## INDIAN CHRONICIA

#### Husband beaten up, wife gang-raped by unidentified persons in Sangareddy

mandal in the early hours of Tuesday. The woman and her husband had got down from an auto-rickshaw on NH-65 at 4 am near Tilottam Gardens. While they were proceeding towards Mamidipally village, some unidentified persons stopped them. When the husband tried to protect his wife, they thrashed him and raped her. The victim and her husband, with the support of their relatives, approached the Sangareddy rural police a few hours later. The police sent the victim to the government hospital in Sangareddy for medical tests. A probe is on.

#### Miscreants set cars on fire in Kothagudem, Khammam

during the wee hours of Tuesday. In the incident that was recorded by CCTV camera, a youth wearing a hooded jacket was seen dousing the car with petrol and setting it on fire. The car was parked in an open ground outside the house of the advocate SCB Nagar in the Ramavaram area. Noticing the car on fire, the advocate informed the fire brigade, after which the firefighters reached the spot and extinguished the fire. By the time the fire brigade reached the spot, Sampath's car and the car parked next to it were completely gutted.

#### Govt will not encourage belt shops under any circumstances: Sridhar Babu



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): Minister for IT and Industries Duddilla Sridhar Babu has emphasised that the Congress government will not support belt shops in Telangana under any circumstances. During an Assembly session on Tuesday, the Minister expressed his dismay over the widespread liquor sales that took place during the BRS administration, noting that the BRS had a history of permitting liquor sales even in small grocery stores. Sridhar Babu remarked that it was encouraging to hear BRS MLA Prashanth Reddy acknowledge in the Assembly that belt shops were established during the previous government's term in Telangana. He assured that the government would conduct operations within the Excise department without any corruption or irregularities. Previously, BRS MLA Vemula Prashanth Reddy questioned whether the State government's strategy involved the introduction of new brands, beers, and the establishment of new bars and pubs. He accused the government of attempting to proliferate belt shops to boost revenue. Prashanth Reddy urged the government to repeal the current liquor policy and eliminate belt shops without delay. (NSS)

#### BJP protests for implementation of promises made to women.

Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): The Bharatiya Janata Party today strongly condemned the arrest of the party's Mahila Morcha activists who protested in front of the Assembly under the leadership of BJP Mahila Morcha State President Mekala Shilpa Reddy demanding that the Congress party fulfill the promises made to women before the elections in Telangana state. She alleged that the Congress government had raised its hands on the implementation of the promises made to women before the elections in Telangana state. "Is it moral for the Revanth Reddy government to arrest the women if they demands the implementation of the promises made to women before the elections? Referring to the promise of the payment of Rs. 2,500 per month to all the eligible women of the state, she asked the state government as to what happened to its promise. She said that the pension amount was not increased to Rs. 4,000 despite making a poll promise by the state government. He wondered as to Why the Congress government not keeping its word? "When will the Abhaya Hastam funds be released again..? The Congress government should answer the women's world. The Congress party, which lured people with promises before the elections and won with their votes and then backed down after coming to power, by cheating time and again. (NSS)

#### Prepare strong action plan for upcoming monsoon season: GHMC Commissioner

Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): GHMC Commissioner llambarthi has advised the concerned officials to prepare a monsoon action plan to alleviate the hardships of the people in the city during the upcoming monsoon season. The Commissioner held a coordination meeting with Hydra Commissioner Ranganath on the issues of fire safety, monsoon action plan, drain desilting and rehabilitation of drain safety tanks at the GHMC headquarters on Tuesday.

Speaking on this occasion, the two discussed various problems faced by the city during the monsoon season. He suggested that special measures be taken at the 141 water storage areas already identified in the city. He also said that a permanent solution should be found without water storage areas in the future. He said that the desilting work in drains should be completed before the monsoon season without any problems in the low-lying areas. He directed the engineering officers to complete the tender process for the same and advised the officers of the relevant departments to work together in coordination for the safety of the city's citizens and without traffic disruption. He also said that special attention should be paid to the protection and restoration of the city's lakes, and added that he also instructed the lakes officials to follow advance water management practices instead of overflowing through the lakes during the rains. He said that in this way, efforts would be made to prevent flooding in low-lying areas. The commissioner suggested that the people of low-lying areas should be alerted from time to time in the wake of the rains, that Nala audit measures should be taken to prevent accidents in the Nala during the rainy season and added that a special officer should be made responsible for the circle to monitor it from time to time

#### Supreme Court questions delay in Telangana Speaker's decision on BRS MLAs' disqualification case

GNS News Agency,

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday took a stern view of the Telangana Assembly Speaker's delay in deciding disqualification petitions against 10 MLAs who defected from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) to the ruling Congress. The matter has been adjourned to next Wednesday. A bench comprising Justices BR Gavai and AG Masih questioned the prolonged inac-

"As on today, how much time has passed since the first application? It appears to be an year. Why has not the Speaker's office



set a deadline for deciding these petitions?" Justice Gavai asked.Senior Advocate Aryama Sundaram, representing BRS MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy, argued that despite a High Court order in September 2024 directing the Speaker to fix a hearing schedule within four weeks,

no notice was issued until January this year. He stated that one of the defected MLAs even contested the Lok Sabha polls on a Congress ticket and lost but continues to hold his MLA position under BRS. Senior Advocate D Seshadri Naidu

petitioners."Only after the Supreme Court's earlier observations did the Speaker issue notices on February 13, giving the defected MLAs three weeks to respond. mandate is followed."

#### However, even after the deadline passed, there is no clarity on the status of disqualification petitions," he said.On time being sought on the respondents' side to respond, Justice Gavai cautioned, "Don't practice delaying tactics in this court." The bench also questioned whether a constitutional court could direct a Speaker to act within a specific timeline, to which Sundaram asserted, "The Constitution stands above all of us. It is the Court's duty to ensure its

#### More than 83,668 WhatsApp accounts used for Digital Arrest blocked: Home Ministry

GNS News Agency, March 25

New Delhi: The "Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre" (I4C) set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs has identified and blocked more than 83,668 WhatsApp accounts and 3,962 Skype IDs used for Digital Arrest, the Parliament was informed on Tuesday. Apart from this, over 7.81 lakh SIM cards and 2,08,469 IMEIs have been blocked by the Government after receiving police complaints, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar said in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha. A Digital Arrest is a cybercrime where scammers impersonate law enforcement officials to falsely accuse individuals of crimes and extort money or personal information by threatening arrest or imprisonment.

