to take appropriate action despite the her father lodging a complaint on March 7 itself, mentioning the name of the suspect who had been harassing the woman for quite some time. Meanwhile, SSP Deepak Pareek on Saturday confirmed that three of the four suspects — Sultan Mohammad, Raj Kumar, and Amandeep — have been arrested from the Bihar-Nepal border. Earlier, the police had arrested one accused Mohit Kumar along with the vehicle used for the abduction. Mitali's family has demanded death penalty for the accused. "We seek justice for our daughter. The police must take strict action against all those responsible for her murder and ensure that such tragedies do not happen again," said a relative. Derabassi MLA Kuljit Singh Randhawa who attended the funeral described the incident as deeply tragic and a significant challenge for the Punjab Police. "Crimes like these are intolerable. No accused will be spared, even if police negligence is involved. The harshest punishment will be given to set a strong precedent," the MLA said.

Himachal's premier health institute IGMC, Shimla sees rise in opioid addicts



GNS News Agency, March 19

A 24-year-old native of Kulwari village near Ghumarwin in Himachal Pradesh's Bilaspur district was rushed to the psychiatric ward of Indira Gandhi Medical College & Hospital (IGMC) when he began showing withdrawal symptoms. It's been 15 days since the man—who said he became addicted to chitta (heroin) during a short stint as a factory worker in Punjab's Ludhiana—has been admitted to the ward. His mother is the sole attendant. Three days ago, a 21-year-old from Chopal in Shimla was taken to the IGMC's psychiatric ward after he was detained by the police for allegedly attacking a bus driver and fellow passengers who objected when he smoked on a moving bus operated by the Himachal Roadways Transport Corporation (HRTC). Although his parents said that he is not an addict, doctors have been observing the youth's severe withdrawal symptoms. The BSc dropout from a reputed college in Solan reportedly told his father that he had only taken chitta once. The nursing staff, however, had to restrain his hands and feet to prevent the youngster from harming himself. Arrested for his alleged links with a recently busted inter-state drug-trafficking gang in Shimla, a 26-year-old was lodged at the Kaithu Jail in judicial custody, where he began exhibiting withdrawal symptoms. Prison staff rushed him to IGMC, where doctors admitted him in the psychiatric ward.

The well-guarded psychiatric ward in the E block of Himachal Pradesh's premier health institute has witnessed a marked shift in the substances abused by patients over the last two years. The ward's black sliding door remains chained shut at all times. At least three security personnel—including a female guard and a uniformed policeman—are on duty 24x7. The ward has a capacity of 30 beds, eight of which are earmarked for addicts. Speaking to The Indian Express, Dr Dinesh Dutt Sharma, head of the Psychiatry Department at IGMC, Shimla, said, "Since 2023, we have noticed a change in the substances to which people are addicted before being rushed to IGMC under emergency conditions. In 2023, approximately 890 patients visited the psychiatric outpatient department (OPD), and 258 were admitted to the ward. Out of these, 116 were addicts — 89 were addicted to cannabis and 27 were addicted to opioids."

Opioids refer to synthetic drugs, including heroin, that are addictive in nature. "In 2024, the total number of patients was 1,083, of whom 358 were admitted to the ward. Out of these, 145 were addicts. The number of patients addicted to opioids increased to 79, while those addicted to cannabis decreased to 66. In 2023, there were no female addict patients but in 2024, we admitted six such patients suffering from addiction to opioids," he shared. Dr Sharma maintained that although alcohol remains the most commonly used substance among patients presenting to the psychiatric OPD with withdrawal symptoms, alcoholic patients are rarely admitted to the ward. He explained, "Drug addiction falls under the category of chronic diseases. What makes chitta (heroin) dangerous is the high possibility of death from overdose, as victims tend to inject it. We have

Young nurse dies by suicide in Mohali, family alleges harassment by husband and in-laws

GNS News Agency, March 19

The deceased has been identified as Priyanka, a nurse at Fortis Hospital in the city. The family of the deceased has accused Priyanka's husband and in-laws of abetment to suicide. Priyanka's father, Surinder, a resident of Agroa village in Hisar district, Haryana, told the police that his daughter married Akash in February 2023. According to Surinder, shortly after the wedding, Priyanka's husband Akash's extramarital affairs caused frequent conflicts in their household, leading to emotional distress for Priyanka.

The father further claimed that Akash's family pressured them into funding his move abroad and demanded Rs 12 lakh for the purpose. However, Akash never went abroad despite taking the money and allegedly continued to harass Priyanka. The woman's family also accused him of being an alcoholic, and physically abusive toward Priyanka. According to Priyanka's father, on March 13 at around 10 pm, Priyanka's mother-in-law, Babli, called Priyanka's maternal uncle, stating that Priyanka had locked herself inside a room and was not responding to calls. When the family arrived in Mohali, they discovered that Priyanka's body had already been placed in the hospital mortuary.



As per the Mohali police, Priyanka's body was handed over to her family following a post-mortem examination at Civil Hospital, Phase 6, Mohali. The police have registered a case under Section 108 (abetting suicide) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita against Akash, his mother Babli, and other family members.

RBI likely to cut rates next month amid easing inflation: HSBC



GNS News Agency, March 19

New Delhi: After the decline in retail inflation in February to 3.6 per cent, the March inflation print is also trending below the RBI's 4 per cent target which is likely to lead to another rate cut by the central bank next month, according to an HSBC Research report. "The RBI has already embarked on a rate cutting cycle and is likely to go in for another 25 basis points reduction in the April monetary policy committee meeting, taking the repo rate to 6 per cent," HSBC Research said.

"Currently, March quarter inflation is trending lower than the RBI's forecast for the quarter. While winter crop sowing has been good, temperature in the next few weeks is important as the wheat crop is in its grain-filling stage," the report states. Deflation in food continued for the second consecutive month in February, down 1.0 per cent month-on-month. This was led by a fall in vegetable, pulses and egg, fish & meat prices. That said, prices of cereals, sugar and fruits rose, the report points out. Core inflation, which excludes food and fuel goods, rose across all definitions due to a sharp rise in gold prices during February. However, excluding gold, core inflation also remained firmly below the 4 per cent mark in annual terms and, at its long-term average in sequential terms, the report said. It also highlights that the rupee has depreciated by 4 per cent vs USD since October, which could add 30 bps to inflation, going by the FX sensitivities. However, a benign outlook on oil prices (HSBC commodity forecast for Brent is USD73/b for 2025), and Chinese excess capacity is likely to keep a lid on core inflation.

Putting it all together, we think that headline inflation will likely average 4 per cent in FY26, the report concludes. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra last month announced a 25 basis cut in the policy rate from 6.5 per cent to 6.25 per cent in the monetary policy review to accelerate growth amid global uncertainties. He said that inflation has declined and is expected to further moderate and gradually align with the RBI's target of 4 per cent. HSBC has projected India's GDP growth at 6.5 per cent. It sees an upsurge in rural demand post-harvest, a growth impulse from a cut in the income tax rate for the middle class, and monetary policy easing is likely to support growth in the April-June quarter. However, weaker goods exports after the global restocking cycle, ahead of US President Donald Trump's tariff threats, could be a drag, the report added.

The row over SCP/TSP funds in Karnataka

GNS News Agency, March 19

The alleged diversion of funds allocated to Special Component Plan (SCP) meant for Scheduled Castes and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) meant for Scheduled Tribes for guarantee schemes in Karnataka has triggered an uproar from the Opposition BJP. During the course of the ongoing budget session of the legislature, the issue has turned out to be a major flashpoint even as the state government maintained that it was done as per norms. While the Leader of Opposition R Ashok took objection to the use of SCP/TSP funds in the Legislative Assembly Thursday, the issue raised a storm in the Legislative Council Friday, forcing the Council chairman to adjourn proceedings for a brief period.

What are SCP/TSP funds?

The funds are allocated for the welfare of SC, ST communities, considered among the most backward in the state. Prior to 2013, there was no law in existence in Karnataka to ensure allocation of funds to these groups proportional to their population. In 2013, the Congress government under Siddaramaiah enacted the Karnataka Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan and Tribal-Sub Plan (Planning, Allocation and Utilization of Financial Resources) Act. Rules for the law were notified in 2017 with Karnataka becoming the second state to have such an Act. The law requires the government to spend 24.1 per cent of its total budget on SC/ST welfare with 17.15 per cent for SCs and 6.95 per cent for STs.

What is the quantum of funds allocated under SCP/TSP in Karnataka?

The allocation for SCP/TSP in Karnataka has almost tripled from Rs 15,894.66 crore in 2014-15 to Rs 42,018 crore in the recently presented 2025-26 budget. Save for 2014-15, when expenditure of the allocation was around 81 per cent, government data shows that more than 92 per cent of the funds allocated were spent till 2023-24 — the maximum being in 2023-24 when 97.23 per cent of the funds were spent. The funds, according to the government, are used in 470 schemes implemented by 35 departments.

What were the complaints on the implementation of SCP/TSP in the past?

The norms for allocation of funds were subject to a dispute during the erstwhile BJP government. While various sections of the 2013 Act provided for the usage of funds for individual development, colony development and expenditure in the social sector for the SC/ST communities, section 7(D) allowed the government to use it for 'deemed expenditure'. Due to the section, there were allegations that the erstwhile BJP government was using the SCP/TSP funds for infrastructure projects, thereby defeating the purpose of the funds. Following demands from Dalit groups, the Congress government scrapped 7(D) after it came to power in 2023.

What is the current row?

The combined BJP-JD(S) opposition has alleged that the SCP/TSP funds were being used to fund guarantee schemes. The coalition partners had also staged a protest during the start of the budget session against the Siddaramaiah government. Prior to this, the state government had constituted a drive to ascertain caste-wise data of beneficiaries for its guarantee schemes so that allocations can be made under SCP/TSP. The government has also shared data in the Legislative Council of spending Rs 13,434 crore of the Rs 39,121 crore allocated under SCP/TSP for guarantee schemes. As per the data, Rs 7,438 crore was spent for Gruha Lakshmi.

Participation of elephants in festivals is part of our culture: Supreme Court



GNS News Agency, March 19

A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma was hearing a petition filed by the NGO Vishwa Gaja Seva Samithi, which challenged a judgment of the Kerala High Court on January 13 in a suo motu case on the treatment of captive elephants in religious festivals, especially in the temples of Kerala. The petitioner NGO, represented by senior advocate Vikas Singh and advocate Narendra Kumar Verma, urged the apex court to "re-evaluate the all-impractical directions and biased observations" made by a Special Bench of the High Court. The NGO sought the Bench's interventions "to ensure the deeply rooted tradition of Kerala Hindu temple festivals including ezhunnellippu are preserved and protected within the bounds of Constitutional safeguards".

"Animal activists and NGOs have now become money-making tools and a majority of them are based in foreign countries and funded by foreign countries. Many animal rights activists in India are the agents of these crypto NGOs and they are trying to stop pujas and rituals in Hindu temples in India," the petition alleged. It asked the court to initiate an enquiry into the allegations of their foreign funding. In the context of Kerala, the petitioner NGO said, "Each festival has a different set of legends and myths behind it, depending on the temple deity. However, most revolve around the presence of elephants to honour the deity. The majority of Hindu temples in Kerala own elephants, which are donated by devotees." The petitioner pointed out that even the State emblem of Kerala depicted two elephants facing each other with their trunks raised, and featured the Ashoka Pil-

lar and conch in the middle. The petition claimed the very inception and progress of the proceedings in the High Court were "undermining and belittling the cultural and religious sentiments of millions of devotees who consider the use of elephants in festivals as an integral part of their religious practices". "It appears to us they want to completely stop the use of elephants in our festivals... It is a part of our culture," Justice Nagarathna orally observed.

Mr. Singh said the use of elephants was part of both religious and cultural festivals. "Elephants, particularly in Kerala, are revered as sacred animals, symbolizing strength, divinity, and prosperity," the petition said. "There is a clear allegation of foreign funding. They are trying to interfere with our culture," senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi and advocate Abhilash M.R. said. They appeared for the Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu devaswoms, which host the annual Thrissur Pooram, an event which witnesses elaborately caparisoned elephants. The Bench, however, did not agree with an application filed by the two devaswoms seeking a transfer of the case from the Kerala High Court to the Supreme Court itself. The devaswoms contended that the case involved core issues pertaining to wildlife conservation and religious and cultural practices involving the use of elephants in temple festivals. They said a case dating back to 2014 concerning captive elephants was already pending in the Supreme Court. Justice Nagarathna highlighted that the case involved the conflicting issues of the welfare of elephants and their use for cultural purposes. The Bench said the High Court was already seized of the case and there were guidelines laid down under the Captive Elephant (Management and Maintenance) Rules, 2012. The apex court wondered whether the transfer petition was a ploy to shift the case outside Kerala. The devaswoms chose to withdraw the transfer plea. In December 2024, the apex court struck a balance between animal rights and temple customs by directing the devaswom to strictly adhere to the 2012 Rules while staying any directions issued by the Kerala High Court found contrary to the law. On January 13 this year, the High Court however went ahead to reiterate the fact that festival organisers must mandatorily maintain "sufficient space" between elephants used in processions and parades as per the Rules. "It ill-behoves the rule-making authority to maintain a deafening silence at a time when a strict adherence to the Rules is mandated by the Supreme Court," the High Court had underscored.

22 years later, Punjab man acquitted as 'gun' fails firing test

GNS News Agency, March 19

The Punjab and Haryana High Court acquitted a man, who was earlier convicted under the Arms Act, after the prosecution failed to prove that the firearm allegedly seized from him was in working condition. Justice Jasjit Singh Bedi delivered the verdict, setting aside the conviction and sentencing imposed by the lower courts. The case dates back to January 24, 2003, when the Punjab Police registered an FIR against Jagtar Singh based on secret information. According to the prosecution, a police team had raided a pond area near Bir Sikhawala in Faridkot district, where Jagtar Singh and four others were allegedly plotting thefts and robberies. While the other suspects escaped, Singh was apprehended, and a country-made double-barrel pistol of .315 bore along with two live rounds was allegedly seized from him.

Following an investigation, he was charged under Section 25 of the Arms Act. The Chief Judicial Magistrate, Faridkot, convicted him on November 15, 2006, sentencing him to two years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 2,000. His appeal was dismissed by the Additional Sessions Judge, Faridkot, on April 1, 2008. Singh then filed a revision petition in the High Court in May 2008, and his sentence was suspended in August 2008.

During the final hearing of the revision petition, Singh's counsel argued that the prosecution had failed to prove that the firearm was functional, as it had not been test-fired. The counsel pointed to the deposition of Gurnam Singh, the police official who examined the weapon, stating that he had not checked the firing pin. The State contended that the weapon had been examined and was found to be in work-



ing condition. However, the court referred to previous judgments, including 'Jarnail Singh v. State of Punjab' (1999) and 'Mohan v. State of Madhya Pradesh' (2019), to clarify that test-firing is not always mandatory but that an examiner must establish that the weapon is capable of discharging a projectile.

Citing Modi's Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology, Justice Bedi explained that a firearm requires a functioning firing pin to propel a projectile. Since a police witness had admitted in cross-examination that he had not checked the firing pin, the court ruled that the prosecution had failed to establish that the weapon was a working firearm. "Thus, in the absence of checking for a firing pin, it cannot be ascertained that a shot could be fired and therefore, the weapon cannot be stated to be a firearm in working condition," Justice Bedi stated in the judgment. Accordingly, the high court set aside the judgments of the Chief Judicial Magistrate and the Additional Sessions Judge, acquitting Jagtar Singh of all charges.

CIDCO housing scheme: After high prices, homebuyers raise concerns over 'reduced' apartment sizes

Homebuyers have raised concerns about receiving apartments smaller than the promised size under the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO)'s latest housing scheme - My Preferred Home Scheme - in Navi Mumbai. While applicants were already discontent with the high prices of CIDCO homes, new complaints have surfaced regarding discrepancies in the actual carpet area of the flats. According to advertisements, apartments under the scheme were listed as 322 sq ft. However, winners of the housing lottery have received Letters of Intent (LOI) specifying the size as only 291.92 sq ft. This difference has aggrieved buyers, who now feel they are getting less than what was initially promised.

Former MLA and NCP (Sharad Pawar) leader Sandeep Naik has written to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, demanding that CIDCO allot apartments as per the original advertised size. "CIDCO must ensure that the flats provided match the size mentioned in the original housing scheme documents. Beneficiaries should not be deprived of their rightful carpet area," Naik stated. Many homebuyers are now speaking out about the issue. Expressing his disappointment, Suraj Kanojiya, an applicant who secured a house in Talaja Sector 29, said, "I was prepared to pay the higher price because I thought I was getting a 322 sq ft apartment. Now, finding out that the actual size is much smaller is frustrating; we feel deceived." Another applicant, who does not wish to be named and secured a flat in Kharghar Sector 14, shared similar concerns: "Buying a house in Navi Mumbai is already a challenge, and hence we depend on organisations like CIDCO, but now we are being given less space than what was advertised. CIDCO needs to address this." Applicants also pointed out that they were not informed about this crucial detail from the beginning, including at the experience centres displaying sample flats.

However, CIDCO officials have clarified that the original advertised size includes the balcony area, which is not reflected in the Maharashtra Real Estate Regulatory Authority (MahaRERA)-registered carpet area mentioned in the LOI. "The total area remains the same as stated in the advertisement. But as per RERA regulations, only the car-



pet area without the balcony is recorded in official documents, which is why the number appears lower on the LOI," a CIDCO spokesperson explained. CIDCO's My Preferred Home scheme, launched in 2024, attracted thousands of applicants hoping for affordable housing. The scheme offered 26,000 flats under the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and Low-Income Group (LIG) categories in locations such as Panvel, Kharghar Bus Terminus, Mansarovar Railway Station, Khandeshwar Railway Station, Kharghar Sector 16A, and Vashi Truck Terminus.