Since 2021, he said that a Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System for reporting financial frauds and stopping siphoning off funds by fraudsters has saved more than Rs 4,386 crore in more than 13.36 lakh complaints. Claiming that the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) does not separately compile or publish specific data regarding digital arrest scams, the MoS said the MHA has set up the I4C as an attached office to deal with all types of cyber crimes in the country, in a coor-

dinated and comprehensive manner. Sharing details of avenues for citizens to report digital arrests and other cyber crimes, he said the "National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal" (https://cybercrime.gov.in) has been launched, as a part of the I4C, to enable the public to report incidents pertaining to all types of cyber crimes. The MoS said cyber crime incidents reported on this portal, their conversion into FIRs and subsequent action thereon are handled by the State/UT Law Enforcement Agencies. He said the "Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System," under I4C, was launched in 2021 for immediate reporting of financial frauds and to stop siphoning off funds by the fraudsters. "So far, a financial amount of more than Rs 4,386 crore has been saved in more than 13.36 lakh complaints. A toll-free Helpline number -1930- has been operationalised to get assistance in lodging online cyber complaints," he said. Highlighting initiatives for citizen awareness, he said the Central Government has a comprehensive awareness programme on digital arrest scams which, inter-alia, includes, newspaper ad vertisements, announcements in Delhi Metros, the use of social media influencers to create special posts, campaigns through Prasar Bharti and electronic media, special programmes on Aakashvani.

#### Narendra Modi Govt ensures no fertilizer shortages for farmers: Kishan Reddy



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): Since coming to power in 2014, the Narendra Modi government has spent over ?12 lakh crore on fertilizer subsidies. As a result, fertilizers have been made available to farmers across the country at very low prices, irrespective of international market rates.

In the past, farmers had to wait in long queues to get fertilizers. However, due to several measures taken by the Narendra Modi government, farmers no longer face such difficulties, and they are able to obtain the required amount of fertilizers at subsidized rates. These measures include the supply of neem coated urea, revival of many closed fertilizer plants, establishment of new plants, enhancement of production capacity at existing plants with modern machinery, creation of a national fertilizer monitoring system, and prevention of fertilizer black-marketing through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system. One such initiative was the establishment of the RFCL (Ramagundam Fertilizers and Chemicals Ltd), inaugurated with an investment of ?6,338 crore. For the 2024-25 Rabi season, fertilizers have been supplied to all States, and there are still stocks available in various States to meet their requirements. Before each crop season, the central government typically takes steps to ensure that adequate fertilizers are available to farmers in each state. As part of this, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare coordinates with all state governments to ensure that the required fertilizers are available in each state according to their monthly needs. Based on the data provided by the state governments, the Central Fertilizer Department ensures that sufficient fertilizers are supplied to the states month-wise and continuously monitors their availability. The entire supply of major fertilizers provided with subsidies is tightly controlled through an onlinebased monitoring system called the "Integrated Fertilizer Monitoring System (IFMS)" to prevent any malpractices. Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, along with the Ministry of Fertilizers, conducts weekly video conferences with agricultural officials from each state to take immediate action and ensure the timely supply of the required fertilizers. Once fertilizers are supplied to the states, it is the responsibility of the state governments to distribute them at the district and mandal levels based on the needs of the farmers. (NSS

#### CEO holds meeting with political parties on electoral roll purification



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): C. Sudharshan Reddy, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), convened a meeting with representatives of various political parties on Tuesday to discuss ongoing efforts to purify electoral rolls ahead of upcoming elections. The CEO outlined initiatives to improve the accuracy of voter lists, including measures to address discrepancies and ensure a robust electoral framework. He invited suggestions from the attendees, which included establishing polling booths in gated communities, linking Aadhaar with voter IDs, and removing deceased voters from the rolls.Sudharshan Reddy also provided an overview of the legal framework governing voter enrollment, additions, and deletions. He emphasised the importance of registering first-time voters aged 17-18 and sought the cooperation of political parties in this effort. Representatives from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) attended the meeting. (NSS)

#### ATM withdrawals to get costlier from May 1 as RBI approves fee hike



GNS News Agency, March 25

New Delhi: Starting May 1, withdrawing cash from ATMs in India will become more expensive as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved an increase in ATM interchange fees. This means customers who rely on ATMs for their financial transactions will have to pay additional charges once they exceed their free transaction limit. An ATM interchange fee is a charge that one bank pays another for providing ATM services.

This fee, which is usually a fixed amount per transaction, is often passed on to customers as part of their banking costs. The RBI decided to revise these charges following requests from white-label ATM operators, who argued that rising operational expenses were affecting their business. The increase in charges will apply nationwide and is expected to impact customers, particularly those from smaller banks. These banks rely on larger financial institutions for ATM infrastructure and related services, making them more vulnerable to rising costs. From May 1, customers will have to pay an additional Rs 2 for each financial transaction beyond the free limit. For non-financial transactions, such as balance inquiries, the fee will increase by Rs As a result, withdrawing cash from an ATM will cost Rs 19 per transaction, up from the earlier Rs 17. Checking account balances will now cost Rs 7 per transaction, according to the official notification. ATMs, once seen as a revolutionary banking service, have been struggling in India with the rise of digital payments. The convenience of online wallets and UPI transactions has significantly reduced the need for cash withdrawals. Government data shows that digital payments in India were valued at Rs 952 lakh crore in FY14.By FY23, this figure had jumped to Rs 3,658 lakh crore, reflecting a massive shift towards cashless transactions. With this new fee hike, customers who still rely on cash transactions may feel the burden, further pushing them toward digital alternatives.

#### Justice Verma's case a blot on judiciary: CPI leader Dr K Narayana

New Delhi, March 25 (NSS): The corruption case of Delhi High Court judge Justice Verma has become a stain on the Indian judiciary, said CPI National Secretary Dr K Narayana today. He also said the world was shocked when a hundred crore rupees of currency was found in the house of the Delhi judge, which is the pinnacle of corruption. Speaking at a media conference held on Tuesday at the AP Bhavan premises in New Delhi, Dr Narayana said even if Justice Verma is not doing business, if hundreds of crores of rupees are in his house, it means that it is all corrupt money He said four days after the matter came to light, the Delhi Fire Department officials were being managed and added that they were saying that no burnt notes were found there. He made strong comments that even if bundles of the burnt notes were found, only the Fire Department officials, who gave false reports should be fired. Narayana said the judiciary had been losing its independence since Narendra Modi came to power. He alleged that the judiciary was under Modi's shadow. He questioned whether Prime Minister Modi could attend the personal puja program held at the house of former judge Justice Chandrachud and added that the pressure of the Central government on the judiciary was increasing severely. He said it was clear that even the collegium had finally come under PM Modi's



#### **Indian Chronicle**

English Daily

#### Kamra in the dock

Politicians sling mud at each other in India every day and usually get away with it. A stand-up comedian, no natter how popular or controversial, doesn't enjoy this priviege. Kunal Kamra learnt it the hard way after he alluded o Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde durng a show in Mumbai. His 'gaddar' (traitor) barb incurred he wrath of Shiv Sena (Shinde) members, who vandalised ot only the Habitat Studio where the show was filmed but also the hotel which housed the studio. The police have booked Kamra on the charge of making defamatory renarks against Shinde, even as Chief Minister Devendra adnavis himself has sought his apology. Sena MP Naresh Mhaske has even warned that the comedian would be chased by party workers throughout the country and forced o flee India.Has Kamra gone too far this time? Not really ince he has taken potshots at the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of India over the years. There is also nothng original about his comment on Shinde. Last month Sena faction leader and ex-CM Uddhav Thackeray had cidly remarked that taking a dip in the Ganga would not vash off Shinde's sin of betraying Maharashtra. Hitting back, the Deputy CM said he had attended the Maha Kumbh to wash off the sins of those who had dumped bena founder Bal Thackeray's ideology. Their verbal duel has been going on since June 2022, when Shinde triggered the collapse of the Uddhav-led government, but both aven't bothered to drag each other to court.What's disurbing about the Kamra episode is the violent reaction which shows that the space for political satire is shrinking larmingly in Maharashtra or, for that matter, anywhere in he country. Such brazen intolerance strikes at the heart of freedom of speech and expression, which is guaraneed by the Constitution. It's true that this freedom is subect to 'reasonable restrictions', but the trend of trampling pon an individual's fundamental right at the slightest pre-

#### Lawyers in Manthani Protested by Boycotting **Duties Over the Brutal Murder** of Lawyer Israel in Hyderabad"



"P. S. Ashokan "Indian chronicle "Manthani "25-3-2025 "Lawyers in Manthani boycotted their duties on Tuesday in protest against the brutal murder of lawyer Israel in Hyderabad. Acting on the call of the State Bar Council, lawyers in Manthani gathered to express their condolences for Israel's death and announced their decision to boycott their duties.""They condemned the increasing attacks on lawyers, including murders, and demanded the introduction of a special law for the protection of legal professionals. The Bar Association leaders presented a memorandum to the Manthani Judicial Officer, requesting necessary action for the safety of lawyers.""The protest was attended by several prominent figures, including Bar Association President Haribabu, Vice President Raghoutam Reddy, General Secretary Sahender Reddy, Treasurer Anjaneyulu, and lawyers such as Shashikanth Kache, Ramesh Babu, Bhaskar Reddy, Chandrashekhar, Shashibhushan Kache, Janjarla Shekhar, Arla Nagaraju, Subhash, Srinivas, Venkataram Reddy, and Racharla Rajender, among others.

#### Speaker Prasad Kumar withdraws his comments against Sunitha Laxma Reddy

Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar today said he was withdrawing his comments made against BRS party MLA Sunitha Lakshma Reddy during a debate on the bills in the assembly on Monday. Sunitha Lakshma Reddy mentioned about the comments made by the Speaker against her when the Legislative Assembly met on Tuesday morning. She said when she was speaking in the House on Monday, she was hurt by the comments made by the Speaker. She

made it clear that she did not deviate from the subject and added that she This to inform to the general public at

Speaker said properly. "I have never violated parliamentary traditions. I am hurt by your the CM insulted us in the Adilabad Municipality. past, we stood silently and That, the original link document No. protested and did not be-Speaker Gaddam Prasad handover to undersigned. Kumar said he respects If no objection is received within 7 say this to you. You are waived doing a running commen- Dt: 25-03-2025 tary. Sunitha Lakshma Reddy is an immeasurable honour. If you feel

hurt, I will withdraw my

words," he added. (NSS)

did not hear what the large that, Rathod Santosh S/o Rathod Seetharam R/o H.No.62, Ch. Khanapur, Dist. Adilabad is the owner of Plot No. 938, in Sy.No.72/17, measuring 36'x50'=1800 Sq Fts, situated at Battisawargaon, Mdl & comments. Even when Dist. Adilabad, within the limits of

have inappropriately. I If anyone has any claim, right, title or leave it to your wisdom to interest of any kind in the said modify your comments or property, they may contact the not "she said Reacting undersigned within 7 days of the to the comments of documents of documents. Sunitha Laxma Reddy, one finds the above document kindly

the women a lot. "I have days, and if any claim and objection eight older sisters. I did not arise, it shall be deemed to have been

**Bipin Kumar Patel** Advocate, ADARSH Building, N.H.No.7, Adilabad Cell: 9440005500

#### Everyone with a job card should come to work." MPDivo Peddi Anjaneyu.



Parakala, March 25; (Indian Chronicle)." The Mandala Parishad Development Officer said that everyone with a job card in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should come to work. Everyone who has a job card will be completed on the 31st of this month, stopping the vehicle of the workers coming to the village as part of the new food security cards in the village of Velampalli on TuesdayHe said that the government is for the betterment of any scheme for a family for a hundred days and 30000 / per day. Similarly, 12 thousand rupees will come under the spiritual assurance of working at least 20 days in a hundred days. Everyone who has a job card must take part in the employment guarantee work and advised the wages to take advantage of the opportunity. Panchayat Secretary M Srinivas, Karobar Srinivas and others were present at the

#### Okay the country is financial good with the okay election.

Kumar. "Parakala, March 25; (Indian Chronicle). "Bharatiya Janata Party state leaders Dr Sirangi Santosh Kumar said that the country will do the financial benefit of the country with the same electionBJP state leaders Dr Sirangi Santosh Kumar was the chief guest at the local Bharatiya Janata Party office in the town on Tuesday. Speaking on the occasion, they said that the country would have a lot of financial benefit with the same election policy and that the elections were held repeatedly and the country would be wasted and wasted time. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that it is a matter of pride that the country is working to bring a single election policy to reduce the burdenJamily elections have been interrupted by the elections of the states since the formation of the Indira Gandhi government after the formation of the Indira Gandhi government after the formation of the Jamily elections in the pastCome on. In this situation, the Bharatiya Janata Party is hoping that the country will grow in all sectors if there is only one election without any



difficulty in the country's economic progress. The event was attended by BJP district general secretary, former councilor party RP Jayanti Lal, leaders Rajabhadraya, Chandupatla Rajendra Reddy, former councilor Bejjamki Purna Chari, Satyanarayana, Purushottam, Rambabu,

#### THE GLORIOUS GAYATRI MANTRA

P. S. Ashokan "Indian chronicle" Manthani "25/03/2025

"Gayyatri Mantra is a highly" revered and powerful mantra in Hinduism, embodying profound spiritual significance. Various sages and scriptures have extolled its virtues: ""Veda Vyasa Maharshi: Emphasizes that chanting the Gayatri Mantra is essential before reciting other mantras, likening neglecting it to forsaking a prepared meal. ""Vishwamitra Rishi: Mentions that meditating on Gayatri Devi, visualized as a golden-hued Sun, leads to liberation from the cycles of birth and death.""Devi Bhagavata: Describes Gayatri as the embodiment of liberation, radiating a white brilliance that purifies the intellect.""Kurma Purana: Identifies Gayatri as the Veda Mata (Mother of the Vedas), asserting there's no mantra superior to hers. ""Yajnavalkya Rishi: States that even a novice, by chanting the Gayatri Mantra, attains the status of a learned scholar. "Bhishmacharya: Advises that those who consistently chant the Gayatri Mantra remain untouched by sorrow. ""Atri Maharshi: Highlights that chanting Gayatri 8,000 times near the Sun leads to freedom from all sins.""Laghur Atri Samhita: Recommends that only those who chant Gayatri should be invited for ancestral rites.""Padma Purana: Mentions that devotees of Gayatri are freed from major and minor sins. ""Agni Purana: Assures that a Brahmin who regularly performs Gayatri worship during the three daily Sandhyas remains faultless, regardless of the donations he accepts. "Shankha Smriti: Proclaims that there's no mantra beyond Gayatri for alleviating the torments of hell. "Suta Samhita, Yajna Vaibhava Khanda: Equates the merit of donating food and water to the merit of chanting Gayatri.""Narada Maharshi: Declares that where Gayatri resides, Lord Narayana is present, leaving no room for doubt.""Vashishta Maharshi: Assures that