What do MahaRERA rules say?

According to MahaRERA, the carpet area is defined as "the net usable floor area of an apartment, excluding the area covered by external walls, areas under services shafts, exclusive balcony or verandah area, and exclusive open terrace area, but includes the area covered by the internal partition walls of the apartment."

Simply put, MahaRERA's carpet area calculation focuses solely on the internal, usable space of an apartment, deliberately excluding balconies and similar spaces. CIDCO's assertion that the discrepancy arises due to the exclusion of balcony areas in MahaRERA's carpet area definition is consistent with MahaRERA's guidelines. The reduction from the advertised 322 sq ft to the 291.92 sq ft specified in the LOI likely results from the exclusion of balcony space, aligning with RERA's measurement standards.

'Language not to be hated... if you learn Hindi, you can interact better in places like Delhi': Chandrababu Naidu



GNS News Agency, March 19

Amid vehement opposition to the New Education Policy's three-language formula from the neighbouring Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said Monday that languages are for communication and while the mother tongue is important, "there is no harm in learning other languages". Naidu, while making a presentation of 'Swarna Andhra 2047 Vision' in the Legislative Assembly Monday, spoke about the importance of learning the mother tongue. At the same time, he said, learning a new language could provide a competitive edge to youth looking for job opportunities.

The CM's remarks come at a time when the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu has been opposing the "imposition of Hindi" in the southern states. "Whether you are looking to work in the state, in the country, or outside, skills are important and they can be imparted in the mother tongue only. Learning the mother tongue is of utmost im-

portance. Some say that knowledge can be gained through English. No, it can be gained mainly through the mother tongue. In our state, it is Telugu. Hindi is jatiya basha (national language) and learning it will help in communicating in places such as Delhi. English is an international language... Let me reiterate once again that language is not to be hated. It is only for communication. So, instead of playing unnecessary politics, we should strive to learn as many languages as possible," he said. His remarks were met with approvals and smiles from Janasena Party members, including Deputy CM K Pawan Kalyan.

Although Naidu did not make any reference to the National Education Policy 2020, his speech lent weight to the three-language policy. "If you learn a language like Hindi, you will be able to interact better in a place like Delhi. At the same time, mother tongue should not be forgotten. Across the world, if you go to any country, the ethnic group with the highest income are Indians and 33 percent of them are Telugus. So, if you go to any Indian neighbourhood and call out in Telugu, it is likely many Telugus will come out and you start a discussion there. And I am proud to point that out those who speak (this) mother tongue are occupying important positions across the world," Naidu said.

Last week, Andhra Pradesh Deputy CM K Pawan Kalyan waded into the language row, calling out DMK leaders for not objecting when Tamil movies were dubbed into Hindi for "financial gain". On Saturday, Kalyan issued a statement in response to the DMK criticism. Posted on X, the statement quoted Kalyan as saying that the NEP 2020 did not make Hindi compulsory but that "false narratives about its imposition" were being peddled to mislead the people.

How a Pune painter is asking viewers to re-imagine women in different contexts

GNS News Agency, March 19

Pune artist Arpa Mukhopadhyay's art, which blends myth and modernity, is drawn from the dual cultural influences she experienced while growing up - she was born in a small village in West Bengal, with winding streets and strong folk customs, before moving to the "maximum city" of Mumbai. Mukhopadhyay's art, which blends myth and modernity, is drawn from the dual cultural influences she experienced while growing up - she was born in a small village in West Bengal, with winding streets and strong folk customs, before moving to the "maximum city" of Mumbai. (Express Photo)

One of the paintings by Pune-based contemporary artist Arpa Mukhopadhyay has three women dressed in traditional saris, with their heads covered, playing on tablas, tanpura, and flute. What is left to the viewer's imagination is where the women are located as the blue background gives no clue and makes the musicians appear to be floating in the air. "It is as if they are in eternity. They don't need to belong to a place or time, Music is eternal and they represent music," says Mukhopadhyay, who will display the work at her first solo show, Timeless Reimaginings, at PN Gadgil in Pune's Aundh from March 19-26.

Mukhopadhyay's art, which blends myth and modernity, is drawn from the dual cultural influences she experienced while growing up - she was born in a small village in West Bengal, with winding streets and strong folk customs, before moving to the "maximum city" of Mumbai. When she began to paint and develop her aesthetics, Mukhopadhyay found that her art was emerging from "traditional Indian aesthetics, inspired by folk art, such as the Kalighat paintings and the Bengal School of Art paintings that I encountered during my stay in Bengal, which I try to seamlessly integrate with the contemporary themes and practices I developed as an adult." What stands out among the vivid hues and layers of Mukhopadhyay's paintings is that the works put women at the centre. A painting shows two traditional women lying on the grass. It's not grass because it's not green but the viewer can imagine and re-imagine it as grass. The backdrop is such that you can even think of it as a memory field or, maybe, the women are just lost in reverie. It also makes a viewer wonder why women, unlike men, are almost never seen lying down casually to relax in a public space. "The painting will not tell you. It will make you imagine and re-imagine something that you already know in a different context," says the artist.

A prominent painting is of a woman, who looks like a mythological figure - except that she is not wearing orna-



ments. She is flying or floating in the air while other women and children from buildings watch her with wonder. "She could be a representative of the mythological being or it could be your imagination or something that is your aspiration. You want to be a strong woman who is on a higher pedestal. She could be Durga, but she has been reimagined," says Mukhopadhyay. Another goddess in the collection is Kamdhenu, who grants abundance and bounty that typically is understood as wealth. Mukhopadhyay's Kamdhenu is easily identifiable as the cow figure, with wings and golden ornaments, but her wings depict trees and greenery. "Today, the real blessing that we need from a goddess is a good environment and sustainability. Hence, I have portrayed an entire landscape in her wings. So that has been re-imagined in today's context," says the artist. Mukhopadhyay was not always an artist though she has been practicing art for years. She was working in the IT industry for many years and it was around six years ago that she got into professional painting. The turning point came after her mother passed away and Mukhopadhyay started painting as a way of grieving. "I used to paint every day and night. Soon, I thought that since it was giving me so much peace why not take it up as a profession," she says.

Mukhopadhyay has been widely exhibited, from the W Gallery Holiday Auction and Exhibition in the US in December 2020, to the Autumn-Winter 2020 Exhibition, "Hope" by the Open School of Creative Arts and Well Being, North Devon, England, to the 89th All India Exhibition 2024, The Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar, in 2024. With 'Timeless Reimaginings', Mukhopadhyay strikes out as a solo flyer.

People abandoning parents will not get their property: Karnataka minister Sharan Prakash Patil

GNS News Agency, March 19

Karnataka minister Sharan Prakash Patil, karnataka property, indian express Karnataka minister Sharan Prakash Patil emphasised that under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007, parents can revoke property transfers if their children fail in their duty of care. The Karnataka government has warned that it will cancel property transfers and wills made in favour of children who abandon their elderly parents in hospitals.

This follows reports from the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences (BIMS), which has recorded over 150 cases of elderly people being deserted. Similar incidents have been reported from other government medical colleges across the state. In response, Medical Education Minister Sharan Prakash Patil directed all government medical colleges to report such cases and file complaints with assistant commissioners (revenue sub-division) to initiate legal action. The issue was raised by the BIMS director during a review meeting at Vikasa Soudha, prompting Patil to instruct Dr B L Sujatha Rathod, Director, Medical Education, to take im-



mediate steps. Medical officers revealed that many elderly patients were left in hospitals under the pretext of treatment but never taken back home. Since hospitals provide food and shelter, some abandon their parents there to avoid responsibility. While financial difficulties were cited in some cases, most parents were deserted after their property was transferred to their children.

Wildfires rage across Telangana; 164 forest fires reported every day in 2025

GNS News Agency, March 19

Adilabad: In an alarming trend, Telangana is recording an average of above 164 forest fires every day, with human errors and not mere accidents, said to be triggering the shocking number of wildfires even in critical tiger reserves in the State. According to official data, Telangana registered a staggering 11,434 forest fires from January 1 to March 10 this year. The gravity of the situation is evident when this figure is compared against the 14,027 forest fires that were reported in an entire year in 2024! On an average,

the State has witnessed nearly 163.4 forest fires a day in 2025. While the Bhadradi circle saw 3,243 wildfires in the last 70-odd days, 2,479 forest fires occurred in the Kawal Tiger Reserve. The Kaleshwaram and Basar circles saw 2,080 and 1,784 fire incidents respectively, while the Amrabad Tiger Reserve experienced 924 forest fires while Rajanna-Sircilla district accounted for 788 incidents and Charminar circle registered 146 forest fires. Forest officials instantly receive a message on their mobile phones whenever a forest fire occurs.

China 'appreciates' PM Modi's 'positive' remarks on Sino-India ties



GNS News Agency, March 19

China appreciated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "positive" remarks on the Sino-Indian ties favouring dialogue over discord and said that a cooperative dance between the elephant and dragon contributing to mutual success is the only choice for both sides. China noted Prime Minister Modi's recent positive statement on China-India relations and appreciate it, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing in Beijing while responding to a question on the Prime Minister's remarks in conversation with American podcaster Lex Fridman.

Ms. Mao said the successful meeting between Prime Minister Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Kazan, Russia, in October provided strategic guidance for the improvement and development of bilateral ties. Both sides have earnestly followed through on the important common understandings, strengthened exchanges and achieved positive outcomes. "Let me stress that in the 2000 plus years' history of interactions, the two countries have maintained friendly exchanges" and both the countries learned from

each other contributing to civilisational achievements and human progress, she said. "As the two largest developing countries, China and India have shared the task of accelerating their development and revitalisation and understand and support each other's successes," she said.

This serves the fundamental interests of over 2.8 billion people, meets the common aspiration of regional countries, and follows the historical trend of the Global South growing stronger and conducive to world peace, she said. The two countries should be partners that contribute to each other's success and a "cooperative pas de deux", a ballet dance between dragon and elephant, is the "only choice for both sides", she said, retreating the recent comments by Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the development of bilateral ties.

China stands ready to work with India to implement the important common understandings between the two leaders, take the 75th anniversary of the diplomatic relations as an opportunity and advance bilateral ties on the track of stable and sound development, she said. In his podcast, Mr. Modi said normalcy has returned to the India-China border after his recent talks with President Xi to defuse tensions ignited by the 2020 clashes between the two armies in eastern Ladakh. Sounding optimistic about the ties between the world's two most populous countries, he said differences between neighbours are natural and emphasised the ancient cultural ties between them when the two civilizations learnt from each other and had little conflict. Asserting that their efforts are aimed at ensuring that their differences do not turn into disputes and preferring dialogue over discord, he said the two countries once contributed over 50 per cent of the global GDP. "Our cooperation is not only (mutually) beneficial but also essential for global peace and prosperity," he said.

Quashing of Munambam judicial commission's appointment plunges land issue into further legal complications

GNS News Agency, March 19

The quashing of the appointment of the C. N. Ramachandran Nair judicial commission on Munambam land issue has once again plunged the vexing issue, which has even threatened to upset the communal amity in the State, into further uncertainties. Though the Kerala government, represented by its Advocate General, keenly contested the petition of the Kerala Waqf Land Samrakshana Vedi for the dissolution of Mr. Nair's appointment before the Kerala High Court, the court found merit in the contentions of Vedi and ruled in its favour. The State government is likely to challenge the decision before a Division Bench.

The court order has again reactivated the issue, which had remained almost dormant for the past few months. The Waqf Tribunal, headed by a District Judge, had also seized the matter and had held a camp sitting in Kochi as the parties to the Munambam litigation were all from Kochi. There will be a change of guard in the Tribunal as Rajan Thattil, the present judge, will be replaced by T. K. Minimal as the chairperson in May this year as part of the general transfer of the judicial officers. Incidentally, Mr. Nair had voluntarily suspended the functioning of the commission during the second week of February, when the petition challenging his appointment came up before the Kerala High Court.

Responding to the Single Judge's order, Mr. Nair said he had no personal comments to offer as it was up to the State government to respond. "The State government can either accept the order or challenge it before a Division Bench. I shall wait for the government's decision," he said. The Commission had almost completed its work and all that was left was to write the report. Large volumes of documents, including the earlier court orders and title deeds



of properties involved in the issue, were collected by the commission. While some documents were obtained from the government, the parties to the litigation too had also supplied several documents to the panel. It had also listened to various stakeholders and provided them the opportunity to file written submissions, explained Mr. Nair. "The functioning of the Munambam panel has not brought any significant financial burden on the government as I have not taken any remuneration for the job because the government has been paying me the salary for my engagement as the chairperson of the Kerala State Commission for Economically Backward Classes among Forward Communities. All that the government has spent on the panel was the wages of the staff employed for the panel," he said. While the Waqf Samrakshana Samithi, another organisation fighting for the protection of Waqf properties, welcomed the court decision, Joseph Benny Kuruppassery, the convener of the Land Protection Samithi, has sought an intervention from the State government to resolve the issue.

Telangana tourists flock to Madhya Pradesh's temples and heritage sites



GNS News Agency, March 19

A large number of tourists from Telangana have been making a beeline to the 'Heart of India' — Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) — with many preferring temples and other pilgrimage centres in that State, thanks to enhanced road and air connectivity between both the States and improved facilities at tourist destinations across M.P. Although M.P. is home to more than a dozen renowned pilgrimage centres, the Mahakaleswar Temple and Kal Bhairav Temple in Ujjain, along with the Omkareshwar Temple, remain the most visited by people from Telangana. "Usually, travellers from Telangana prefer the Indore circuit (spiritual destinations) consisting of Jyotirlingas. They land in Indore and then cover the entire circuit. Flight connectivity between Hyderabad and Indore is good," says a senior officer of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB), which operates an office at Tourism Plaza, Begumpet, in Hyderabad.

"Given the varied demands of tourists, we are focusing on customised packages. We design the packages based on the number of tourists, duration of stay, times of visit and mode of transport. However, we can assure visitors of affordable accommodations at our hotels and resorts. The most preferred modes of transport are cars and minibuses since both the States are well connected by a national highway," the official added. The Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (MPSTDC) provides a range of amenities for visitors, including hotel rooms, restaurants, resorts, and cottages at nearly all major tourist destinations. "We operate more than 170 hotels, including three-star properties. Tourists can book rooms through our website: <https://mpstdc.mponline.gov.in>. Additionally, we offer homestays in many designated rural areas, allowing visitors to experience village life and taste homely food," an MPSTDC official said. Having varied and fascinating history, Madhya Pradesh boasts three UNESCO World Heritage sites — architectural marvels such as the temples of Khajuraho, the stupa of Sanchi, and the rock shelters of Bhimbetka. The recent 51st Khajuraho Dance Festival (KDF), held from February 20 to 26, attracted thousands of

domestic and foreign tourists to Khajuraho which is connected by air and rail from Delhi. A dance performance at the KDF-2025 even set a Guinness World Record for the longest classical dance marathon, with 139 artists performing continuously for over 24 hours. Domestic as well as international tourists from the US and European countries flock Khajuraho every year, according to officials. However, locals lamented that the foreign tourist's footfall is yet to pick up ever since a significant drop after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Principal Secretary Tourism and Managing Director of Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board Sheo Shekhar Shukla the government hoped that their focus on the expanding tourism infrastructure, promoting cultural heritage, and leveraging digital marketing strategies would certainly help them in attracting both domestic and international tourists in greater numbers. Several historic forts, such as the 6th century Gwalior Fort and 17th century palaces in Orchha, along with hill stations like Pachmarhi, continue to attract heritage tourists. The State's national parks, including Panna and Pench, are home to big cats and other wildlife. "Our State is known as the Tiger State, Leopard State, Cheetah State and Vulture State. Jungle safaris are in high demand, and visitors usually need to book tickets two to three months in advance," an official said. Meanwhile, Film Tourism, Adventure Tourism and Wildlife Tourism are also thriving in M.P., which has over 30% of the State area covered with forest. Betwa river, which flows alongside the heritage city Orchha, offers an adventurous rafting experience besides providing a great opportunity to have the amazing sights of the city from a different angle. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh's diverse culinary landscape offers a mouth-watering array of options. The State's distinct regions, including Bagelkhand, Bhopal, Bundelkhand, and Malwa, showcase their unique flavours and specialities, catering to both vegetarians and meat-lovers alike.

Three girls, one boy from Asifabad selected for national football competition

Kumram Bheem Asifabad: Three girls and a boy from the district were selected to participate in a national-level football competition by shining in a State-level 68th SGF under-14 football championship held at Wanaparthy. Bhumika from TGWURJC-Asifabad, Dikshitha of TGMRS-Sirpur (T) and Anitha studying at TG Model School-Karghaznagar qualified to take part in the national level event.

Executive committee rejects Dhami's resignation as SGPC president, appeals to him to 'immediately resume his duties'



GNS News Agency, March 19

The executive committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) on Monday unanimously decided to "reject" Harjinder Singh Dhami's resignation as the president of the apex gurdwara body and appealed to him to immediately resume his duties. After a meeting held under the leadership of senior vice-president Raghujit Singh Virk at its sub-office in Chandigarh, all SGPC executive committee members visited Dhami's residence in Hoshiarpur and urged him to "immediately resume" his duty as the president of the Sikh organisation.

It was the second visit of SGPC executive committee members to Dhami since his resignation from the post on February 17 after the then Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh condemned the dismissal of Giani Harpreet Singh as the jathedar of Damdama Sahib at Talwandi Sabo

near Bathinda. According to SGPC sources, Dhami demanded a few days to consider the SGPC's request. Earlier, Dhami had said that he won't withdraw his resignation. According to an SGPC statement, at the meeting, it was also decided to form a committee of academic scholars to review the Centre's New Education Policy (NEP) in light of the message delivered by Jathedar of Akal Takht and Takht Kesgarh Sahib, Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj, on the occasion of the Sikh festival of Hola Mohalla. The statement said the committee would evaluate reforms necessary in the NEP in Punjab's context, and necessary actions would be taken accordingly. "The committee will also deliberate on the current challenges facing the Gurmukhi language and the recommendations will be taken up with the Union government," the SGPC said. Besides these, the SGPC also focused on religious campaigns announced by Giani Kuldeep Singh. "As per the Jathedar's orders, the SGPC will initiate a vigorous religious campaign which will reach every household. This campaign will commence on April 13 on the occasion of Khalsa Sajna Diwas (Vaisakhi). To mark its launch, 'Amrit Sanchar' (initiation) ceremonies will be held at the Takhts, where thousands will be initiated into the Sikh faith," the SGPC said. At Takht Kesgarh Sahib in Anandpur Sahib, the 'Amrit Sanchar' will be performed using the historical 'Khanda' of Guru Gobind Singh, the statement said. This year, the 350th martyrdom anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur and the 350th Guruship centenary of the 10 Sikh master, Guru Gobind Singh, is being commemorated according to 'Panthic' traditions and the religious campaign will be dedicated to these historic events.

Delhi Police arrest 4 from Rajasthan for stealing jewellery worth Rs 50-60 lakh in Kailash Colony

GNS News Agency, March 19

The Delhi Police Sunday arrested four people, including a woman and a receiver of stolen items, from Rajasthan in connection with a robbery of jewellery worth Rs. 50-60 lakh in the Capital's Kailash Colony area. The case came to light on February 21 when the police received a PCR call reporting a burglary at an H-Block residence in Kailash Colony. The complainant informed the police that he and his family had been away in Surajkund, and when they came back at around 3.15 pm, they discovered their flat's main door broken and valuables worth several lakhs missing.

During the investigation, forensic experts and crime teams inspected the crime scene. CCTV footage analysis showed four individuals arrived at the residence in the afternoon on February 21. Two suspects entered the house after breaking the door, while the other two kept watch outside, said police. At 1.34 pm, all four were seen fleeing. Through technical surveillance and intelligence gathering, the suspects were identified as Pardhan, Ranjeet Singh, Babulal and Prakash, all residents of Ajmer in Rajasthan. The police traced them to their village and arrested Pardhan, 34, Bhanwar Singh, 60, a 53-year-old woman, and Ramavtar Soni, 28. During interrogation, they allegedly confessed to the crime, said the police. "They had stolen Rs 3 lakh in cash and gold and diamond jewellery worth Rs 50-60 lakh from there and ran away to their native place in Ajmer. On February 26, they distributed the stolen



jewellery among themselves and some jewellery items were given to Bhanwar Singh and the woman. Bhanwar Singh and the woman sold 125 gram of gold jewellery to Ramavtar Soni. Some of the jewellery items were hidden by Bhanwar Singh and the woman in a hole in the fields at their village, which were recovered on their instance," said Ankit Chauhan, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South. According to the police, the arrested have prior criminal records. Pardhan has been named in a burglary case registered at Greater Kailash 1 Police Station, and was declared a proclaimed offender in December 2023. The police said they are continuing their investigation to arrest three of the remaining accused and recover the remaining stolen property.

Karnataka Police book right-wing activist Chakravarthy Sulibele over his 'inflammatory' remarks

GNS News Agency, March 19

The Karnataka Police said Monday they have registered a case against right-wing activist Chakravarthy Sulibele for allegedly making inflammatory remarks during an event at Koragajja Kshethra in Kuthar. The remarks were reportedly made on March 9 during a foot march organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) from Kadri Temple to Koragajja Kshethra. The First Information Report (FIR) was filed by Abdul Rasheed, a local Congress worker. The case was registered on Sunday under Sections 353(2) (statements conducing to public mischief) and 192 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The case was registered after Congress leaders, led by Ullal unit president Mustafa Abdulla, filed a complaint at the Ullal Police Station, alleging that Sulibele's statements were aimed at inciting communal tensions. Sharing a copy of the FIR on X, Sulibele said, "An-



other FIR against me—this time not for hate speech, but for advocating love. I merely said love knows no boundaries, and Hindu boys should break free from societal constraints to marry across communities. How is this hate?"

Delhi Police detain 7 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants under special drive



GNS News Agency, March 19

The Delhi Police said Monday they have detained seven illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, including a minor, from the city and the National Capital Region (NCR) under a special drive. The operation launched by the East Delhi police was conducted as part of an ongoing campaign against illegal immigrants to identify and deport individuals residing in the city without valid documents. The detained individuals were identified as Dilawar Khan, 48, Beauty Begum, 39, Rafikul, 43, Tauhid, 20, Mohammed Azhar, 28, Zakir Malik, 40, and a 15-year-old girl.

The police said the seven people had entered India illegally through river routes near the India-Bangladesh border, and were living in various locations across Delhi-NCR to evade detection. On Sunday, the police detained Khan from Krishna Nagar, based on a tip-off received by the police. Initially, the police said, he claimed to be a resident of West Bengal, but sustained interrogation revealed him to be a Bangladeshi national from Khulna district. Following his confession, six more Bangladeshi nationals were iden-

tified and subsequently detained from different locations, including Laxmi Nagar, Lajpat Nagar, Krishna Nagar, Seemapuri in Delhi, and Shalimar Garden in Ghaziabad. The police said the deportation process has been initiated with the assistance of the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO), Delhi. The accused will be presented before FRRO at R K Puram for further deportation proceedings.

CPJ concerned over Telangana CM Revanth Reddy's remarks on Journalists

Hyderabad: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has expressed concern over Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's recent comments threatening to publicly humiliate individuals posing as journalists and posting critical content. His remarks came after two journalists from Pulse News were arrested for publishing an interview critical of him.

On March 12, Hyderabad Police arrested reporter Thanvi Yadav and Pulse News Managing Director Revathi Pogadadanda. Police claimed their interview contained abusive content that could incite social unrest. Their mugshots were posted on social media, a practice usually reserved for criminals. On March 17, the journalists were granted bail after spending five days in custody. However, they still face serious charges, including criminal conspiracy, promoting hatred and publishing obscene material under Indian law. If convicted, they could face jail time.

Bangladesh slams Gabbard's remarks on minority persecution



GNS News Agency, March 19

The interim government of Professor Muhammad Yunus refuted U.S. National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard's remarks on the alleged persecution of minority communities in Bangladesh saying her comments were "not based on any evidence or specific allegations". It said Ms. Gabbard's statement in an Indian TV channel was "misleading and damaging to the image and reputation of Bangladesh, a nation whose traditional practice of Islam has been famously inclusive and peaceful and that has made remarkable strides in its fight against extremism and terrorism". The U.S. spy chief, now in India, earlier on Monday said the "longtime unfortunate persecution, killing, and abuse of religious minorities like Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and others has been a major area of concern for the U.S. government and President Trump and his administration."

In an interview with the TV channel, Ms. Gabbard alleged "persecution and killing" of religious minorities in

Bangladesh and that "the threat of Islamic terrorists" in the country was "rooted" in the "ideology and objective" to "rule and govern with an Islamist caliphate". She said U.S. President Donald Trump's newly begun talks with Bangladesh's interim government on the issue while "The talks are just beginning between President Trump's new cabinet coming in and the Government of Bangladesh, but this continues to remain a central focus area of concern". But the chief adviser's office said groundlessly linking Bangladesh to the idea of an "Islamist caliphate" undermined the hard work of countless Bangladeshis and their friends and partners around the world who were committed to peace, stability, and progress. It said Bangladesh "strongly condemns any efforts to link the country to any form of 'Islamist caliphate'".

"Political leaders and public figures should base their statements, especially about the most sensitive issues, on actual knowledge and take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes, to fan fears and potentially even stoke sectarian tensions," Yunus's office said. Ms. Gabbard, who arrived in New Delhi on Sunday on a three-day visit, spoke about the ideology of an "Islamic Caliphate" and how extremist elements and terror groups globally aim for such an outcome. The Chief Adviser's office, however, said Bangladesh, like many countries around the world, faced challenges of extremism, "but it has continuously worked in partnership with the international community, including the US, to address these issues through law enforcement, social reforms, and other counterterrorism efforts". "In support of our shared global efforts to combat extremism and terrorism, the Interim Government of Bangladesh remains committed to engaging in constructive dialogue based on facts and on respect for the sovereignty and security of all nations," the statement read.

Israel launches deadly wave of airstrikes against Hamas across Gaza, killing at least 200 including several children

GNS News Agency, March 19

Israel launched a wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Tuesday, saying it was striking dozens of Hamas targets in its heaviest assault in the territory since a ceasefire took effect in January. Palestinian officials reported at least 200 deaths. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he ordered the strikes because of a lack of progress in talks to extend the ceasefire. Officials said the operation was opened and was expected to expand. The White House said it had been consulted and voiced support for Israel's actions.

The surprise attack shattered a period of relative calm during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and raised the prospect of a full return to fighting in a 17-month war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza. It also raised questions about the fate of the roughly two dozen Israeli hostages held by Hamas who are believed to still be alive. Hamas accused Mr. Netanyahu of upending the ceasefire agreement and exposing the hostages "to an unknown fate." In a statement, it called on mediators to hold Israel "fully responsible for violating and overturning the agreement." In the southern city of Khan Younis, Associated Press reporters saw explosions and plumes of smoke. Ambulances brought wounded people to Nasser Hospital, where patients lay on the floor, some screaming. A young boy sat with a bandage around his head as a health worker checked for more injuries, a young girl cried as her bloody arm was bandaged.

Many Palestinians said they had expected a return to war when talks over the second phase of the ceasefire did not begin as scheduled in early February. Israel instead embraced an alternative proposal and cut off all shipments of food, fuel and other aid to the territory's 2 million Palestinians to try to pressure Hamas to accept it. "Nobody wants to fight," Palestinian resident Nidal Alzaanin told the AP by phone from Gaza City. "Everyone is still suffering from the previous months," he said. The White House sought to blame Hamas for the renewed fighting. National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said the militant group "could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose refusal and war." US envoy Steve Witkoff, who has been leading mediation efforts along with Egypt and Qatar, had earlier warned that Hamas must release living hostages immediately "or pay a severe price." An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the unfolding operation, said Israel was striking Hamas' military, leaders and infrastructure and planned to expand the operation beyond air attacks. The official accused Hamas of attempting to rebuild and plan new attacks. Hamas militants and security forces quickly returned to the streets in recent weeks after the ceasefire went into effect. Israel's Defence Minister, Israel Katz, said the "gates of hell will open in Gaza" if the hostages aren't released. "We will not stop fighting until all of our hostages are home and we have achieved all of the war goals," he said.

Explosions could be heard throughout Gaza. Khalil Degran, a spokesman for the Health Ministry based at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in central Gaza, said at least 200 people had been killed. The territory's civil defense agency said its crews were having a difficult time carrying out rescue efforts because various areas were being targeted simultaneously. Talks on a second phase of the ceasefire had stalled. The strikes came two months after a ceasefire was reached to pause the war. Over six weeks, Hamas released 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight more in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners in a first phase of the ceasefire. But since that ceasefire ended two weeks ago, the sides have not been able to agree on a way forward with a second phase aimed at releasing the 59 remaining hostages, 35 of whom are believed to be dead, and ending the war altogether. Hamas has demanded an end to the war and full withdrawal of Israeli troops in exchange for the release of the remaining hostages. Israel says it will not end the war until it destroys Hamas' governing and military capabilities and frees all hostages.

Mr. Netanyahu has repeatedly threatened to resume the war. "This comes after Hamas repeatedly refused to release our hostages and rejected all offers it received from the U.S. presidential envoy, Steve Witkoff, and from the mediators," Mr. Netanyahu's office said early Tuesday. Taher Nunu, a Hamas official, criticized the Israeli attacks. "The international community faces a moral test: either it allows the return of the crimes committed by the occupation army or it enforces a commitment to ending the aggression and war against innocent people in Gaza," he said. Gaza already was in a humanitarian crisis. The war erupted when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostages. Most have been released in ceasefires or other deals, with Israeli forces rescuing only eight and recovering dozens of bodies. Israel responded with a military offensive that killed over 48,000 Palestinians, ac-



According to local health officials, and displaced an estimated 90% of Gaza's population. The territory's Health Ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and militants, but says over half of the dead have been women and children. The ceasefire had brought some relief to Gaza and allowed hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to resume to what remained of their homes. A renewed Israeli ground offensive could also be especially deadly now that so many Palestinian civilians have returned home. Before the ceasefire, civilians were largely concentrated in tent camps meant to provide relative safety from the fighting. The return to fighting could also worsen deep internal fissures inside Israel over the fate of the remaining hostages. Many of the hostages released by Hamas returned emaciated and malnourished, putting heavy pressure on the government to extend the ceasefire. The released hostages have repeatedly implored the government to press ahead with the ceasefire to return all remaining hostages, and tens of thousands of Israelis have taken part in mass demonstrations calling for a ceasefire and return of all hostages. Mass demonstrations are planned later Tuesday and Wednesday following Netanyahu's announcement this week that he wants to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency, the Shin Bet. Critics have lambasted the move as an attempt by Netanyahu to divert blame for his government's failures in the Oct. 7 attack and handling of the war. Since the ceasefire in Gaza began in mid-January, Israeli forces have killed dozens of Palestinians who the military says approached their troops or entered unauthorized areas. Still, the deal has tenuously held without an outbreak of wide violence. Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been trying to mediate the next steps in the ceasefire. Israel wants Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas instead wants to follow the ceasefire deal reached by the two sides, which calls for negotiations to begin on the ceasefire's more difficult second phase, in which the remaining hostages would be released and Israeli forces would withdraw from Gaza.

Godavari waters not reaching Wyra reservoir, say Telangana Rythu Sangham leaders

GNS News Agency, March 19

Khammam: Connecting the Rajiv link canal in the lower part of Enkooor with Nagarjuna Sagar left canal yielded no result for the cultivation of lands under Wyra reservoir ayacut and in Konijerla mandal and Enkooor mandals, felt Telangana Rythu Sangham leaders. The Sangham district secretary Bonthu Rambabu noted that Godavari waters released from Sitarama Project into the Enkooor NSP left canal through the Rajiv link canal not reaching Wyra reservoir. As a result, the efforts to connect Sitarama Project canal to Wyra reservoir turned futile. Speaking to Telangana Today, he said that if the same Sitarama Project canal was connected at the head regulator near Timmaraoepet, Godavari water would have helped to irrigate lands in Tallada, Kallur, Penuballi and Vensoor mandals besides cultivation lands within the Sagar ayacut in Bonakal, Konijerla, Enkooor and Vaira mandals, he said. He wanted alternative arrangements to be made for diverting Godavari waters to Wyra reservoir by constructing an escape channel at Ginnelavagu to provide water to the lands of erstwhile Khammam district. On the other hand, CPI (ML) New Democracy Kothagudem district committee found fault with the State government for diverting Godavari waters to Khammam instead of supplying water to lands in agency mandals in Kothagudem district. The party district secretariat member Shaik Umar stated that three ministers in the district, Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy and Tummala Nageswara Rao should ensure Godavari water supply to mandals in like Julurpad and others where the canals were built.

Trump warns Iran of 'consequences', vows to hold it responsible for further Houthi attacks



GNS News Agency, March 19

U.S. President Donald Trump on explicitly linked the actions of Yemen's Houthi rebels to the group's main benefactor, Iran, warning Tehran it would "suffer the consequences" for further attacks by the group. The comments by Mr. Trump on his Truth Social website escalate his administration's new campaign of airstrikes targeting the rebels, which killed at least 53 people this weekend alone. U.S. officials said the strikes were carried out against more than 40 targets and more airstrikes were planned in the coming days. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of military operations. Meanwhile, the Iranians continue to weigh how to respond to a letter Mr. Trump sent them last week trying to jump-start negotiations over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program.

Houthi supporters rallied in several cities Monday after the strikes, vowing revenge against America and Israel over blocking aid to the Gaza Strip after its war on Hamas there. The Houthis' al-Masirah satellite news channel put young boys on air live, who chanted the group's slogan: "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam." "The Yemeni position is an irreversible position [regarding Gaza], so do whatever you [Americans] want, for we are men who fear no one but God," said Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a Houthi leader who spoke to the demonstration in Yemen's rebel-held capital, Sanaa.

The United Nations called for a halt to all military activities in Yemen and the Red Sea, urging "utmost restraint" and warning that "any additional escalation could exacerbate regional tensions." U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said Monday. Describing the Houthis as "sinister mobsters and thugs," Mr. Trump warned any attack by the group would be met with "great force, and there is no guarantee that that force will stop there." "Iran has played 'the innocent victim' of rogue terrorists from which they've lost control, but they haven't lost control," Mr. Trump alleged in his post. "They're dictating every move, giving them the weapons, supplying them with money and highly sophisticated Military equipment, and even, so-called, 'Intelligence.'" And in a marked departure from the previous administration, Mr. Trump has given U.S. Central Command the authority to launch offensive strikes against the Houthis when it deems it appropriate. The Biden administration had required White House approval to conduct offensive strikes like the ones over the weekend. It did allow U.S. forces to launch defensive attacks, including to take out weapons that appeared to be ready to fire. Delegating the authority to the regional

commander, said Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkeiwich, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "allows us to achieve a tempo of operations where we can react to opportunities that we see on the battlefield in order to continue to put pressure on the Houthis." He added that it also allows the U.S. to hit a broader array of targets. The U.S. officials said Mr. Trump made the decision last week. The weekend strikes targeted headquarters positions and drone sites where what the Pentagon identified as "key leaders" for the Houthis' drone program were located at the time, said Mr. Grynkeiwich. The Pentagon said there was no evidence that any civilians were killed in the attacks.