even an ignorant person, by chanting Gayatri, attains a luminous status akin to the gods. ""Mahatma Gandhi: Observes that daily recitation of Gayatri leads to spiritual elhealing and protection from dangers ""Ad Shankaracharya: Proclaims that the glory of Gayatri transcends human expression, considering it the primordial mantra. ""Given these profound endorsements, it is highly beneficial to engage in Gayatri Upasana (worship) regularly, especially during the auspicious times of dawn and

#### Sridhar Babu fulfills young patient's wish by gifting a cricket kit

Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): "Sir, I love cricket. I dream of becoming a great cricketer. Please get me a cricket kit, sir." These heartfelt words came from a young boy bravely battling cancer. Anyone with a heart would be deeply moved upon hearing them. Minister Sridhar Babu was so touched that he couldn't hold back his tears. Bhouth Nithin, a young cancer patient from Sarvai Peta village in Palimala mandal of Bhupalpally district, is undergoing treatment at Sparsh Hospies in Hyderabad. Upon learning about his condition, Sridhar Babu personally visited the hospital to meet him. He reassured Nithin, offering his unwavering support. Overcome with emotion by Nithin's words, the Minister immediately arranged for a cricket kit, fulfilling the boy's heartfelt wish on the spot. He also assured Nithin's parents that he would stand by them like an elder brother and encouraged them to reach out to him directly for any help they needed. (NSS)



#### SCR Vijayawada Divn commissions record 206.29 Route km of automatic block signalling in FY 2024-25



Vijayawada, March 25 (NSS): In a ground-breaking achievement, the Vijayawada Division of South Central Railway, in collaboration with the Projects Organization Unit of Vijayawada, has successfully commissioned 206.29 Route Kilometers (RKm) of Automatic Block Signalling (ABS) during the financial year 2024-25. This milestone cements the Vijayawada Division's reputation as a pioneer in implementing Automatic Block Signalling systems. On the evening of March 23, 2025, ABS was successfully commissioned

across 29.67 RKm between key sections of Samalkot, Pithapuram, Gollaprolu and Ravikampadu, completing the Division's total ABS commissioning to 206.29 RKm for the fiscal year. This remarkable achievement encompasses an impressive 416.23 Track Kilometer (RKm multiplied by the number of tracks) in the northern section of Vijayawada Division. The implementation of ABS ensures smoother railway operations and significantly reduces congestion along the Vijayawada-Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada-Gudur

#### South Central Railway to tighten security at MMTS

Hyderabad: In the wake of the MMTS assault case, the South Central Railway (SCR) on Tuesday said that is has initiated additional measures to enhance security for passengers, especially women travelling in the city and suburban sections.

#### PhonePe Launches New Vehicle Insurance For Two-Wheelers & Four-Wheelers



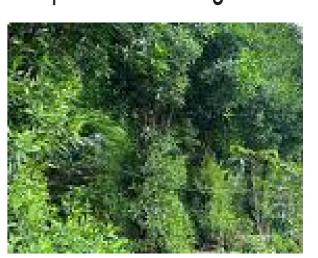
Hyderabad: Phone Pe has announced the launch of its "new vehicle" insurance offering for two-wheelers and fourwheelers. This launch aims to provide cost-effective online alternatives for all new vehicle buyers as compared to conventional dealership insurance plans. With this launch, users can now compare policies from multiple insurers and make the purchase online on the PhonePe app.

Vehicle buyers often face challenges such as inflated premiums, limited choices, biased recommendations with dealership insurance. However, with this launch, PhonePe is collaborating with leading insurers to offer a trusted and competitive insurance experience to users. Key highlights of the plan include: Savings of up to ?4,000 on two-wheeler insurance and up to 40,000 on four-wheeler insurance as compared to dealership pricesLowest price on two-wheeler insurance with Own Damage Cover starting at ?1, only on the PhonePe app100% digital insurance-buying experience with zero paperworkNo large dealer margin and no hidden fees Commenting on the launch, Vishal Gupta, CEO at PhonePe Insurance Broking Services, said, "In our commitment towards making insurance accessible and affordable for everyone, we are pleased to launch our latest "new vehicle" insurance offering for all prospective two-wheeler and four-wheeler owners. This coverage aims to facilitate users in making informed decisions by comparing policy options and pricing via a seamless digital experience. At PhonePe, our goal is to simplify insurance-buying and make the process transparent and hassle-free for users. With this launch, we hope to transform the way consumers purchase insurance for their new vehicles.'

Here's how users can avail this on the PhonePe app:

- 1. First, navigate to the Insurance section on the PhonePe app, and select Car Insurance from the homepage
  - 2. Tap on the Buy New Car widget.
  - 3. Click on Check Plans to explore available options.
  - 4. Enter your vehicle details to proceed.
  - 5. Fill in your RTO details for registration.
  - 6. Browse and compare plans from top insurers.
- 6. Customise your policy by selecting suitable addons and choose the plan that best fits your needs.
  - 7. Tap Buy New Plan for policy issuance.

#### Speaker urges Govt for removal of Conocarpus plants in Telangana



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): A noteworthy discussion unfolded in the Assembly on Tuesday between BRS MLA Vemula Prashanth Reddy and Assembly Speaker

During this conversation, Prashanth Reddy emphasized the need for the State government to take steps to enhance both forest and tree cover in Telangana. He noted that under the leadership of former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, the BRS government initiated the Telangana ku Haritha Haram program, which is a key initiative aimed at expanding the state's green cover. Over the course of ten years, this program resulted in the planting of approximately 273 crore saplings at a cost of Rs. 10,822 crore. Moreover, nurseries and village forests were set up in every village. Prashanth Reddy highlighted that the Haritha Haram initiative has successfully increased the green cover in Telangana by 7 percent. In response to Prashanth Reddy's comments, Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar acknowledged that during the BRS administration, a total of 273 crore plants were planted, but noted that among them were many ineffective ones. He mentioned a specific plant called Conocarpus, which is drought-resistant and can grow in various conditions. However, this plant absorbs oxygen and emits carbon dioxide, and it does not provide a habitat for birds. According to him, these plants are widespread throughout Telangana, found in villages and along roadsides. He urged the State government to remove these plants from all areas of Telangana. (NSS)

#### **CHANGE OF NAME**

I, SHAMS UL HAQ S/O SYED ISRARUL HAQ (old name) born on 30-06-1954 at Adilabad earlier was Holding Passport No. AA885069 DT: 17-03-2025 hereby changing my Name and henceforth in future I would be known as SYED SHAMSHUL HAQ S/O SYED ISRARUL HAQ (new name) H.No. C-2-2-333 Amabedkarnagar, Adilabad-504001, Telangana State.