Iran's ambassador to the United Nations delivered a strong rebuke Monday to Mr. Trump's recent rhetoric about the Islamic Republic, saying Mr. Trump and U.S. officials are making "reckless and provocative statements" and threatened to retaliate if those words turn to actions. In a letter to the U.N. Security Council, Ambassador Amir Sa'ed Iravani said his country would "defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national interests under international law against any hostile action." It's unclear what sparked Mr. Trump's post. However, the head of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard sought to separate the Houthis' actions from those of Tehran this weekend. The Houthis also launched drones and missiles targeting the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier in the Red Sea, though none reached the ship as it continues flight operations in the region. "Every shot fired by the Houthis will be looked upon, from this point forward, as being a shot fired from the weapons and leadership of IRAN, and IRAN will be held responsible, and suffer the consequences, and those consequences will be dire!" Mr. Trump added. The Houthi rebels attacked over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, from November 2023 until January this year when a ceasefire began in Gaza. The campaign also greatly raised the Houthis' profile in the wider Arab world and tamped down on public criticism against their human rights abuses and crackdowns on dissent and aid workers.

The Houthis claimed there had been additional U.S. airstrikes overnight, though American officials did not immediately acknowledge them. In Saada province, the Houthis' stronghold, the rebels raided a warehouse run by the World Food Program. A member of Yemen's exiled government first reported the Houthis had been taking supplies from the facility without the WFP's permission in the aftermath of the U.S. airstrikes. The United Nations agency later acknowledged the Houthis' actions to The Associated Press. "WFP regrets the de facto authorities' decision to seize some of the commodities," it said. "These commodities were intended for the most vulnerable food-insecure families. Only WFP and its partners have the authority to distribute them and ensure they reach the intended recipients." Yemen, at war since the Houthis seized Sanaa back in 2014, has been on the precipice of famine for years. But the U.N. in February suspended its operations in Saada over security concerns following the detentions of dozens of U.N. workers and others in recent months. A day later, the WFP announced one of its staffers died while imprisoned by the Houthis.

Landowners are standing with 'begging bowls' to recover 1,557.61 crore, laments Madras High Court

GNS News Agency, March 19

The Madras High Court has found that hundreds of land owners whose properties had been acquired for various purposes in the 38 districts of Tamil Nadu as well as in Puducherry were yet to be paid an astounding amount of ₹1,557.61 crore as on December 31, 2024. Justice N. Anand Venkatesh called for the statistics from the High Court's Registrar (Statistics) and found that 1,222 execution petitions (EPs) were pending in Tamil Nadu for recovery of ₹1,521.83 crore and 59 EPs were pending in Puducherry for recovering ₹35.78 crore.

"The amount that has been ascertained by the Registry is alarming and hence some steps must be taken to ensure that the compensation amounts are paid," the judge observed and sought the assistance of Advocate General P. S. Raman in finding a solution to the problem. The judge passed the interim orders on a 2017 writ petition filed jointly by M. Settu and M. Chandrasekar seeking compensation for the lands acquired from them for establishing Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) factory in Ranipet district (formerly a part of Vellore district).

While perusing the case bundle, Justice Venkatesh found that Justice N. Seshasayee (since retired) had, in March 2018, called for details of the number of execution petitions pending in various courts across Tamil Nadu in land acquisition cases and found that a staggering amount of ₹760 crore had to be recovered. Since nothing much had transpired in the matter since then, Justice Venkatesh called



for fresh statistics as on December 31, 2024 and found the amount to have increased to ₹1,521.83 crore which included ₹431.12 crore in Tiruvallur district, ₹387.10 crore in Chennai, ₹375.40 crore in Namakkal and ₹319.13 crore in Chengalpattu. "This assumes significance since the lands of the owners have been taken away and they are made to stand with the begging bowl to recover the compensation by filing execution petitions," the judge said and observed that every property owner had a fundamental right to receive fair compensation. Since the Chief Secretary as well as the Revenue, Industries, Highways, Housing, Finance and Adi Dravidar Welfare secretaries had been impleaded suo motu as respondents to the present writ petition in 2018 itself, the judge decided to pass further orders in the case on March 21 after hearing all of them.

This Coimbatore nursery specialises in trees and plants native to Tamil Nadu

GNS News Agency, March 19

Butterflies announce the presence of the nursery long before we enter it. Situated within the sprawling campus of Kumaraguru College of Technology in Saravanampatti, Poonthalir is being run by S Bharathidasan and his wife B Kavitha. What is striking about the nursery is the absence of flowers: here, everything is green, except for the odd flowering plant. Each of these saplings have a story to them, and are being nurtured by the couple like their children. Poonthalir was started 22 years ago at Ganesapuram in Annur. "It began as an initiative to support our NGO Arulagam's vulture conservation efforts," says Bharathidasan, taking us around the nursery. When he set it up, Bharathidasan did not want it to be a place for just flowers and ornamental plants. He chose to nurture native plants, particularly trees that thrive in our soil and climate.

"I collect seeds from the forests of Sathyamangalam and Mudumalai during my visits for vulture conservation work," explains the 53-year-old, adding that he makes these trips thrice a month. Back at the nursery, Kavitha takes over. She processes the seeds — this involves soaking them in hot or cold water depending on the variety — and packs them in sapling bags or sets up a mother bed and later plants them in bags. "I refer a lot of literature on trees to understand how this should be done," explains Kavitha. She points to rows of bags with seeds that are just sprouting. "These are from the kalarchikaai climber," she explains, picking up a seed the size of a small gooseberry. "Can you hear

the seed move inside the shell when you shake it?" she asks, adding that this indicates it will not sprout.

Some seeds have a period of "sleep," she explains, after which they sprout forth. Bharathidasan has come across seeds in fascinating shapes and sizes. "Some seeds are built to be so sturdy that they can even withstand elephants stepping on them," he says. He hopes to set up a seed bank and a museum to display his collection of seeds and show how they have evolved. Poonthalir has two branches in the city, apart from one inside Mudumalai Tiger Reserve and another one at Rameswaram. "In Mudumalai, we mostly sell plants that can be used as cattle fodder so that locals can make use of them," explains Bharathidasan. "In Ramnad, we nurture varieties that thrive in the sandy soil of the region, including various species of palm trees." Kavitha shows us saplings of native varieties such as vaagai, virai, gundu mani kodi, punthiranjeevi, thaalai, Nagalingam tree, muyal kaadhu, and the bondham puli tree. "Apart from trees, we also sell herbs, shrubs, and plants that can be used as live fences by farmers," she says. At the far end of the nursery, is a rare kurundhai plant, a mountain lime variety. Then there is the alinjil tree that bears small edible berries. "Our ancestors may have eaten these fruits during their time," says Kavitha. The nursery now has over 70 varieties of native trees and plants. Kavitha spends most part of her day in the nursery, amidst the plants and trees she raises. When the saplings are loaded on trucks to be transported once they are sold, Kavitha does feel a tinge of sadness. "

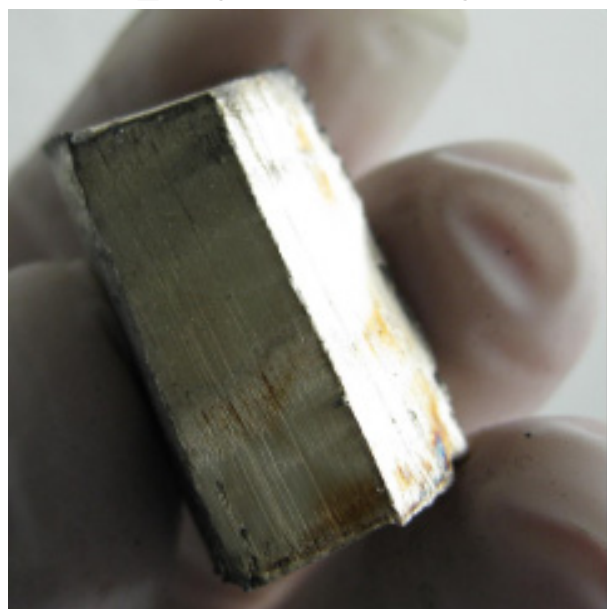
‘We’re still at the beginning of the AI journey’



AI development has often drawn inspiration from neuroscience, though Subramanian acknowledged the gap between artificial and biological intelligence. “We still don’t understand enough about the brain to replicate its efficiency,” he admitted. The human brain’s ability to process sensory inputs in parallel, adapt through neuroplasticity, and perform energy-efficient computations remains unmatched. Despite AI models boasting billions of parameters, they still fall short of the brain’s capabilities. “Today’s large language models exceed the number of neurons in the human brain, yet they’re limited in comparison to the brain’s efficiency and flexibility,” Subramanian observed. One milestone in AI’s journey was the development of AlphaGo by DeepMind, which demonstrated the power of reinforcement learning and deep neural networks. “It surpassed human performance in the game of Go, relying on deep learning and reinforcement strategies to handle complex decision-making,” Subramanian reflected. AlphaGo’s success highlighted AI’s potential in strategic reasoning and long-term planning, influencing advancements beyond gaming.

In 2017, AI took a leap forward with the introduction of the Transformer architecture, particularly in natural language processing. The seminal paper, ‘Attention Is All You Need’, introduced self-attention mechanisms that outperformed previous RNN-based models. “Transformers eliminated sequential bottlenecks and handled long sequences efficiently,” Subramanian explained. This architecture led to models like BERT and GPT, which fueled the rise of large language models and generative AI. The adaptability of Transformers made them foundational for diverse applications, from text generation to image and audio processing.

Discussing the competitive landscape, Subramanian noted how OpenAI’s strategic focus on scaling language models gave it an edge over tech giants like Google. “OpenAI invested heavily in compute resources and data curation at a time when others were hesitant,” he said. This early commitment paid off with the success of GPT-2 and GPT-3, leading to widespread adoption and commercial success. Meanwhile, companies like Google and Amazon pursued different strategies, balancing research with business priorities. “Google’s focus was more on moonshot projects, while Amazon emphasised providing diverse AI solutions to customers,” Subramanian observed. AI’s evolution from simple perceptrons to transformative language models reflects decades of innovation, interdisciplinary research, and technological advancements. Yet, as Subramanian emphasised, “We’re still at the beginning of this journey. The more we learn about AI and neuroscience, the more we realize how much there is yet to uncover.” The future of AI promises exciting developments, driven by continued exploration of both artificial and biological intelligence. As the field advances, understanding AI’s history and foundational principles will be crucial in shaping its potential and addressing the challenges ahead.



From mines to minds: how lithium shapes energy and psychiatry

Lithium, a silvery-white alkali metal, was discovered in 1817 when Swedish chemist Johan August identified it within the mineral petalite. Photograph used for representational purposes only. Lithium, a silvery-white alkali metal, was discovered in 1817 when Swedish chemist Johan August identified it within the mineral petalite. Photograph used for representational purposes only | Photo Credit: Dnn87, CC BY 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

In a significant stride towards bolstering strategic resources, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent visit to the United States last month culminated in the launching of a collaborative initiative focused on recovering and processing critical minerals, notably lithium. This partnership underscores the rising importance of lithium in various sectors, from energy storage to pharmaceuticals. Lithium, denoted by the symbol Li, has atomic number 3 and is a silvery-white alkali metal. It was discovered in 1817 when Swedish chemist Johan August identified it within the mineral petalite. In 1821, William Brande successfully isolated lithium in its elemental form through the electrolysis of lithium oxide. Due to continuing exploration, measured and indicated lithium resources have increased substantially worldwide, totalling about 105 million tons as per the U.S. geological survey in 2024. Major lithium reserves are concentrated in South America’s ‘Lithium Triangle’—encompassing parts of Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile. Australia is the leading producer, extracting lithium from hard-rock spodumene deposits. India’s lithium deposits are in Reasi (Jammu & Kashmir) and Mandya (Karnataka), with exploration ongoing in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Himachal Pradesh. The recent Indo-U.S. initiative aims to recover and process lithium.

In 1859, Alfred Baring Garrod published a paper in The London and Edinburgh Monthly Journal of Medical Science examining lithium’s potential to dissolve uric acid crystals, proposing its use for gout treatment. The hypothesis stemmed from chemical observations rather than clinical trials. While lithium salts showed promise in vitro, therapeutic applications were limited by toxicity and impractical dosing. The study marked one of the earliest discussions on lithium’s physiological effects, but its medical relevance remained uncertain.

In 1949, Australian psychiatrist John Cade published a seminal paper in the Medical Journal of Australia detailing his discovery of lithium’s antimanic properties. Cade hypothesised that mania was linked to a metabolic imbalance and conducted experiments, injecting guinea pigs with urine from manic patients, observing toxic effects. He administered various compounds to identify the poisonous substance, noting that lithium carbonate has a calming impact on the animals without sedation. Translating these findings to clinical practice, Cade treated ten patients with mania using lithium salts, reporting significant mood stabilisation and reduction in manic symptoms. This groundbreaking study introduced lithium as an effective treatment for mood disorders like acute mania and bipolar disorder. Melbourne’s Noack and Trautner (1951) and French psychiatrists Despinoy and De Romeuf (1951) independently tested lithium in manic patients, reporting effectiveness. Despite initial scepticism and concerns over toxicity, further studies, notably by Danish psychiatrist Mogens Schou in the 1950s and 60s, confirmed lithium’s efficacy as a mood stabiliser. By 1970, lithium was approved for the treatment of bipolar disorder in the United States.

Mechanism of action and ongoing mysteries

Lithium’s exact mechanism in stabilising mood disorders is not fully understood. It is hypothesised that it influences neurotransmitter activity and intracellular signalling pathways, by competing with sodium ions due to their chemical similarities as alkali metals. This competition may

alter neuronal excitability and neurotransmission. Despite its long history of use, the precise biological underpinnings of lithium’s mood-stabilising effects continue to be a research subject. Lithium has a narrow therapeutic window (0.6–1.2 mEq/L), requiring regular monitoring to prevent toxicity. It is absorbed orally, distributed evenly in total bodywater, and is excreted unchanged via kidneys, necessitating renal function monitoring. It is not used in pregnant women. With lithium, the difference between an effective dose and a toxic dose is small. At therapeutic levels, lithium stabilises mood, but even slight elevations can lead to toxicity, causing neurological, renal, and cardiac complications. Lithium also interferes with thyroid function, leading to hypothyroidism. Over time, this can lead to fatigue, weight gain, and depressive symptoms, further complicating bipolar disorder management. Lithium exemplifies the Paracelsus’ principle—“the dose makes the poison”—whereby a slight deviation from the therapeutic range can turn it from a life-saving mood stabiliser into a toxic agent. It also has a delayed onset of action—often requiring weeks to show full effects—which means that more rapid-acting medications are usually preferred in acute manic episodes. Second-generation antipsychotics have emerged as viable alternatives to lithium due to their mechanism of action and better safety profile. Unlike lithium, which acts as the source of bipolar disorder by inhibiting sodium-GPCR protein pumps in neurons, SGAs act at a downstream level by modulating neurotransmitter activity, particularly dopamine and serotonin. This difference means that while lithium exerts its effects at the root of the disorder by stabilising neuronal activity, SGAs regulate the symptoms more directly by blocking excessive neurotransmitter action.

Despite the increasing use of SGAs, lithium remains the drug of choice for specific bipolar disorder presentations, manic episodes and suicidal tendency prevention. It is most effective for classic euphoric mania and bipolar disorder with a strong genetic component. Lithium uniquely reduces the risk of suicide in bipolar patients, a benefit that SGAs do not replicate. Its mood-stabilising properties are particularly valuable in preventing relapses, ensuring long-term remission, and managing treatment-resistant cases.

What prompted John Cade to hypothesise lithium for mood stabilisation remains a greater mystery than the unknowns surrounding its mechanism of action. His work was published in 1949 when the relationship between medical research and ethics fundamentally differed from today’s standards. Cade’s experiments immediately after WW-2 reflected an era where scientific curiosity often operated in a vacuum, independent of ethical considerations.

Uncertainty, new visa battles for students in the U.S.



“Super afraid” — that’s how Columbia University doctoral student Ranjani Srinivasan feels after self-deporting to Canada. U.S. immigration and customs enforcement agents raided her apartment on the campus housing, claiming she was a “ Hamas sympathiser”, and she was forced to take refuge in Canada. Speaking to The Hindu’s Kallol Bhattacharjee in an online interview from an undisclosed location in Canada, Ms. Srinivasan, who is in her fifth year of PhD, said she is “super afraid of retaliation” and that she is not yet aware of what specific charges were brought against her by the American authorities that led to her being “disenrolled” from the university just six months before she was to complete her PhD. Prior to her case, the March 8 arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia University graduate who became a leader of pro-Palestinian protests on the campus, drew global attention. According to media reports, the Trump administration sought to deport Mr. Khalil, a legal permanent resident of the United States. On Friday (March 14, 2025), Immigration officials announced the arrest of a second person who participated in Pro-Palestinian protests at Columbia University. That the Trump administration has decided to construe any condemnation of Israel’s brutal war on Gaza as support for terrorism has set off panic among students. While the developments are widely seen as emblematic of the regime’s targeted attack on those expressing solidarity with Palestine, universities are faced with many questions. Almost daily, students are confronting new realities about their altered visa statuses, funding cuts, and a rapid reconfiguration of the university system itself. Their visas and academic futures have never looked more precarious. Meanwhile in Gaza, the January 19

ceasefire agreement has hardly brought respite to survivors. At least five Palestinians were killed, including two local journalists, and others wounded on Saturday (March 15, 2025) in an Israeli strike on Gaza’s northern Beit Lahiya town, medics told Reuters. Witnesses and fellow journalists said the people in the car were on a mission for a charity called Al-Khair Foundation in Beit Lahiya, and they were accompanied by journalists and photographers when the strike hit them, the news agency reported, pointing to the “fragility” of the ceasefire.