DECLARANT. SYED SHAMSHUL HAQ S/O SYED ISRARUL HAQ

PLACE: ADILABAD DATE: 26-03-2025

### SBI employees contribute 37,16,500 for Armed Forces Flag Day Fund



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS):The employees of State Bank of India, LHO Koti have contributed an amount of? 37,16,500/- for Armed Forces Flag Day Fund, Telangana State.

Rajesh Kumar, Chief General Manager, State Bank of India, handed over a cheque of ? 37,16,500/- to Jishnu Dev Varma, Governor of Telangana and Chairman Armed Forces Flag Day Fund in the presence of Colonel Ramesh

Kumar (Retd), Director Sainik Welfare, Telangana State, Jitendra Kumar Sharma, DGM& CDO, SBI, G Ramakrishna, AGM PR & Captain Sanjay Apage (Retd), AGM Security.

Speaking on the occasion, Jishnu Dev Varma appreciated the support extended by the SBI is for a noble cause and this gesture will certainly be an inspiration for other organizations to emulate. The Governor acknowledged the long standing contribution of the Bank continuously for the last 10 Years in support of the Welfare of the Ex-Servicemen and their dependents including Veer Naris.Rajesh Kumar stated that SBI has always been at the forefront when it comes to supporting our soldiers and citizens at large. The Bank has a host of schemes specially designed to cater to the specific needs of the Serving and retired Defence Personnel with special value Add-On schemes such as Accidental Insurance coverage ranging from ?50 lakhs to ?1.00 crore. He said that SBI, LHO Koti is also providing employment to Ex-Servicemen as Security staff in various branches in the state. He assured to looking forward to participate and contribute effectively in various schemes for rehabilitation and resettlement of Ex-Servicemen in future. (NSS)

#### Another body unearthed in SLBC tunnel

Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): Another body of the missing workers was unearthed at the SLBC tunnel close to Domalapenta in the Nagarkurnool district on Tuesday, raising the total number of recovered bodies to two. This body was located roughly 50 meters from the conveyor belt during excavation activities conducted with a mini excavator. The body was identified as Manoj Kumar of Uttar Pradesh. The body has been shifted to Nagarkurnool Government Hospital. The body will be handed over to the family members after the autopsy. District Collector Santosh Kumar said the arrangements will be made to send the body to its native place after the postmortem. He further stated the state government will provide Rs. 25 lakh to the victim's family. Meanwhile, search operations are ongoing, with teams concentrating on finding six additional missing workers. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has also asked Chief



Secretary Santhi Kumari to designate senior IAS officer Shiva Sankar Loteti to closely oversee the rescue operations and to take immediate action in this regard. (NSS)

### Abandoned vehicles to be auctioned at Moinabad PS

Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): The Cyberabad Police have accumulated 357 Abandoned / Unclaimed vehicles of various types and makes which are pooled at Moinabad PS grounds, Cyberabad Commissionerate. It is proposed to dispose of these vehicles by way of Online/Open Public Auction as empowered u/s 6(2), 7 of Cyberabad (Metropolitan area) Police Act 2004 r/w Sec. 39, 40&41 of Hyderabad City Police Act. If any persons are having any objection of Ownership holder/Hypothecation interest are any of these vehicles may file an application before the Commissioner of Police, Cyberabad Commissionerate and claim their vehicles within six months from the date of notification, failing which the abandoned / unclaimed vehicles will be conducted in open public auction.

The particulars of vehicles are available at Moinabad Police Station Ground under control of N. Veeralingam,



MTO-II, Reserve Inspector cell no.9490617317 and on the official website of Cyberabad police www.cyberabadpolice.gov.in. (NSS)

### Lawyers attempt to block assembly, demand job security



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): There was a tense atmosphere at the Assembly during the Telangana Legislative Assembly session in the city. Lawyers tried to block-

ade the Assembly demanding job security for them. Protesting the murder of Advocate Israel, the lawyers, under the leadership of Telangana Advocates JAC, tried to blockade the Assembly. Speaking on the occasion, they demanded that a special law be brought for the protection of the lawyers. They went towards the Assembly demanding that a law be made to provide job security immediately. The police stopped the lawyers. This led to a scuffle between the two groups and tension arose. Later, the police detained the protesting lawyers and took them out of the Assembly premises

Meanwhile, Advocate Israel was murdered in New Maruti Nagar from Santoshnagar area on Monday. Advocate Israel had filed a complaint against a man named Dastagiri, an electrician, for harassing a woman. With this, Dastagiri, who had become envious of the lawyer, attacked Israel with a knife. Israel died while undergoing treatment at Apollo Hospital. (NSS)

#### SBI STAFF CONTRIBUTE Rs. 37.16 LAKH TO ARMED FORCES FLAG DAY FUND

Employees of State Bank of India (SBI), Hyderabad Circle, showcased their unwavering commitment to social responsibility by contributing Rs. 37.16 lakh to the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund, Telangana. Shri Rajesh Kumar, Chief General Manager of SBI, Hyderabad Circle, presented a cheque worth Rs. 37,16,500 to the Honorable Governor of Telangana, Shri Jishnu Dev Varma, who is also the Chairperson of the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund. The handover took place in the presence of Shri Col Ramesh Kumar, Director of Sainik Welfare (Telangana); Shri Jitendra Kumar Sharma, DGM & CDO; and Shri Captain Sanjay Apage,

Honorable Governor Shri Jishnu Dev Varma Expressed his gratitude and commended the noble gesture by SBI staff. He noted that such contributions set a benchmark for other organizations and citizens to follow. He lauded SBI's continued support for the welfare of war veterans, ex-servicemen, war widows, and their families. Shri Rajesh Kumar said that SBI and its employees, strongly believe in giving back to society and contributing to the nation's progress. He said that SBI has been consistently supporting the Flag Day Fund for years, reaffirming its commitment to the welfare of war veterans, their families, and the children of war widows. SBI Hyderabad Circle has undertaken several notable initiatives in the State, to support the armed forces and enhance the facilities in defense establishments. Shri Rajesh Kumar, Chief General Manager of SBI Hyderabad Circle, informed the Honorable Governor that SBI is ranked as the 4th most trusted bank in the world, a testament to the trust every Indian reposes in it. He also emphasized that Hyderabad circle is home to 1204 SBI

branches, reflecting the bank's extensive reach and com-



mitment to serving the community. Also, CGM assured the Governor of the continued support to the welfare of the war veterans and their family members. Today's gesture highlights SBI's ethos of community service and solidarity with those who have served the nation.