Our Foreign Affairs Editor Stanly Johny reviewed some recent books on Palestine. Pankaj Mishra’s The World After Gaza; Raja Shehadeh’s What Does Israel Fear from Palestine?; and Antony Loewenstein’s, The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World. “How did Israel, founded by a people who were victimised by Nazism, become an “inhuman victimiser”? How can the liberal “gentile” West not be bothered by the mass violence Israel is committing against the Palestinians? In The World After Gaza, Mishra seeks to understand the shrinking grey zone between the victim and the victimiser,” he writes.

Top 5 stories this week:

1. Terror on the train: The Hindu editorial on Pakistan and its Balochistan province
2. Kallol Bhattacharjee writes on the Baloch Liberation Army, the rebels who shook Pakistan
3. Sri Lanka’s Parliament will debate a nearly three-decade-old report probing allegations of unlawful detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings by the State between 1988 and 1990, the ruling National People’s Power [NPP] government has said.
4. Rare success: The Hindu editorial on the International Criminal Court and Duterte arrest
5. New Delhi is hosting the annual Raisina Dialogue from March 17-19, 2025. Who are the newsmakers attending the 10th edition this year? Will Ukraine war, tariffs threatened by U.S. President Donald Trump, relations with China dominate proceedings? Why are leaders from West Asia and South East Asia not well represented? What about Pakistan? — Our Diplomatic Affairs Editor Suhasini Haidar tells us what to expect from the foreign policy bash.

Here’s how Indian card games are reshaping game nights and social gatherings



In living rooms, cafés, and weekend get-togethers, card games are quietly reshaping the social landscape in India. This past year has seen an influx of new designs — some built to test knowledge, others to fuel laughter or spark debate. From fitness challenges to fun drinking games, these decks have found a place in conversations and celebrations alike, reflecting a shift toward playful, interactive experiences. Card games are evolving into cultural snapshots, capturing the mood and humour of modern India.

At first glance, a fitness community creating a card game might seem like an unlikely pairing, but for The Quad, a Chennai based fitness community it was a natural extension of their shared goals. What began as a simple idea to make workouts more engaging soon evolved into a deck that encouraged movement, competition and camaraderie. “Fitness and exercise is a process. It requires intent and structure to bring movement into people’s lives. So much natural movement has been removed from our lives, and we wanted to find a way to bring that back,” says Ranjani Shanker, head of marketing at The Quad, which launched the card game Move It! (?399 on shop.thequad.in) In November last year.

“Move It! is a game that involves deduction skills and memory. If you have played Chinese Whispers and The New York Times Wordle, it is a combination of them, but with movement,” she says, adding that it took approximately six months to make the card game from conceptualisation to production. “We decided to go with a physical card game because we already have online courses that people subscribe to, and a card game seemed like a more tangible and fun way to bring people together,” she adds. According to Statista, a German online platform that specialises in data gathering and visualisation, table-top games or board games will experience an annual growth rate of 5.38% between 2024 and 2029 in India. This growth rate is being credited to the surge in the popularity of cards, with growing number of local designers creating innovative and culturally relevant games.

Proving this statistic right are Gurugram-based independent creators of card game Angry Indians (?599 on amazon.in), which is a satirical game based on strategy for “open-minded desi nerds”. Abhishek Sheel and Rihju Talukdar, the co-creators of the game came up with the idea during peak covid lockdown. “We thought, why not make a card game because with table-top games, you have the freedom of making something as complex or as simple as you want and there’s an audience for both,” says Rihju. “The concept of the game came from pent-up political angst, but we couldn’t be too loud or radical. We also did not know the mechanics of making a game, so we wanted to keep it light-hearted and doodley,” he says. They knew for sure that the mechanics had to involve attack and defend actions because the game is a satire on Indian pop-culture and modern way of life, which invariably includes a ton of friction, adds Rihju.

Rihju says there was a lot of math involved: “I ended

up re-learning probability related concepts I learnt in school to figure out the chances of winning and losing.” A single gameplay of Angry Indians can go on 10 minutes to 45 minutes and the playability is endless. “There are a number of strategies so you can keep playing in different ways. We sometimes get emails asking us if we can make certain moves that we hadn’t thought about ourselves,” says Abhishek, adding that there was a personal learning curve.

Then there is The Ultimate Indian Drinking Game (?999 on amazon.in) by New Delhi-based party game makers Dring. “For us extroverted people, the covid lockdown was a difficult time. My best friend from college and I invited some people over and played a drinking game that was made in the U.S. While it was a lot of fun, we realised that there were a lot of cultural differences so it was evident that it was not made for us,” says Kanishk Singhal, co-founder of Dring. The 55 deck of cards, launched in November 2020, needs three or more players with no upper limit. Each player takes turns drawing from a deck of cards and follows instruction written on it. If they fail, they need to drink. Cards come with instructions or ‘dares’ like — “balance a drink on your head and walk from one side of the room to the other. If you fail, take three sips” or “Send the 7th picture in your gallery to the 4th chat on your Whatsapp, or take five sips.” “After we marketed the game with a small video, we sold out of our entire stock of 400 boxes in three days. This made us realise that there is a market. India wants to play these games, but there is a gap,” he says. Dring currently has a catalogue of over ten different games with themes ranging from dating, Bollywood to women only, all catered to young adults.

“Now that the Indian designers and producers have started making games with these shared experiences, they are doing a much better job,” says Varun Devanathan, founder of The Board Room, a chain of table-top gaming cafes in Chennai. He adds, “We have access to a larger pool of players, so a lot of new designers take our help to test their games and players have been responding very well to Indian games,” he says, adding that a particularly interesting game is Chappal vs Cockroach (?999 on amazon.in) by Bengaluru-based startup Nightingame. The rules of the game are simple — the player who hits a cockroach card fastest with a chappal card from their hand wins!

The rise in popularity of card games has many catalysts according to Phalgun Polepalli, the founder of Mozaic Games, a Bengaluru-based game-maker. “Card games are affordable and portable, and they are designed to accommodate many players, unlike most board games that max out at four players,” he says. “The Indian market is unique in this sense because while the rest of the world is looking at single-player games, we want games that include bigger and bigger groups.” He adds, “These are designed for quick-play and the rules are simpler to hold attention” he says, adding that manufacturing card games is easier than manufacturing board games. “Card games are cost-effective because the investment is less.

Is workplace chat 'gossiping' or 'sharing information'?



gossip." But if they don't act, and the information turns out to be credible, they could face repercussions for ignoring the "inside word." There is evidence that such paradoxical situations play out quite frequently in real-world workplaces. For example, inside information about negligence towards patient safety in healthcare settings has, in the past, been dismissed as "just gossip" until it provoked a public scandal. The same thing happened in a university where gossip shared through a "whisper network" was eventually corroborated by an independent inquiry. In this case, the inquiry also found official complaints had been ignored.

One case study from the United States found managers tended to keep an ear out for information passing through the grapevine and selectively use it to further their own interests. If gossip threatened their power, they repressed it as "just gossip". But if gossip provided "useful" information – ammunition against a subversive employee, for example – management legitimised gossip as "official information". To avoid scandals stemming from when gossip is ignored, managers might consider "co-opting" gossip, bringing it into official communication channels. But there's a problem with this approach. Gossip gains its credibility as the inside word because it takes place outside official communication channels.

Therefore, if managers try to co-opt gossip into formal management processes, it's likely to have the unintended consequence of discrediting the shared information. Instead, "managing gossip" requires a better understanding of its functions and motivations. One function is to reduce uncertainty. Research suggests gossip often arises to fill information gaps. For example, people might speculate about a manager's salary by gossiping about their expensive car or holiday. Such gossip is likely to be exaggerated and counterproductive. However, it could be managed simply by being transparent about staff salaries, filling the information gap before gossip does. Another key function of gossip is to warn against antisocial behaviours like bullying. But if employees feel uncomfortable speaking up about such behaviour – even when it's perpetrated by those with official power – managers will not face the dilemma of whether to act on information that could turn out to be "just gossip." Gossip is a slippery and paradoxical form of communication. Some would say it's unmanageable. But what can be managed are the workplace behaviours and hierarchical relationships that gossip loves to sink its teeth into.

Sydney: When two junior employees bump into each other in the corridor and start chatting about their manager's overbearing manner, it's typically considered gossip. But what about when two managers have an off-record catch-up to discuss an under-performing employee? Both scenarios meet traditional definitions of gossip – the information being shared is about other people, the people it's about are absent, the information is shared in a way that casts judgement on those people, and it's informal. Yet the two situations are viewed very differently.

It's not any set of objective criteria, but people's shared agreement that a situation counts as gossip. This understanding of gossip helps us make sense of the "workplace gossip paradox" – the idea that gossip can be considered both a reliable source of social information (the inside word) and an unreliable information source (just gossip).

How does recognising the slipperiness of gossip help us understand the workplace gossip paradox?

The answer has to do with the role of power in legitimising information. Leaders and managers need information to justify action. If a manager is going to investigate a sexual harassment claim, they can't do so based solely on a hunch. They need to hear about it from someone. If the victim of sexual harassment complains directly to their manager, an investigation is automatically justified. But what if the manager hears about harassment indirectly and unofficially (for example, through "gossip"), with the added complication that the alleged perpetrator is another manager? If the manager does something about what they've heard and the source turns out to be unreliable, they could face negative consequences for acting on what was essentially "just

How could you forget? The mysterious, mischievous memory-machine

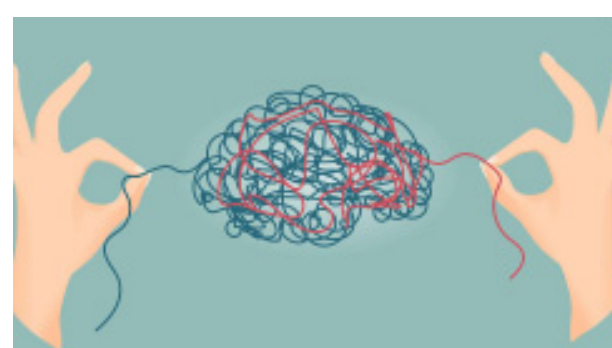
Whether we are trying to pull off a pickle recipe for our family or trying to impress a gathering with a well-timed joke, a large chunk of our daily cognitive, social, and communicative activities are invested towards making memories, and retrieving old ones. I use the word chunk not because it sounds cool (it undoubtedly does) but because, incidentally, it is used by Joseph LeDoux, a neuroscientist who works on anxiety and memory as well as by David Herman, a cognitive narratologist. The latter examines how cultures and collectives remember and encode data, beliefs, and values, through narrative chunks that often operate as storytelling functions and figures such as metaphors. Memory studies as a discipline is perfectly (and sometimes precariously) situated between the molecular and monumental dimensions of remembering and forgetting, examining neurons as well as narratives, subliminal sentient experiences as well as shared social rituals.

Memory manifesting in its absence As we experience, often to our embarrassment, memory may manifest itself by paradoxically producing its absence. Examples can include struggle to remember a name or where one kept a key (the latter being a very common experience for this author). It can also acquire complex collective dimensions whereby cultures and nations forget certain events and figures from their past, sometimes accidentally sometimes strategically (Paul Connerton's essay 'Seven Types of Forgetting' is a brilliant study of the same). It is safe (and scientifically valid) to assume that one cannot study memory sans a study of forgetting, that commemoration may also be complexly shaped by forms of oblivion or even erasure. Thus, the verbs could and did normally associated with forgetting (as reflected in the title of this piece) also imply intentionality, action, or agency rather than passive accidental erasure.

It gets even more interesting and strange as one begins to plumb the depths of the mysterious memory-machine. For then, you realise that memory is not just retrieval or reconstruction. It is also oriented towards the future, both at the level of imagination and action. This is true in the immediate personal sense (for example one can go ahead and maneuver a meeting only if one remembers the relevant information) as well as in the collective sense as evinced in the futuristic appeal and aspiration of nostalgia that may be instrumentalised and even weaponised for political purposes. Charan Ranganath (a globally acclaimed neuroscientist with Chennai connections) offers a brilliant bird's eye view of the processes of memory in Why We Remember? In a work filled with anecdotes from music concerts, birthday parties, and complex neuroscientific experiments in laboratories, Ranganath writes how, despite growing up almost entirely in the United States, his memory of Tamil words always experiences more retrieval whenever he visits Chennai. Research reveals that context is a vital element in the memory process. If one re-situates or disconnects contexts, strange things can take place in the memory machine.

The 'butcher on the bus' phenomenon A funny example is known as the butcher on the bus phenomenon, whereby one's familiar butcher is not recognised or remembered simply because he isn't in his market clothing and happens to be traveling in a bus like all other passengers, thus appearing atypical and out of context. Memory is thus both semantic (recalling data related to learnt knowledge) and episodic (sensitive to sentient experiences and connected to contexts). It is both retrieval (where the neuroanatomy of the hippocampus plays a vital part) and information and emotion processing (where the prefrontal cortex comes in). It thus integrates information with emotion, knowledge with experience, emerging less as a static entity and more as an interactive activity. With so much going on, it is but obvious that memory is both mysterious and mischievous, throwing lifeboats and anchoring the self during moments of cognitive and existential struggle, while also playing tricks, like Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream, pouring wrong potions on the wrong heads.

The manipulative dimension of memory is well-known and documented in research and writings alike. Elizabeth Loftus' neuroscientific work on memory, misinformation, and punitive processes foregrounds how frequently false memories may be planted, sometimes through systematic interro-



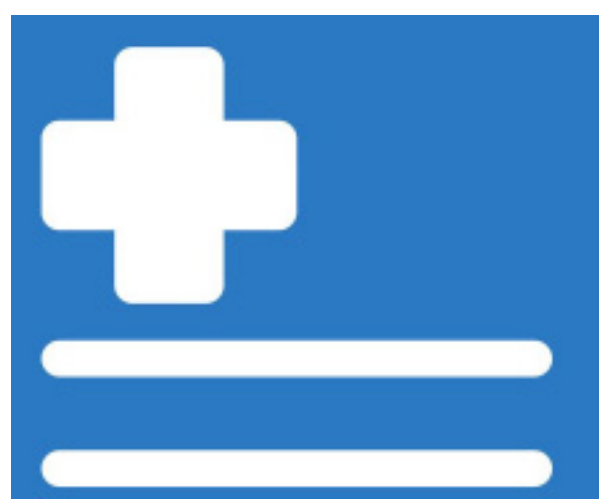
Memory studies as a discipline offers an alchemy of allied knowledge networks to examine how we remember and forget, how we heal and move on, how we reconstruct and imagine ahead

gation techniques that may be racially or socially biased. Likewise, Salman Rushdie remembered how afraid he was of being invaded, as a boy during the 1962 Indo-China war, despite the fact that he was outside of India during that time, simply because the many news reports and radio broadcasts made a strong affective implant that subsequently operated as false memory. Thus, apart from its problematic proximity to forgetting and future-imagination, memory is also notoriously manipulative and plastic.

The reconsolidation theory As Joseph LeDoux theorises, the reconstruction model of memory may be replaced by reconsolidation, whereby what one retrieves at each recall may not be the original memory of the original experience but the last remembered version of the same, each recall being profoundly and complexly shaped by the environment around the remembering subject. Frederic Bartlett's example of memory schema is a perfect example of the same whereby a group of Cambridge students were made to read a native-American fable and asked to re-write the same multiple times from their original memory and the results revealed how the rewrites became increasingly "infected" by the cultural and social location and biases of the remembering and rewriting subject to the point that the final draft of the story incorporated many elements from Anglo-American cultural contexts while erasing and erasing elements from the original native-American legend. Therefore, contexts and emotional situations matter in memory, often to the point of playful plantations and manipulations. Many years ago, as a PhD student in Durham, this author wrote a poem called 'Conatus' (self-preservation as defined by the Dutch philosopher Spinoza) with the lines: 'Memory is what happens/when neurons make love/at the back of the head/across the folds of a semi-solid sponge/that weighs less than a shopping mall guide'. Almost 13 years later, and after all the additional reading and research, memory remains a mysterious, and often, mischievous machine impossible to be entirely unpacked or understood. Neuroscience has offered many magnificent insights; we know increasingly more about forms of amnesia and recalls. But as the neurosurgeon-protagonist in Ian McEwan's novel Saturday discovers through an epiphany in the end, the rich associative architecture of memory and cognition goes beyond neural nets and synaptic structures, connecting to words, emotions, senses, and spaces in ways that require reflections from literature, music, and art, among others.

Memory studies as a discipline offers this alchemy of allied knowledge networks to examine how we remember and forget, how we heal and move on, how we reconstruct and imagine ahead, with complex compounds of contexts, apparatus, and affect. In the process it reveals that the true magic of memory often lies in the ordinary everydayness where the familiar form can sudden transform and transport. Where time-travel often becomes real. And where fluidity is all.

The challenges of public health education in India



The decision by the United States to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) and drastically reduce the scale of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is one that has sent shock waves through the aid and public health world. This move has disrupted essential health-care services in many low- and middle-income countries. However, India has been largely unaffected, as international aid accounts for just 1% of its total health expenditure. Nevertheless, the cessation of such funding threatens to further shrink an already constrained public health development sector, which relies heavily on international support. More importantly, this development directly impacts the public health job market, reducing opportunities for thousands who are pursuing their Master of Public Health (MPH) and similar postgraduate courses.

Public health plays a critical role in shaping a nation's well-being and health-care delivery. The Constitution of India, through Article 47, underlines the state's responsibility to improve public health care. Public health is a specialised field that requires specific knowledge and skills to effectively address people's health needs. There is an urgent need for a dedicated workforce in India trained in public health, a fact that was very starkly realised during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond government systems, such a workforce is essential for civil society organisations, academic institutions, and research organisations engaged in public health.

The evolution of training and jobs in India Though the surge in public health education in India is relatively recent, its history dates to the colonial era. In the early days, public health was largely embedded within medical teaching. This narrow approach persisted despite the establishment of the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata in 1932 and the subsequent inclusion of preventive and social medicine – later known as community medicine – as an essential part of medical education. Specialists in community medicine, well-trained in public health provided public health services and met human resource needs in this field. However, their numbers were limited, and they were often engaged in medical teaching. Many students pursued MPH courses abroad in countries such as Australia, the European Union, the United Kingdom and the U.S. Yet, the supply of public health professionals remained constrained. Recognising the growing need and demand, MPH institutions and teaching expanded in India.

The number of institutions offering MPH and related courses in India has grown rapidly. Currently, over 100 institutions offer master's level courses in public health, whereas in 2000, there was only one. This expansion coincided with the launch of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in 2005, which opened public health system roles to non-medical public health specialists. A wide range of institutions, from social science faculties to community medicine departments within medical institutions, have begun offering MPH courses. However, after an initial surge in demand, government recruitment for public health specialists plateaued, while the number of schools, programmes, and graduates continued to rise. As a result, securing jobs has become increasingly difficult for graduates. Compounding this issue are challenges such as the lack of standardised training, insufficient practical learn-

ing opportunities, faculty shortages, and varied curricula that inadequately prepare students for real-world public health challenges. In addition, institutions offering public health courses are unevenly distributed, with large and populous States such as Assam, Bihar and Jharkhand, and many smaller and hilly States, having none or only a limited number of seats.

Hurdles graduates face, issues in education The foremost challenge is the mismatch between supply and demand, with limited and shrinking job opportunities for graduates. Today, entry-level positions in public health, such as research or programme assistants, attract a very high number of applications, with a significant proportion of candidates being eligible. The success rate remains exceptionally low, with only a few positions available. Moreover, the shrinking of public health roles and institutions within the public system has further limited job prospects. Efforts to establish public health management cadres in States have been hindered by multiple factors.

In recent times, the changing landscape of health care, marked by the growing dominance of the private sector in public health, further restricts employment opportunities. The private sector prioritises hospital and business management professionals over public health specialists. With limited opportunities in both the public and private sectors, the research and development sectors remain the primary employers for graduates. However, these sectors rely largely on foreign grants, and India is no longer one of the priority countries for such international funders. Similarly, the development sector is constrained by limited funding, which is expected to worsen further due to recent decisions in the U.S. The national research and health development funding remains in its early development and is significantly underfunded. Thus, the job scarcity for public health professionals continues and can exacerbate further.

Beyond job scarcity, there are concerns about the quality of MPH education. The rapid spread of public health schools has led to intense competition to attract students, often at the expense of compromising admission standards. Many students enrol in these courses without a clear understanding of the field or passion needed to thrive in this field. Further, public health faculty often lack adequate training and real-world experience. The absence of a standardised curriculum and clear outcome measures, despite the Health Ministry's model course framework further exacerbates concerns. In India, MPH courses are currently not mandatorily regulated by any regulatory body. Neither the National Medical Commission (NMC) nor umbrella organisations such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) oversee MPH training. In the absence of these quality measures, the overall quality of graduates is also impacted. Approaches to consider

To address these challenges, a multi-pronged approach is required. The most urgent priority is to create public health jobs at all levels, from primary care to State and national health systems. In most developed countries with established public health education systems, governments are the largest employers of public health professionals. Similarly, establishing a dedicated public health cadre within State governments would be a significant step. This would not only create employment but also strengthen public health systems. Next, a robust regulatory mechanism must be introduced by constituting a dedicated regulatory body or a specialised public health education division within existing regulatory agencies such as the NMC or UGC. This department, led by public health experts, should be responsible for setting curriculum standards and minimum training requirements while allowing room for institutional innovation, given that public health is a dynamic and evolving discipline. Moreover, public health training in all institutions must be closely integrated with practical learning opportunities within public health systems. There is a need to foster the growth of public health institutions in States where there are none or only a limited number. The emerging global situation calls for more national action and the building of local ecosystems for sustainable development in health. Dr. Vikash R. Keshri is a senior public health and health policy expert and an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the School of Population Health, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. The views expressed are personal

All you need to know about: Low bone density

Low bone density, or osteopenia, refers to a condition where bone mineral density is lower than normal, indicating weakened bones that are more susceptible to fractures, though not as severe as osteoporosis. According to the International Osteoporosis Foundation, osteoporosis affects 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men over 50, causing up to 37 million fragility fractures annually, impacting around 500 million people worldwide. The global aging population is estimated to drive a significant surge in osteoporosis-related hip fractures, with annual cases projected to nearly double from 2018 to 2050.

How does low bone density occur?

Bones are living tissues that continuously break down and rebuild. However, as women age, especially after menopause, the process of bone loss outpaces bone formation due to a drop in estrogen levels, a hormone crucial for maintaining bone strength. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this accelerated bone loss in postmenopausal women increases their risk of fragility fractures, which result from minimal trauma like a fall from standing height or lower. Other factors contributing to bone density loss include poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, smoking, alcohol consumption, and certain medical conditions or medications, such as glucocorticoids or anticonvulsants.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Low bone density is often referred to as a "silent condition" because it typically has no symptoms until a fracture occurs. Women may not realise they have weakened bones until they experience a fracture, usually in the hip, spine, wrist, or upper arm, following a minor fall or injury. Spine fractures, in particular, can sometimes cause back pain, loss of height over time, and a hunched posture. The WHO stresses that most vertebral fractures go undiagnosed, further emphasising the importance of early screening for those at risk.

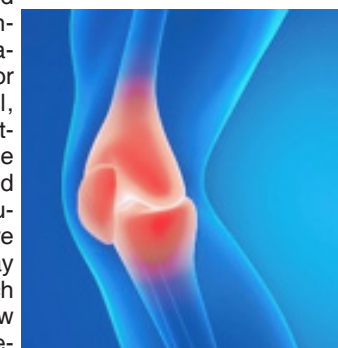
Who is at risk?

Certain groups of women are more vulnerable to developing low bone density and related fractures. Older women, particularly postmenopausal women, face the greatest risk due to hormonal changes that affect bone metabolism. According to WHO, fractures are more likely to occur in older women as bone fragility increases with age. Non-modifiable risk factors include age, family history of fractures, early menopause, and ethnicity, with Caucasian and Asian women being at higher risk. Modifiable risk

factors also play a significant role. These include smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, low body weight, and nutrient-poor diets lacking in calcium and vitamin D. Certain medications, like long-term steroid use, and underlying health conditions, such as diabetes or malabsorption disorders, further elevate the risk. The WHO stresses that while some risk factors cannot be changed, lifestyle modifications and medical interventions can help prevent fragility fractures.

What are the treatment options?

Treating low bone density involves a combination of lifestyle changes, medications, and fall prevention strategies. According to WHO's Bone Health and Ageing initiative, the primary approach focuses on strengthening bones and minimising fracture risk. Consulting a healthcare professional for personalised care that will provide increasing calcium and vitamin D intake through diet or supplements is crucial, along with regular weight-bearing exercises like walking, jogging, and strength training to stimulate bone growth. In more severe cases, doctors may prescribe medications such as bisphosphonates to slow bone loss or hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for postmenopausal women to maintain bone density. Fall prevention strategies, including home safety adjustments and balance exercises, are essential, as most fractures in older women result from low-energy trauma. Early detection plays a key role in treatment. Tools for predicting fracture risk, which combine clinical risk factors and bone mineral density tests, help guide healthcare decisions. Preventing future fractures, known as secondary prevention, also involves timely rehabilitation following a fracture. This can include physical therapy, assistive devices like walking aids, and lifestyle counseling. The WHO emphasises that effective management of fragility fractures not only reduces the risk of subsequent fractures but also improves the quality of life for older women. While some risk factors, like age and genetics, cannot be altered, proactive steps.



The gender budget — bigger allocations, little impact



class, and tribal identities. This has led to the failure of the schemes to transform the lives of marginalised women. As Vikas Singh from Daang Vikas Sansthan, who works with widows of mine workers in Rajasthan, points out, "Schemes are very nice on paper, but digitization has created new barriers. Most women lack digital literacy, making accessing welfare schemes without middlemen difficult." The government's move to eliminate intermediaries through digitisation necessitates urgent investments in digital literacy programmes.

Outdated Census data, other gaps Women from SC/ST communities face layered discrimination, making it vital to analyse how budgetary allocations address these intersections. In the Union Budget 2025-26, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs received an allocation of ₹14,925.81 crore — a 45.79% increase from the previous year's revised estimate of ₹10,237.33 crore. However, specific allocations under the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) are not detailed in the available sources.

These sub-plans are integral to the Budgets of various Ministries, with the aim of ensuring targeted development for SCs and STs. The combined allocations for SCSP and TSP across all Ministries are substantial, reflecting the commitment to welfare. But there is a lack of gender-disaggregated data within these plans, which makes it challenging to assess their actual impact on SC/ST women. The last Census in India was in 2011, making current data outdated. This gap raises serious questions about how government policies are tailored without updated statistics, affecting accountability mechanisms. According to the "Dalit Adivasi Budget Analysis 2023-24" report by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), over 35% of the funds allocated under SCSP and TSP are underutilised due to bureaucratic red tape and lack of community involvement. Complicated paperwork, procedural barriers, low outreach, and an inadequate dissemination of information hinder women from availing themselves of welfare schemes. Though women do not understand the nitty-gritties due to the financial jargon of the Economic Survey, they wait every year for "schemes", "subsidies", and govern-

ment support that can make their life easier. Schemes often fail to consider regional, cultural and social diversities, especially in tribal areas where access to education and health care remains dismal. The literacy rate among tribal women is 49.4%, compared to the national female literacy rate of 64.63% (Census 2011). Issues to tackle

According to Sandeep Patnaik, a researcher and journalist working on women's rights and panchayati raj issues, "Strengthening local institutions and ensuring better utilization of existing funds is as important as increasing allocations." The role of panchayati raj institutions is critical in ensuring the last-mile delivery of services, yet they often lack the autonomy and the resources to implement gender-sensitive policies effectively. Also, the government needs to create strict rules to prevent the rule of "sarpanch husbands", which has become one of the significant obstacles to women's empowerment and upliftment. Gender budgets must be designed after an audit that accounts for intersectionality of caste, class, and tribal identities at the central and State levels. Second, the government must adopt community-led participatory methods that involve women, especially those from SC/ST backgrounds, in planning and monitoring schemes. Evidence from Kerala's Kudumbashree mission shows that community-led implementation significantly improves outreach and effectiveness. Establishing transparent monitoring systems to track fund utilisation and impact would be beneficial. The creation of a gender budget tracking portal could foster greater public accountability. While the increased allocation for women in the Budget is in the right direction, real progress lies in its effective implementation. Without addressing the intersectional realities of caste, class, gender, and the digital divide, the gender budget will continue to fail women. For transformative change, policies must move beyond tokenism to ensure equity, accessibility, and accountability. Bhoomika Choudhury is an international lawyer and researcher specialising in business and human rights, corporate accountability, and labour rights. Yukti Choudhary is an international human rights lawyer and researcher specialising in corporate accountability, labour rights, and sustainability

Bank union forum gives call for nationwide strike on March 24 and 25 after talks with IBA fail



The unions had also sought the withdrawal of recent directives regarding performance reviews and performance-linked incentives. The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) has given an official call for a two-day nationwide strike on March 24 and 25.

The demands raised included filling up the workmen and officer director posts in public sector banks, along with resolving residual issues with the IBA and amending the Gratuity Act to raise the ceiling to ₹25 lakh, aligning it with the scheme for government employees and seeking exemption from income tax. (File) The demands raised included filling up the workmen and officer director posts in public sector banks, along with resolving residual issues with the IBA and amending the Gratuity Act to raise the ceiling to ₹25 lakh, aligning it with the scheme for government employees and seeking exemption from income tax. (File)

This is over their various demands, including adequate recruitment in all cadre and regularising temporary employees and 5-day work week in the banking industry, according to news agency ANI. The strike comes because discussions with the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) over key demands failed to yield any positive outcome.

The issues discussed were centred around the recruitment in all cadres and a five-day workweek, according to a report by news agency PTI. The demands raised included filling up the workmen and officer director posts in public sector banks, along with resolving residual issues with the IBA and amending the Gratuity Act to raise the ceiling to ₹25 lakh, aligning it with the scheme for government employees and seeking exemption from income tax, according to the report.

The unions had also sought the withdrawal of recent directives from the Department of Financial Services (DFS) regarding performance reviews and performance-linked incentives. The UFBU which is an umbrella body of nine bank employees' associations, opposed what it calls "micro-management" of public sector banks by the DFS, alleging that these measures threaten job security and undermine the autonomy of bank boards. The union forum comprises major bank unions, including the All India Bank Employees Association (AIBE), All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC), National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE), and All India Bank Officers' Association (AIBOA).

'Wolf of Wall Street' Jordan Belfort has an interesting take on Donald Trump's tariffs

GNS News Agency, March 19

Jordan Belfort echoed Trump's statements that the tariffs would help in restoring domestic production in the US, critical for the country's long-term stability. Entrepreneur Jordan Belfort, also known as the "Wolf of Wall Street," said there's no reason to panic about US President Donald Trump's latest tariff hikes on key trade partners. This is because "everyone's taking advantage of us," Belfort said on "Fox & Friends," an American daily morning Fox News programme. Harness data analytics to drive decisions with IIM Kozhikode DAM program. Join Now Belfort claimed that the tariffs will ultimately end up strengthening American manufacturing though "there's going to be corrections in markets." The US stock market had entered correction territory last Thursday, as concerns of a potential trade war continued. However, Trump told White House reporters that he's "not going to bend at all" on the tariffs which include a 25% levy on steel and aluminum imports, along with a proposed 200% tariff on European champagne and other alcohol products. This resulted in swift backlash from major US trade partners such as Canada, China, and the European Union, with Canada having already retaliated with its own additional tariffs. Belfort echoed Trump's statements that the tariffs would help in restoring domestic production in the US which is critical for the country's long-term stability, adding that "you can't just be a consumer nation." "It's like being on a sugar high for 50 years," Belfort had said. "At some point, you're bleeding the wealth out of the country." Belfort said that the US is losing on the trade deficit and that over time, that will cause massive problems and thus, "needs to be reset." However, critics have warned that the tariffs could do more harm than good, with economists arguing that trade wars drive up costs for consumers, strain relationships with allies, and could slow global economic growth, according to the report.

Banks wrote off bad loans worth 16.35 lakh crore in last 10 years: Centre



GNS News Agency, March 19

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman emphasized that such write-offs do not relieve borrowers of their liabilities. Banks have written off non-performing assets (NPAs) or bad loans worth about ₹16.35 lakh crore in last 10 financial years, Parliament was informed. Highest amount of ₹2,36,265 crore was written off during financial year 2018-19 while NPAs worth ₹58,786 crore were written off in 2014-15, the lowest in the last 10 years. Harness data analytics to drive decisions with IIM Kozhikode DAM program. Join Now During 2023-24, banks wrote off bad loans of ₹1,70,270 crore, lower than ₹2,16,324 crore done in the previous financial year.

Banks write off non-performing assets (NPAs), including those in respect of which full provisioning has been made on completion of four years, as per the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines and policy approved by banks' boards, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a reply in the Lok Sabha. Such write-offs do not result in waiver of liabilities of borrowers and therefore, it does not benefit the borrower, she said.

Banks continue pursuing their recovery actions initiated against borrowers under the various recovery mechanism available to them, such as filing of a suit in civil courts or in Debts Recovery Tribunals, action under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, filing of cases in the National Company Law Tribunal under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, etc, she said. As per RBI data, as on December 31, 2024, scheduled commercial banks had 29 unique borrower companies, which have been classified as NPAs and each of them have outstanding of ₹1,000 crore and above, she said, adding aggregate outstanding in these accounts were ₹61,027 crore.

With regard to recovery of overdue amount from borrowers, banks make calls and issue emails/letters to borrowers regarding payment of the overdue amounts, and depending on the default amount, banks may also approach the National Company Law Tribunal for initiation of corporate insolvency resolution process in case of corporate borrowers. Further, if a loan account is classified as NPA, banks initiate recovery actions, as per their Board-approved policies, which include filing of a suit in civil courts or in debts recovery tribunals, and, action under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, she added. Replying to another question, Sitharaman said it has been decided by the government to constitute the 8th Central Pay Commission (CPC). The financial implication of the recommendations of the 8th Central Pay Commission will be known, once the recommendations are made by the 8th Central Pay Commission and accepted by the government, she said.

After Maruti, Tata Motors set to hike vehicle prices

New Delhi: Tata Motors on Monday said it will increase prices of its commercial vehicle range by up to 2 per cent from April in order to partially offset the impact of rising input costs. The prices of the company's commercial vehicle range will increase by up to 2 per cent from April 1, 2025, Tata Motors said in a regulatory filing. The price increase is to offset the rise in input costs, and will vary as per individual model and variant, it added. Part of the USD 165 billion Tata group, Tata Motors is a USD 44 billion organisation. It manufactures cars, utility vehicles, trucks, and buses. Shares of Tata Motors on Monday ended 0.84 per cent up at Rs 660.90 apiece on BSE. Maruti Suzuki India on Monday said it will hike vehicle prices by up to 4 per cent from April to offset the impact of rising input costs.