Yours faithfully, (G Ramakrishna)

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

### NIMS urologists join India's elite with a historic first public hospital robotic kidney transplant in South India



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS):In a groundbreaking achievement, urologists at Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) have successfully performed the Institute's first-ever robotic kidney transplant, marking a significant milestone in public healthcare. The rare feat positions NIMS among the elite group of the few hospitals in India to adopt robotic-assisted surgery for renal transplantation.

The recipient, a 33-year-old man from Nalgonda, had been battling end-stage renal disease for nearly a decade. After undergoing a live-related kidney transplant in 2017, he later suffered chronic rejection, necessitating a second transplant. This time, he received a cadaveric kidney, making the surgery particularly complex due to previous surgery. Despite the challenges, the surgery was carried out without any complications, and the newly transplanted kidney functioned immediately, producing good urine output as soon as it was connected, signalling a successful graft and a smooth recovery. Known for its high-volume transplant program, the dept of Urology and renal transplantation in NIMS has now conducted 41 renal transplants in 2025 alone in 2.5 months, bringing its total count close to 2,000. This is in addition to around 11,000 other urological surgeries that are performed annually. The introduction of robotic technology is expected to further enhance surgical precision, reduce recovery time, and improve patient out-

Professor Dr Rahul Devraj, institute's lead Urologist and transplant surgeon, described the robotic transplant as a "landmark achievement", adding that it was the first of its kind in a government hospital in South India. The pioneering procedure was led by Professor Dr Rahul Devraj, along with Senior Professor and HOD Dr Ram Reddy and Assistant Professor Dr Dheeraj SSS, who were instrumental in

executing the complex surgery. They were supported by a highly skilled team of urologists, including Dr. Vidyasagar, Dr. Charan Kumar, Dr. Ramachandraiah, Dr. Raghuveer, Dr. Poovarasan, Dr. Suraj Kumar, Dr. Shahrukh, Dr. Anant, Dr. Abhishek, Dr. Anupama, Dr. Rakesh, Dr. Madhusudhan, Dr. Nishant, Dr. Srujan, Dr. Tagore, and Dr. Veda Prakash, each playing a crucial role in ensuring the surgery's success. The anesthesia team, led by Dr. Nirmala, along with Dr. Indira, Dr. Kiran, Dr. Abhiruchi, Dr. Pavani, Dr. Nithesh, and Dr. Anusha, ensured the patient's stability throughout the procedure. Nursing officers Vasantha, Suneetha, Shainy, Sheebha, Aruna and Ganesh, along with OT staff Laxman, Sai and their team, provided essential intraoperative support, ensuring a smooth transplant. Nephrologists Dr. Gangadhar, Dr. Sree Bhushan Raju, and Dr. Swarnalatha provided essential support for pre and postoperative care of the patient.

Robotic-assisted kidney transplantation is transforming organ transplant surgery, offering unmatched precision, smaller incisions, minimal postoperative pain, and faster recovery. With this groundbreaking procedure, the NIMS Urology team reaffirms its status as a trailblazer in medical innovation, setting new standards for public healthcare institutions. By successfully performing advanced urological procedures and tackling complex renal transplant surgeries, NIMS Urologists continue to push the boundaries of excellence in patient care and surgical expertise. The historic surgery is not just a technological triumph, but a testament to NIMS' commitment to providing world-class medical care, making advanced treatment accessible to all.

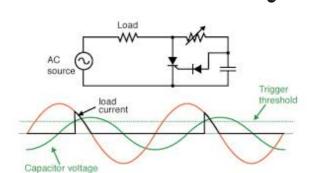
NIMS Director Dr. Beerappa congratulated the urology team for achieving this rare feat, recognizing their dedication and expertise in successfully performing the institute's first robotic kidney transplant. Professor Dr. Rahul Devraj, along with the urology team, expressed their gratitude towards Damodar Raja Narasimha, Honourable Health Minister, Government of Telangana, and NIMS director Dr. Beerappa, for their unwavering support in bringing the latest medical technology to NIMS Hospital, ensuring that cutting-edge healthcare remains accessible to all patients. The procedure was performed free of cost under the Telangana Aarogyasri Health Scheme. Additionally, the patient will benefit from free access to immunosuppressive drugs, essential for long-term graft survival, further easing the financial burden of post-transplant care. (NSS)

### SCR initiates more measures to enhance security

Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): South Central Railway initiated additional measures towards enhancing Security to the passengers travelling in the city and suburban sections. SCR GM Arun Kumar Jain, conducted a review meeting with officials and issued instructions on enhancement of security to passengers. He advised the officials to implement all the measures without any compromise. It has been decided to deploy more female Railway Protection Force (RPF) & Government Railway Police (GRP) staff on trains, especially in ladies' compartments & MMTS trains, ensure regular patrolling by RPF & GRP personnel on MMTS trains, especially during late-night and early-morning hours.

It is also decided to display emergency numbers in all the ladies & 39 coaches including MMTS trains and at conspicuous places. To launch awareness campaigns by regular announcements through Public Address System in railway stations, display of posters in railway premises and sharing of relevant information on digital platforms to educate passengers about safety measures, helpline numbers, and how to report suspicious behaviour. Decision is also taken to strengthen coordination between RPF and GRP personnel, forming joint task forces for immediate response and investigation of crimes against women.

Meri Saheli Teams have been instructed to move in MMTS trains and to conduct a thorough analysis of security vulnerabilities affecting female passengers, with a specific focus on high-risk routes along with MMTS sections. Mandatory checking and escorting of vulnerable trains/sections by all Station Officers, deployment of officers in plainclothes in random trains based on complaints and crime



history will be implemented. It is also decided to conduct frequent drives under the Railway Act to check and remove drunken passengers and males travelling in female coaches. Future plans to enhance women's security: Install CCTV cameras in all compartments, with real-time monitoring by RPF/GRP personnel. Install display screens inside trains to communicate safety messages and important security information for passengers. Equip every ladies' coach with easily accessible panic buttons linked to a control room and the train guard. Explore to integrate the existing security helpline 139 with a mobile app featuring a one-tap SOS option. WhatsApp groups managed by female RPF personnel to address women commuters' grievances and emergencies immediately. Feedback from women passengers to address their concerns during their travel. To issue breath analyzers to RPF personnel for conducting on-the-spot tests and ensuring the removal of intoxicated

### Govt sanctions engineering, law college to Satavahana University



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): The State government has approved the establishment of an engineering college and a law college at Satavahana University, issuing two distinct government orders to this effect. Both institutions are set to begin operations in the academic year 2025-26. The engineering college will be located in Husnabad, while the law college will be situated on the Satavahana University campus. The engineering college will offer four B.Tech programs: Computer Science and Engineering, CSE (Artificial Intelligence), Information Technology, and Electronics and Communications Engineering, with an enrollment capacity of 60 students for each program. A budget of Rs.44.12 crore has been allocated for the construction and other related expenses of the colleges. The three-year LLB program will commence with two sections, each accommodating 60 students, while the LLM specialising in intellectual property law will have one section with an enrollment of 20 students. A budget of Rs 22.96 crore has been allocated for the establishment of the law college. Minister for BC Welfare, Ponnam Prabhakar, has expressed his satisfaction regarding the approval of both an engineering college and a law college at Satavahana University. He extended his gratitude to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, and other officials for their proactive efforts in facilitating this decision. Minister Ponnam Prabhakar, along with Congress MLAs from the former Karimnagar district, honoured Deputy Chief Minister Batti Vikramarka on the Assembly premises. They conveyed their appreciation for the directives that have led to the establishment of an engineering college in Husnabad and a law college in Karimnagar under Satavahana University (NSS)