India to gain in an uncertain world of tariffs, says SBI report

As tariff action by U.S. President Donald Trump looms large, the State Bank of India (SBI) in a special report said that India however would stand to gain in an increasingly uncertain world of tariffs. "Trends indicate that the jump in the U.S. economy post-COVID may have been an outlier as a result of policy extravaganza. Long trends indicate a possible downturn in U.S. economy GDP growth along with a slowdown in U.S. exports and consumption," SBI said in the report.

"The overall value add is showing a declining trend with shrinking Total Factor Productivity (TFP) growth. High U.S. wages could hold back new investment. Net savings to GDP is also at the lowest level since 2011, the second lowest since 1951," it said. "The U.S. debt to GDP ratio shows a secular rising trend... ironically... the U.S. currency showing strength show cyclical



trends with falling peaks," it further said. "If the structural adjustment gains traction, then only the U.S. potential GDP trend can see an upward shift. The crowding in of the private sector that follows along with technical progress can add to growth prospects. However, this adjustment will have short-term costs and has lots of ifs and buts," SBI report. According to SBI report, the reciprocal tariff may not impact India much.

The decline in exports from India to the U.S. could

be in the range of 3-3.5% post reciprocal tariffs, if any, it said. "We estimated the decline in exports in the range of 3-3.5% which again should be negated through higher export goals across both manufacturing and services fronts, as India has diversified its exports kitty, pitched value addition, exploring alternate areas and works on new routes that transcend from Europe to the USA via the Middle-East, redrawing new supply chain algorithms," it said. Stating that India has signed 13 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) in

Ola Electric shares hit 52-week low after insolvency petition by creditor



The petition has been submitted before the NCLT's Bengaluru Bench, alleging default in payment towards the services rendered by the operational creditor. Shares of Ola Electric Mobility Ltd tanked over 7 per cent on Monday morning after the firm said its vehicle registration service provider Rosmerta Digital Services Ltd has sought the initia-

tion of insolvency proceedings against its wholly-owned arm Ola Electric Technologies Pvt Ltd.

In a regulatory filing, the company on Saturday said, "A petition has been filed under Section 9 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) by M/s. Rosmerta Digital Services Ltd, an operational creditor of Ola Electric Technologies Pvt Ltd." The petition has been submitted before the National Company Law Tribunal's Bengaluru Bench, alleging default in payment towards the services rendered by the operational creditor and seeking initiation of the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) against Ola Electric Technologies Pvt Ltd, it added. The company has sought appropriate legal advice and it strongly disputes the claims made, Ola Electric Mobility said, adding it would "take all necessary and appropriate steps to protect its interests and object to the allegations in the aforesaid matter". The insolvency proceedings come at a time when Ola Electric Mobility is cutting around 1,000 jobs across different functions as part of a restructuring exercise to reduce losses.

Crypto exchange OKX suspends the DeFi service which drew EU scrutiny

Digital-asset exchange OKX has suspended a service used by hackers to launder proceeds from a \$1.5 billion heist on trading platform Bybit, after drawing scrutiny from European watchdogs. "After consulting with regulators, we made the proactive decision to temporarily suspend our DEX aggregator services," OKX said in a statement on Monday. "This move allows us to implement additional upgrades to prevent further misuse." The move comes after a Bloomberg News report revealed regulators had zeroed in on the use of OKX's

Web3 service by Bybit hackers — which authorities have linked to North Korea — to launder about \$100 million in proceeds from the heist. The February hack was the biggest and among the most sophisticated to hit the crypto industry so far.

OKX is subject to the European Union's new Markets in Cryptoassets, or MiCA, regulations. National watchdogs from the European Union's 27 member states discussed the exchange's Web3 service at a meeting hosted by the European Securities and

Markets Authority's Digital Finance Standing Committee on March 6, according to the Bloomberg News report. OKX markets its Web3 platform as a decentralised-finance platform and self-custodial wallet that gives crypto traders access to various exchanges and blockchains. The DEX aggregator is one of the services offered through the Web3 wallet, a spokesperson for the company said. Founded in 2017 and based in the Seychelles, OKX offers trading in over 300 cryptocurrencies including Bitcoin and Ether over its



centralized exchange. In July, the company said 53

million individual wallets had been created on its separate

Web3 service, adding that the platform covered 100 different blockchains.

Atletico, the third wobbly but stubborn wheel in the Spanish title race behind Barcelona and Real Madrid



Atletico Madrid were subjected to two astonishing heartbreaks. First, it lost to city rivals Real Madrid in the UEFA Champions League Round of 16 clash in the penalties before succumbing to a 2-4 loss to Barcelona after leading the majority of the game 2-0. (AP) Atletico Madrid were subjected to two astonishing heartbreaks. First, it lost to city rivals Real Madrid in the UEFA Champions League Round of 16 clash in the penalties before succumbing to a 2-4 loss to Barcelona after leading the majority of the game 2-0. (AP)

For someone subjected to two astonishing heartbreaks in the space of four nights, and several in his 14-year shift as Atletico Madrid's manager, Diego Simeone was inhumanly composed when analysing the latest setback at the hands of Barcelona. "It's not because of luck. It happens because of forcefulness. We were better in the first half and then they found that 2-1 quickly, then the 2-2, then the 2-3. But it's not luck. If Lamine doesn't shoot, the third goal doesn't happen. I wouldn't say luck." There was no "anger, rage or injustice," as he reflected on the Champions League exit at the hands of those depressingly familiar rivals down the road, Real Madrid. Rather, he was both numb and shocked as his side blew a two-goal lead in uncharacteristic Atletico implosion, before shipping in two stoppage time goals to lose 2-4. Only the first strike mattered, the long-ranger from Lamine Yamal nestling in the nets, rerouted by a wicked deflection in the 93rd minute. Atletico was resigned to their cruel, crushing fate of the cursed week they lost to two of their bitterest rivals.

Of more significance was how the game altered the title-race dynamics. Barcelona would breathe easy, as they are sitting atop the league table, level on points with Real Madrid, but with a game in hand and an El Clasico at home yet to be duelled. Atletico are four points behind both but with 10 more game-weeks left, Atletico would not recede from title push either. "We will work game by game, and see where it could take us from here," Simeone said. It could yet be the tightest title race in Spain since the 2020-21 season, an edition Simeone could fondly recollect as his side rode the title home by a two-point whisker. But Simeone is a practical man, immune to the soothing arms of the past. Had he been a romantic, he would not have transformed a historically mercurial side to one of the toughest in the league and world; he would not have challenged two of the mightiest powerhouses of the world, snatched a pair of league titles from them, the first of them achieved in the peak Cristiano Ronaldo-Lionel Messi rivalry days. Simeone never had access to such wealth of talent or riches to land superstars.

He did not complain. He was merely happy to have a job, after enduring relegation with River Plate in Argentina. "I had strategy and players ready to lose their lives for the club," he said after landing his first league title as manager in 2014. By then, he had formed a well-defined strategy

Ravichandran Ashwin thanks MS Dhoni for 'gift' of bringing him back to CSK after missing spinner's 100th Test



GNS News Agency, March 19

Ravichandran Ashwin MS Dhoni Chennai super Kings IPLR. Ashwin of Rajasthan Royals and MS Dhoni of Chennai Super Kings during match 17 of the Tata Indian Premier League between the Chennai Super Kings and the Rajasthan Royals held at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai on the 12th April 2023. (Sportpics) India's premier off spinner Ravichandran Ashwin retired from international cricket after the third Test of the Border Gavaskar series, drawing the curtains on one of the most decorated careers ever. Last year, he became the 14th Indian and the first

based on defensive dourness and blitzing counterattacking. It would be his identity—or Cholismo, which is tweaked from his moniker El Cholo—through different Atletico iterations. He lost players to bigger clubs and to the ravages of time, but the spirit Cholismo shone through his sides.

Barcelona won because they shook that spirit. Atletico were in control for three quarters of the game, but when Robert Lewandowski pulled a goal back, a sweet volley, they suddenly froze, reminiscent of the 2014 Champions League final in Berlin. Sergio Ramos's 93rd-minute equaliser shook them so devastatingly that they ended up losing the game 4-1. Six minutes later, Ferran Torres nodded in the equaliser that injected a sense of doom in the Metropolitan Stadium. When Atletico slumped and slipped, Barcelona rose and rallied. Here is a side that has mastered the art of comeback, and they just lashed out the Atletico goalmouth like an unstoppable tidal wave. Somehow, it had to be Yamal, the teenager with precocious gifts and a sense of occasion. His shot was powerful though speculative, but the stars above the modern spectacle of a sporting arena winked, and a wicked deflection parried it towards the far corner of the goal. Torres returned to kill the contest with his second goal, just seconds later. It was the first time in 662 league games that Atletico had blown a 2-0 goal advantage. It could perhaps be the moment Barcelona won and Atletico lost the league. Barcelona's title ambitions were reinvigorated, just as Atletico could feel that the cold hands of fate were again strangling them. But Barcelona would know that Real Madrid would stretch them till the final second, or at least till the Clasico in May, the 35th week of the season.

Atletico Madrid players during the penalty shootout against Real Madrid in the Champions League round of 16 second leg match. (AP/Manu Fernandez) Atletico Madrid players during the penalty shootout against Real Madrid in the Champions League round of 16 second leg match. (AP/Manu Fernandez) Among the three, Atletico has the easiest pile of fixtures. They don't have Champions League encounters to worry about rest and squad rotation; only two of their opponents in the next 10 games are in the top 10, none are in the top five and three of them are among the bottom four. Should Barcelona or Real Madrid falter, Simeone's men would promptly pounce. Barcelona has the toughest calendar, pitted to face three teams in the top five, and three others ranked between 5 and 10 in the latest standings. Apart from Barcelona, Athletic Club, Celta Vigo and Mallorca, Real Madrid don't face any team in the top half. It's an equation similar to the 2020-21 season, when merely two points separated the top three in the final months. Atletico again passed through moments of agony before raising the title. The captain Koke would then reflect, sobbing in joy: "We wouldn't be Atleti if we didn't suffer." Perhaps, after the week of suffering, his team would re-emerge and find silver lines of hope. But a thrilling title race is unfolding in Spain, with more twists and turns awaiting.

Tamil Nadu cricketer to feature in 100 Test matches when he played the fifth Test against England at the HPCA Stadium in Dharamshala. In a recent interaction, Ashwin revealed that he had invited Mahendra Singh Dhoni for his 100th Test but the former India captain couldn't make it. Ashwin said that he wanted to get a memento for his 100th Test from Dhoni but added that he got an even better gift when the former Chennai Super Kings captain played a big part in Ashwin's return to the franchise in the 2025 IPL mega auction.

"I called MS Dhoni for my 100th Test in Dharamshala to hand over the memento. I wanted to make that my last Test. But he couldn't make it. However, I didn't think he would give me the gift of getting me back to CSK. It's a much better one. So, thank you, MS, for doing it. I'm glad to be here," Ashwin said. "Most importantly, I have come back to CSK not as a person who has achieved all those things but as someone who has gone through the full circle and wants to come back here and enjoy those same moments that I enjoyed all those years ago. It is a wonderful place to be," he added. After beginning his domestic career on a promising note, Ashwin came to national prominence with CSK in the 2009 and 2010 seasons. His performances ultimately opened the national doors and had been an integral part of the franchise between 2008-2015.

"I would like to thank myself for fighting until the end and for always believing in me and for never quitting," Andreeva said at the trophy ceremony. "I was running like a rabbit today because Aryna, she's been sending bullets and it was really hard to just keep up." Andreeva had lost to Sabalenka twice this year and it looked as though the pattern would continue as the top-seeded Belarusian mixed some nifty drop shots with her usual forehand power to save four break points in the third game. Sabalenka sent a backhand winner down the line to break in the fourth game and four games later a visibly frustrated Andreeva whacked a ball into the stands after sending a shot into the net as the Russian was broken again. The teenager got a confidence boost in the second set;

Is Shardul Thakur joining Lucknow Super Giants? Speculation at fever pitch after franchise's deleted post

GNS News Agency, March 19

Though no official announcement is on the anvil, Mumbai pacer Shardul Thakur has been camped at the Lucknow Super Giants training nets for the last week. He also surfaced in a social media post by the LSG handle, which was deleted within hours. The deletion raised speculation of him being roped in by LSG to a fever pitch, after Thakur was also seen in Holi videos and appeared in the training jersey. Fans received the deleted post with much trepidation that was nothing about Thakur, who was released by CSK last season. Their worries revolved around the reasons for summoning this potential backup—given LSG are sweating the fitness of their key speedster Mayank Yadav, known for his 97 miles per hour deliveries.

NDTV quoted PTI citing a BCCI anon source as saying, "Mayank is expected to get fit in some time but he might have to miss the first few games of the Indian Premier League. As of now it could be first two to three games. He has just started bowling at NCA and will slowly be building his load." But fans have fanned out their concerns in guessing if Thakur was in fact coming in for Mohsin or Avesh Khan. Some even tossed up names of Marsh and Markram, though that was idle chatter. A Sunday video featuring Thakur



raised the spectre of his joining the franchise. Thakur who played for CSK in 2024 didn't get any bids in the blast auction. However he had continued ploughing away in domestic cricket, with Mumbai's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy numbers of 15 wickets in nine games at an average of 24.53. In the Ranji Trophy, he notched 35 wickets in nine matches at 22.62. Though he is nowhere close to Mayank's speed, he brings in solidity while the star character awaits go ahead from medical and sports science team at BCCI's Centre of Excellence (COE) in Bengaluru.

'Removing women-only events would deprive many of opportunity under false pretence that women can grow in Open tournaments'

GNS News Agency, March 19

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) CEO Emil Sutovsky remarked that removing women-only events from the International calendar will deprive many women players of a chance to develop under the false pretence of growing by competing with men. Speaking during the fourth leg of the 2024-25 FIDE Women's Grand Prix happening in Nicosia, the capital city of Cyprus, Sutovsky said, "If we were to remove all the possibilities to compete in women-only events, if we were to remove the possibility to support travel and so on, I think we would deprive many of these talents of opportunity under, I think, a false pretence that we will try to prove that women can grow in Open tournaments, better than they can by competing in women-only events."

"Once again, never restricting, but any women player should have a chance to compete and excel in girls-only or women-only events. But, of course, also to provide an opportunity to play in open events and compete on par with the best." Unlike other sports like cricket, football and tennis, where the events are segregated based on gender— for male or female— chess has a more inclusive category where both men and women (boys & girls too) can play together apart from an exclusive women's category. The Open category allows any player across genders to participate in an event whereas Women's category, as the name suggests, is only for female players.

The gulf between the average strength of male play-



ers and female players has also widened over the years and the number of elite women players who can comfortably compete in the Open category has also gone down, believed Sutovsky. He said, "While top-rated players, at the age of 15, 16, 17, reached 2500 before, now just a couple of players are rated above 2400 at the age of 17 or 18." The highest-rated active women's player is reigning world champion Ju Wenjun whose Elo rating is 2561. Former world champion, Hou Yifan, a semi-retired chess player has the highest rating (2633) among women players at the point. She is also the only women player to have a rating above 2600. The event, which is being played from March 14 to 25, has two Indian representations in Divya Deshmukh and Harika Dronavalli.

Inzamam-ul-Haq on debate around stars from 1990s era: 'Pakistan cricket would lose its strength without them'

GNS News Agency, March 19

Pakistan vs Bangladesh: Pakistan will be hoping to tournament with at least a win. (PHOTO: AP) Pakistan Cricket has been on a free fall in the last couple of years. Inzamam-ul-Haq has responded to the debate around stars from 1990s era and made it clear that the players from that era will hold special place in Pakistan cricket.

"If we look at the players from the 90s generation, Pakistan cricket would lose its strength without them," Inzamam told media in Lahore. In their ongoing tour of New Zealand, the Pakistan cricket has made heaps of changes after their poor performance at home in the 50-overs Champions Trophy. The national selectors even dropped Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan. However the new era or Pakistan white ball cricket got off to a rough start Sunday with a nine wicket loss to New Zealand in the first of five T20Is. Inzamam-ul-Haq said altering coaches, management, and players would not resolve the underlying issues in the Pakistan cricket. "We are not working in the right direction and making the wrong calls in many areas," he said. "I would think that the cricket board now needs to learn from its mistakes and not repeat the same mistakes we have made in the last two years." In the past two years, the performance of the Pakistan team has been on a decline. If we don't work in the right direction, we will continue to fall further," said Inzamam.

Inzamam was forced to step down as chief selector in



2023 after the board mishandled a matter relating to conflict of interest. "We need to sit down and think about where the mistakes are being made," he said. "Instead of making too many changes, we need to think carefully about where things are going wrong. If there are constant changes, players won't gain the confidence they need, and the situation will remain the same." Inzamam also voiced support for Babar Azam, describing him as a top-class player who is currently going through a rough patch. "Babar Azam is a top player. Everyone goes through a rough patch, but the national team hasn't been playing good cricket for the past few months," he added. "Trust the management and the players, and work together to identify where the mistakes are," he said.