### Female pvt employee cheated by scamster



Hyderabad, March 25 (NSS): A 53-year-old female private employee from Hyderabad received a call from 8135967194, with the caller claiming to be an electricity department official. The caller stated that due to non-payment of electricity bills, the victim's power connection would be disconnected by the evening. To resolve the issue, the scammer instructed the victim to download an app and make a payment of Rs 5/-. The victim, who was busy with work at the time, followed the caller's instructions without suspicion and shared her credit and debit card details. Sometime later, she received a WhatsApp message stating that both her cards had been blocked. Realizing something was wrong; she checked her phone and discovered that it had been hacked by the scammer. He had gained control over her calls, SMS, WhatsApp, and other phone activities. Simultaneously, fraudulent transactions were made using both her credit and debit cards, leading to a total financial loss of Rs 1,05,187/-. When the victim attempted to contact the cyber police, she was unable to generate OTPs on her phone. Since both her phone and banking details had been compromised, she was unable to track the transactions or take immediate action. (NSS)

#### Delhi govt launches online portal to keep a tab on sex determination of foetus



GNS News Agency, March 25

Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh on Friday launched the PC & PNDT Online Portal, which enables government to effectively monitor the misuse of ultrasound technology for sex determination and prevent female foeticides. While hailing the department officials for the digital initiative, the health minister raised concerns about the gender determination prevailing in the country. "The issue of sex determination is deep rooted in our society. Delhi, being the capital of India, must lead by example in its exemplary efforts in eliminating sex determination. I am confident that this initiative will further improve Delhi's sex ratio and strengthen our efforts to end gender-based discrimination. Additionally, I have instructed officials to ensure strict action on any complaint received through the

portal while setting accountability of the concerned officials," said Dr Pankaj Kumar Singh.

The portal for Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Technique (PC & PNDT) will replace manual processes regarding registrations, permits, other legal documents and complaint filing regarding sex determination of foetus. Minister Singh emphasized the importance of the initiative in improving Delhi's current female-male sex ratio of 922:1000.

Singh said that 627 inspections were conducted in 2024-25 alone leading to 70 show-cause notices, 13 suspensions, 53 cancellations, and sealing of 22 ultrasound machines in Delhi. Additionally, legal proceedings and decoy operations have been carried out to curb unlawful activities. The portal (https://pcpndt.delhi.gov.in/) will provide essential services, including automated Form F submission for ultrasound clinics, an online complaint registration system for the public and enforcement actions, and realtime updates on compliance status. These features will significantly enhance the government's ability to monitor and regulate diagnostic centers effectively. The Delhi government has also intensified Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns, including billboard advertisements, newspaper outreach, and community awareness programmes under 'Beti Utsav', to promote the importance of the girl child in the society, health department officials

## Safai workers' wages, pending RCs, CM's 'dream project', fund delay: AAP MLAs put own govt in dock

GNS News Agency, March 25

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) legislators Friday cornered their own government on the floor of the House with questions from their Assembly constituencies during the Question Hour on the first day of the Budget Session.AAP MLA from Mohali Kulwant Singh asked Labour Minister Tarunpreet Singh Sond whether there is any proposal under consideration of the government to increase the minimum wages of the safai workers in view of the continuously rising inflation. Kulwant Singh also complained that the answer to his starred question was received by him just an hour before the session. "It becomes difficult for a member to prepare his supplementary questions when the answer is received at the last minute," he said.

He told the minister that safai workers were the least paid, got a raise of Rs 10-20 while as per various surveys they had shortest lives of all other employees. He said they barely live up to retirement age of 58.To this Sond said a proposal to increase the minimum wages in Punjab is under consideration. He explained that minimum wages are increased in two ways. "One way is that the adjustment of minimum wages is done twice a year on March 1 and September 1, according to the increase or decrease in the consumer price index (CPI).

Accordingly, the last increment/revision was on September 1, 2024 and the next increment/revision will be from March 1, 2025, which will be done in a few days," the minister added. He further said that the other way is to increase the base rate of minimum wages. He expressed optimism this increase would take place within this year, making 2025 the new base year for minimum wages. He further highlighted that the last revision of the base rate was carried out in 2012, and now, with 2025 as the future base year, the minimum wages will be revised accordingly. Sond informed the House that the Punjab Labour Department had adjusted minimum wages for factory workers in the state from September 1, 2024, based on the CPI. As per the revised wages, unskilled workers' wages were fixed at Rs 10,996 per month, semi-skilled workers' Rs 11,776 per month, skilled workers' Rs 12,673 per month and highly skilled workers' Rs 13,705 per month. Naresh Kataria, also an AAP MLA, raised the issue of delay in building a bypass in Makhu. To this, PWD Minister Harbhajan Singh said that the project would start once the MLA goes back to his constituency after the Budget session is over. However, the minister's reply got a comment from the MLA, who said, "Speaker Sahib, the money has not been released yet. How will the project start



Another MLA, Gurdit Singh asked the Transport Minister about the number of cases of registration of new vehicles and transfer of old vehicles pending in Faridkot. To this the minister said 636 RCs were pending, old registration transfer pendency was 871, new driving license pendency was 451, and renewal of old license pendency was 357. The issue has been hogging headlines as Punjab's Transport department was not able to prepare RCs and DLs of residents for want of printing. Hardeep Singh Dimpy Dhillon, another AAP MLA asked Water Resources Minister Barinder Kumar to correct his data about the width of the drains in the constituency. The minister defended saying that the drains would be cleaned with state's own machines. Sarvjit Kaur Manuke, another AAP MLA also asked Transport Minister Laljit Singh Bhullar to accompany her to Jagraon bus station where 80 per cent buses were stopping outside the station under the flyover. Bhullar told her that they were taking action and he had spoken to the general manager. She asked him, "You get the general manager and come with me to Jagraon. I will show you what is happening there." Devinderjeet Singh Laddi Dhose questioned as to when Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's dream project to providing canal water to all villages would be completed. He said in his constituency only 15 per cent drains were cleared. To this Barinder Singh Goyal said the government is rationalising canal water distribution to ensure that water reaches tail-end areas. He said the government has increased water allowance (canal water allocation per thousand acres) by 50 per cent from two cusecs to three cusecs in many districts to ensure that areas with higher groundwater extraction receive canal water on a priority. The minister said water allowance in many districts is six to eight cusecs, while in districts like Sangrur, Barnala, Patiala and Mansa, it is only two cusecs. As a result, the groundwater is being extracted in larger quantities in these

# After Mamata tasks Abhishek & Bakshi to hold TMC fort during her UK trip, 'Captain Abhishek' posters crop up across Kolkata

GNS News Agency, March 25

A day after Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo Mamata Banerjee announced that during her seven-day trip to the United Kingdom, "the party (TMC) affairs will be looked after by Subrata Bakshi and Abhishek Banerjee", a large number of yellow posters and flags, displaying text "Odhinayak Abhishek (Captain Abhishek)", were seen in numerous places in Kolkata on Friday morning.CM Banerjee on Thursday said that a five-member task force comprising ministers and top-level officers would oversee the state's daily affairs while she is away from the country. According to TMC leaders, the 'growing differences' between Mamata Banerjee and her nephew and party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee seems to have "narrowed" after a few months, prompting her to entrust him with responsibility as the party's second-in-command during her absence.