Hardik Pandya recollects how he won back the fans after India won the T20 World Cup

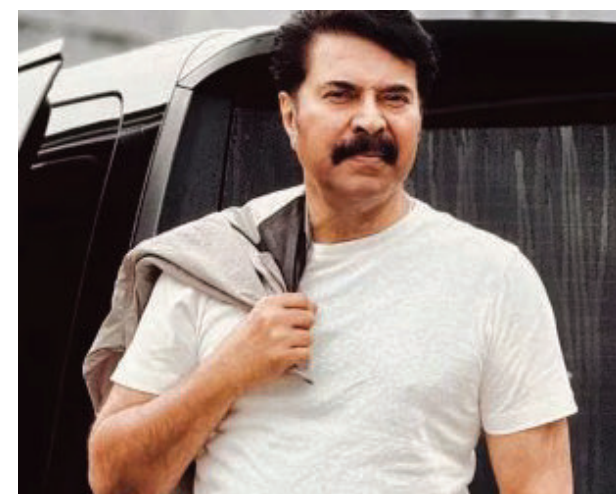
GNS News Agency, March 19

It was a difficult Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 for Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya. On the field, Pandya had done little to flare the fumes of angst, but he had provoked Mumbai Indian fans by switching loyalties from Gujarat Titans to Mumbai. Pandya had led Titans to trophy in their inaugural season. Rippling boos got louder when he played at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, where he was the prodigal son who displaced their beloved son (Rohit Sharma) as captain. But as the year went on, Pandya turned his fortunes around after his match-winning performances in India's T20 World Cup winning triumph. Pandya scored 144 runs and took 11 wickets in the global tournament as India reclaimed the T20 World Cup after 2007, ending India's 13-year long ICC Trophy drought. The all-rounder also played a key role in India's ICC Champions Trophy triumph in Dubai, earlier this month. Pandya had credited his perseverance and resilience towards cricket for winning the fans back. "For me, it has always been about never leaving the battlefield," Hardik Pandya said on JioHotstar. "There have been phases in my career where



my focus wasn't necessarily on winning but on surviving and holding my ground. "I realized that no matter what was happening around me, cricket would always be my greatest ally—it was my way forward. "I kept pushing through, and when all the hard work finally paid off, it was beyond anything I could have scripted. "The six-month phase where we won the World Cup, and then the kind of love and support I received upon returning—it was a complete 360-degree turnaround for me."

Mammootty's team dismisses cancer rumours, confirms he is in good health: 'He's on a break from filming for Ramzan fasting'



For hours, social media had been abuzz with claims that Mammootty had been diagnosed with cancer and had stepped away from his filming commitments for treatment. A towering figure in Malayalam cinema, Mammootty made his full-fledged debut in 1980. Putting an end to the rumours that had been swirling for the past few hours regarding Mammootty's health, the Malayalam megastar's PR team has confirmed that he is absolutely fine, dismissing all speculations as baseless. For hours, social media had been abuzz with claims that the 73-year-old actor had been diagnosed with cancer and had stepped away from his filming commitments for treatment. While a section of netizens refuted the cancer rumours, they still suggested that he was unwell and had been hospitalised. However, it has now been clarified that these speculations hold no truth and that Mammootty is in good health, and took a break from his demanding schedule only due to Eid ul-Fitr

"It is fake news. He is on vacation because he is fast-

ing for Ramzan. He is on a break from his shoot schedule as well because of that. In fact, after the break he will go back to shooting for Mahesh Narayanan's film with Mohanlal," the legendary actor's PR told Mid-Day. Must Read | Mohanlal and Prithviraj Sukumaran's Empuraan back on track as co-producer dispute resolved; makers reveal FDFS timing

Tentatively titled MMMN, the Mahesh Narayanan directorial marks Malayalam superstars Mammootty and Mohanlal's first film together in key roles after a gap of 16 years since Twenty:20 (2008). In fact, just last month, Mammootty was seen on its set when South Indian icon Nayanthara joined the cast, further elevating the project's star-studded appeal. One of the most highly anticipated Malayalam films at the moment, MMMN also features Fahadh Faasil and Kunchacko Boban in key roles. The film's pooja and switch-on ceremony took place in November last year in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with both Mammootty and Mohanlal in attendance. The movie's production spans multiple locations, including Sri Lanka, London, Abu Dhabi, Azerbaijan, Thailand, Visakhapatnam, Hyderabad, Delhi and Kochi, over a 150-day schedule.

A towering figure in Malayalam cinema, Mammootty made his full-fledged debut in 1980 with Vilkanundu Swapnangal after appearing in two uncredited roles in the 1970s. His career quickly gained momentum, leading to a meteoric rise to superstardom in 1987 with director Joshiy's New Delhi. Alongside Mohanlal, he has remained at the forefront of the industry for decades. Over his illustrious 45-year career, Mammootty has also won three National Film Awards for Best Actor — the second most by any Indian actor, a record he shares with Kamal Haasan and Ajay Devgn. Currently, the Malayalam megastar is gearing up for the release of debut director Deeno Dennis's action thriller Bazooka, which is set to hit theatres on April 10, coinciding with the Vishu season. His son Dulquer Salmaan is also an established actor.

Vicky Kaushal-Rashmika Mandanna film breaks Stree 2, Pushpa 2 BO records; crosses Rs 750 cr mark

Chhaava Box Office Collection Day 31: It's been over a month since Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna's period drama Chhaava started its run at the box office. Even in its fifth week, the film is standing strong at the box office, breaking several records. Chhaava has already become Vicky Kaushal's highest grosser, and recently, it also overtook Ranbir Kapoor-starrer Animal's lifetime collection, becoming Rashmika's second-highest grosser after Pushpa 2. Earlier, it crossed Pathaan's lifetime earning. On its fifth Sunday, Chhaava managed to collect Rs 8 crores. The Hindi version earned Rs 7.25 lakhs, while the Telugu version raked in another Rs 75 lakhs.

Trade analyst Taran Adarsh reported how Chhaava is miles ahead of blockbusters such as Stree 2 and Pushpa 2 in its fifth week. "Chhaava sets a new benchmark in Weekend 5, with the holiday on Friday [#Holi] giving a significant boost to its business... The film performed excellently on Saturday and Sunday as well. Weekend 5 toppers Chhaava's nett India collection after 31 days stands at Rs 562.65 crores. The Hindi version has collected a total of Rs 548.7 crores, while the Telugu version contributed another Rs 13.95 crores. The film's gross collection in India stands at Rs 661.3 crores. Worldwide, Chhaava has earned Rs 750.5 crores, while overseas, the film has collected Rs 89.2 crores. The overall occupancy for the Hindi version on its fifth Sunday was 22.68 percent, with a total of 3330 shows running all over India. Chennai has the highest occupancy of 85.50 percent with eight shows, followed by Pune, where the occupancy was 34.50 percent with 373 shows. The occupancy in Bengaluru was 31 percent, with 183 shows. In Mumbai,



the film's overall occupant stood at 27.50 percent with 648 shows, while in Delhi NCR, the total occupancy was 17.75 percent with 820 shows. The film's occupancy for the Telugu version was also 22.68 percent, with a total of 367 shows. Vizag had the highest occupancy of 31 percent, followed by Karimnagar with an occupancy of 29.33 percent. The film's Telugu version was released on 7th March. Other than Vicky and Rashmika, the film also stars Akshaye Khanna, Ashutosh Rana, and Divya Dutta in important roles. Directed by Laxman Utekar and produced by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Entertainment, Chhaava had its theatrical release on 14th February 2025.

'Anil Kapoor slapped me hard thrice during Welcome shoot': Adi Irani recalls how actor didn't apologise, did 'it purposefully'



Actor Adi Irani has worked with several stars in the Hindi film industry, but not all his experiences with renowned actors have been pleasant. In a recent interaction, Adi recalled an incident from the filming of the 2007 hit Welcome, where Anil Kapoor slapped him hard three times during a scene. He also shared Anil's reaction when he confronted the Mr. India actor about it.

Speaking to Filmymantra Media, Adi recounted, "I was wearing glasses in a scene where both Anil Kapoor and Nana Patekar had to hit me. They both hit me, and I was reacting accordingly. They kept asking for re-takes, and during that, Anil Kapoor really slapped me two or three times. Even Nana Patekar ended up slapping me for real once. During the takes, my glasses turned, hurting my eye. Meri halat kharab ho gayi (My condition got worse). After the director said cut, Nana immediately apologized, but Anil Kapoor just walked away. I confronted him and said, 'Anil ji, what is this? You slapped me really hard. This is not done.'

Anil replied, 'It happened by mistake.' I asked him, 'How can it happen by mistake thrice?'

When asked whether Anil Kapoor would dare to do the same with superstars like Shah Rukh Khan or Salman Khan, Adi remarked, "He did that purposefully; he does that to everyone. I think he believes that the more real he performs, the more authentic the reaction will be. But he won't stab someone with a knife for real, right? He wouldn't do this with Salman Khan or Shah Rukh Khan. I have also heard that he had similar issues with Amjad Khan." Welcome, directed by Anees Bazmee, was a massive hit at the box office and featured an ensemble cast, including late actor Feroz Khan, Anil Kapoor, Nana Patekar, Akshay Kumar, Katrina Kaif, Paresh Rawal, and Mallika Sherawat in prominent roles. The film's third installment, Welcome to the Jungle, is set to release in 2025.

Kriti Sanon satisfies her mango craving with a quirky quick fix

Mumbai: Craving mangoes, Bollywood actress Kriti Sanon has found a hilarious quick fix, which includes a flavored lip gloss. Kriti took to Instagram, where she shared a video. It shows Kriti holding a mango-flavored lip gloss. After applying, the actress takes a little lick. She also added the song "Smells Like Summer" by Tokio Hotel in the background of the video.

"On the work front, the actress is currently busy shooting for her upcoming film 'Tere Ishk Mein' with Dhanush. 'Tere Ishk Mein' is said to be a spiritual successor to the world of 'Raanjhanaa', as it delves deeper into themes of unrequited love, longing, and emotional conflict.

Payal Kapadia joins forces with Richa Chadha, Ali Fazal and Jeo Baby to produce Malayalam film Guptam



Global filmmaking sensation Payal Kapadia, known for the Cannes Grand Prix-winning All We Imagine as Light, has joined hands with Bollywood power couple Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal to produce the upcoming Malayalam film Guptam (The Last of Them Plagues). Penned and directed by Kunjila Mascillamani, who rose to fame with the segment Asanghadithar in the 2022 anthology film Freedom Fight, Guptam also brings on board Kaathal — The Core director Jeo Baby and actor Kani Kusruti — known for her performances in Biriyaani (2020), All We Imagine as Light and Girls Will Be Girls — as co-producers.

Unveiling the film's first-look poster, the makers recently announced that Guptam will be presented to investors at CinéV Film Markets in Chandigarh from March 20 to 23. "When her younger daughter disappears in a graveyard, a single mother is forced to move to a conservative, religious, small town in Kerala, India, where she launches a desperate search for the child. Soon, a series of mysterious and disastrous incidents plague the region, and the

townsfolk turn against her, convinced she has brought god's wrath upon them. Now, she must fight to clear her name while coping with grief and struggling to care for her surviving daughter," the movie's logline reads. Don't Miss | Mammootty's team dismisses cancer rumours, confirms he is in good health: 'He's on a break from filming for Ramzan fasting'

Sharing her excitement about the project, Payal shared in a statement issued to the media: "When I first saw Kunjila's Asanghadithar, I was struck by her impeccable craft and strong voice. I knew I wanted to be part of her filmmaking journey. As a woman, I have long struggled with the lack of diverse female representation on screen. Reading the first treatment for Guptam, I was certain this was a film I had to produce. A single mother battling a society that sees her as an anomaly is the reality of countless women around us. I grew up seeing women like Sethulekshmi of Guptam."

Expressing their elation over joining forces with Payal and Jeo, Richa and Ali stated: "As producers, we deeply resonate with Kunjila's script, which exposes the insidious violence against women veiled as 'culture'. In Guptam, a woman's decision to simply exist on her own terms unsettles many in her homeland, a theme that transcends borders. We have long admired Kunjila's work for its originality, and we are excited to embark on this journey with her, knowing she will bring depth, nuance, and vulnerability to this deeply personal story." Mentioning that only Kunjila can come up with such a story, Jeo added: "Her nuanced portrayal of human relationships and their fragility, while telling the story of a witch-hunt, is extraordinary." Kani, meanwhile, shared: "When Kunjila told me the story of Guptam, it lingered in my mind for days. I grew up amid larger feminist movements and organised fights for justice, but I've come to see how ordinary women fight constant, unspoken battles for innumerable rights. Their small acts of resistance shape larger change, yet remain unacknowledged."

Who is Masoom Sharma, the Haryanvi singer whose songs have been banned by state govt

Masoom Sharma alleges his songs have been unfairly banned by the Haryana government. Masoom Sharma alleges his songs have been unfairly banned by the Haryana government. The Haryana government has pulled down three songs of singer Masoom Sharma from YouTube, claiming that the tracks promote gun culture. However, Masoom has alleged that the decision has stemmed from a personal rivalry with a person who now works in the publicity cell of the state government.

Who is Masoom Sharma?

Masoom is a 33-year-old Haryanvi singer, best known for his EP Rupa, which released last year. He makes Haryanvi pop songs, such as Jap Naam Bhole Ka (2021), 2 Numbari (2021), Gunde Te Pyaar (2021), Tuition Badmashi Ka (2022), Bhagatt Aadmi (2022), Ek Khtola Jail Ke Bhitari (2023), Badmashan Kaa Byah (2024), and Lofar (2024).

Why has the Haryana government banned him?

The Haryana government pulled down three of Masoom's songs — Tuition Badmashi Ka, 60 Mukadme and Khatoa — from YouTube because they allegedly promote "gun culture." Songs promoting gun culture have been a cause of concern, with many singers in the neighbouring state of Punjab also coming up with similar numbers.

What is Masoom's response?

Masoom, however, has opposed the ban, claiming that he's being discriminated against. In a Facebook Live, he accused an official in the publicity cell of the Haryana government of discriminating against him. He alleged that the official, now in a high position in the government, acted out of personal spite against Masoom, owing to an old rivalry. He added that a song each of his fellow Haryanvi artists —



Narendra Bhagana and Ankit Baliyan — were also pulled down from YouTube just in order to show that he's not being singled out. The said official also cancelled another Haryanvi singer KD Danoda's show at the Surajkund Mela, alleged Masoom. He further argued that while his songs are being labelled as those which promote hooliganism, the Haryana government has turned a blind eye to the artistes promoting obscenity under the guise of folk music. Masoom also said that if discriminatory practices like these continue, the Haryanvi music industry will get bear the brunt of it in the long run. He said that the fans of Haryanvi music would instead turn to Punjabi music, if freedom of Haryanvi artists is tampered with. He blasted at the officials in the state government who are consciously banning Haryanvi music because they don't want local artistes to succeed.

'Aren't you scared?': Anupam Mittal asks owner of fetish brand on Shark Tank India 4; Namita Thapar says India's not ready for this

The latest episode of Shark Tank India Season 4 featured an intriguing pitch. Randhir Pratap Singh, the founder of Subculture, entered the Tank to present his fetish brand, seeking Rs 50 lakh for a 7 percent equity stake in his company. Introducing himself to the 'sharks', Randhir shared that he comes from an army background and has lived across India.

One thing that immediately caught Aman Gupta's attention was Randhir's foreign accent. Curious, Aman asked, "How many years have you lived in London?" Randhir clarified that he had never lived abroad. Still unconvinced, Aman followed up, "Then where did you get the accent from?" Randhir explained that he had picked it up over the years from his non-Indian partners. Aman, however, pressed further, "But your parents are Indians, right?"

As the Sharks moved on from his background, they began probing Randhir about his business. He revealed that Subculture's products are crafted by a family in Jaipur with a long tradition of working with leather. While the Sharks appreciated his boldness in venturing into a niche industry and openly discussing it, Anupam Mittal asked, "Are you not scared that somebody will harm you someday?" To this, Randhir confidently replied that his army background commands respect, preventing people from messing with him. Speaking about his family's perspective on his business, Randhir admitted that while they don't openly discuss it, they do follow him on Instagram. He said, "They know what I am doing, they follow me on social media. But they don't talk about it." During the discussion, Randhir revealed that 60 percent of his customer base comes from the queer community. Namita Thapar commended him for his efforts and shared her own experience of being trolled after discussing LGBTQ+ issues on her health podcast. She said, "I run a health podcast and one episode I did on the LGBTQ+ community. I got trolled so much and bad comments I can't tell you. That shows us that as

a country, we are not ready yet." Namita was the first Shark to opt out, advising Randhir to grow his business organically and focus on educating people about his products. Other Sharks followed suit, offering similar guidance. Aman Gupta, before declaring himself out, suggested that Randhir find a co-founder to help expand the brand.

Nandamuri Kalyan Ram's 'Arjun S/O Vjayanthi' teaser released

Chennai: The makers of Nandamuri Kalyan Ram's eagerly-awaited film, 'Arjun S/O Vjayanthi', on Monday released a teaser of the entertainer, much to the delight of fans and film buffs. The teaser begins with Vjayanthi playing the role of Vjayanthi, an IPS officer in the film. The fearless cop is shown taking on rowdy sheeters and miscreants, even as she says that in her 10-year career, she has handled several such operations. She discloses that every time she confronts death, the first image that comes to her mind is that of her son, Arjun. The bond between mother and son, we realise, is strong. The teaser shows Vjayanthi asking her son Arjun a gift for her next birthday. She wants him to become a police officer like her. However, fate has other plans as Arjun turns into something else. He turns into a power centre, so much so that the city of Vizag is not controlled by cops or by lawyers but by him. Vjayanthi is a cop, who goes by the principle that whether she is on duty or not, she will not remain mum when a crime occurs before her eyes. She will stand up for what is right, even if a person who is killed is an enemy and the man who has killed him is her kin. Her son meanwhile is a law unto himself. A face off between mother and son becomes inevitable...