"Those who are close to Abhishek Banerjee, particularly the youth wing of the party think, it's a comeback of sorts for Abhishek Banerjee and he was again given his "captain" post. So, they are celebrating with such posters," said a senior TMC leader. After putting up a good show in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the TMC faced a major challenge in the wake of the RG Kar rape and murder case and the widespread public protests. There were also instances when Abhishek Banerjee took a different stance from that of the West Bengal administration on some issues. This led to speculation that were was 'growing distance' between Mamata and Abhishek Banerjee. Amid the widening rift between the old and new guard within the ruling party in the state, Mamata in December last year hinted that she remains the final authority in the administrative as well as organisational affairs in the TMC dispensation. In the recently concluded winter session of the state Assembly, Mamata Banerjee held a meeting with the TMC MLAs where, sources said, she clarified: "Aami doler chairperson, aami shesh katha (I'm the party chairperson, I'm the last word)."In another move, without naming Abhishek and political consultancy firm I-PAC, CM Mamata told her party legisla-



tors: "Someone from an organisation may call you, ask about your constituency but there is no need for you to give information - whatever you want to share, give it to me."IPAC is the political consultancy firm employed by TMC in the 2021 Assembly polls and later. Last year on November 25 TMC national executive committee meeting was held at Mamata's residence in Kolkata's Kalighat, following which her loyalists were elevated. The party supremo inducted veteran party leaders - including MPs Kalyan Banerjee, Mala Roy, Sougata Roy; Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee; and ministers Manas Bhuiyan, Firhad Hakim and Javed Khan – as members of TMC Working Committee.Mamata Banerjee had appointed Abhishek as one of the national spokespersons for the TMC, while also clarifying that senior leaders such as Sudip Banerjee, Kalyan Banerjee, and Derek O'Brien will be responsible for making decisions related to the party's parliamentary affairs. However, the bond between Mamata and Abhishek has improved significantly since last month after the CM held a one hour meeting with I-PAC head Pratik Jain at Nabanna. Following the meeting, she addressed an organizational meeting on February 27, where Abhishek also spoke, emphasising their united front against BJP in the 2026 Assembly Election. Abhishek also recently held a separate virtual meeting to address the "fake voter card" issue, where he provided instructions to party leaders.

### Mohali admn destroys 40 kilos of rotten food in crackdown on unhygienic street vendors



GNS News Agency, March 25

In a crackdown on food vendors using rotten and substandard ingredients, the Food Safety Teams of Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar district have taken 15 samples and issued five challans over the past three days, Deputy Commissioner Komal Mittal said. Providing details, she stated that after authorities discovered rotten vegetables and unsanitary conditions in the kitchens of vendors selling Chinese fast food in the Mataur area, the Food Safety Teams were directed to intensify inspections and take strict action against such vendors. During these inspections, approximately 40 kg of rotten vegetables, stale noodles, and substandard sauces were destroyed to prevent their consumption. Ad-

ditionally, the Food Safety Teams have been instructed to monitor the transportation of chicken, milk, and other food items through random checkpoints.

Deputy Commissioner Mittal warned that anyone found preparing food in filthy or unhygienic conditions using substandard or rotten ingredients would face strict legal action. District Health Officer Dr. Amrit Warring, sharing details of the recent inspections, said that in Kharar, the team visited four eateries and collected four samples. Similarly, in Mataur, three samples of momos and other food items were taken, and two vendors were penalized for poor hygiene. In Zirakpur, three samples were collected from eateries during nighttime inspections, alongside checks on vehicles transporting chicken into the city. On Friday, three more samples of momos and spring rolls were taken from Kurali, while two food vendors were fined for operating in unhygienic conditions.

Additionally, seven kilograms of rotten vegetables and five kilograms of stale noodles were seized and destroyed on the spot. Appealing to the public, Dr. Warring urged consumers to be vigilant about food quality when purchasing from roadside vendors or eateries. He emphasized that vendors must follow strict hygiene and sanitation protocols in their kitchens. Inspections will continue regularly to ensure compliance and protect public health.

### Meerut police to take woman, friend to hotels in Shimla & Manali where they stayed

GNS News Agency, March 25

Officials said it will help them "build evidence" against Muksan and Sahil, also 26, who are in judicial custody after their arrest on March 18. The police will soon seek their remand from court, it is learnt. (File Image)Officials said it will help them "build evidence" against Muksan and Sahil, also 26, who are in judicial custody after their arrest on March 18. The police will soon seek their remand from court, it is learnt. Muskan Rajput (26) and her friend Sahil Shukla, who were arrested for allegedly killing her husband Saurabh Rajput in Meerut on March 3 and disposing his dismembered body in a drum, will be taken to the hotels in Shimla and Manali where they stayed after the murder, police said on Friday.

Officials said it will help them "build evidence" against Muksan and Sahil, also 26, who are in judicial custody after their arrest on March 18. The police will soon seek their remand from court, it is learnt. The two are likely to have got married at a temple in Shimla, the police said. Saurabh (29), a former merchant navy official who had been working in the UK for some years, was killed at the couple's rented house in Brahmpuri locality of Meerut city. "A police team will take the two to these places to collect more evidence so that the chargesheet in the case could be filed early," said Meerut Superintendent of Police (SP) Ayush Vikram Singh. "The duo had planned the murder in advance and were waiting for the right moment to execute their plan. After killing Saurabh, the two hired a taxi for Himachal Pradesh at Rs 54,000 and booked hotel rooms at Shimla and Manali, said the SP. "They dumped 15 body parts in a drum filled with liquid cement so as to stop the foul smell of rotting flesh from coming out once it solidified. They left for Himachal after locking the house on March 5, leaving her six -year-old daughter at her mother's house in the same locality," SP Singh added. Also, Muskan took Saurabh's mobile to Himachal Pradesh and kept posting her photographs on his Instagram account so that no one suspected foul play, the police said. "She posted her solo photographs but their family members believed that the couple was together," said the SP. Saurabh's mother Renu Rajput told the police that a year before getting married in 2016, Muskan porters



and Saurabh eloped twice to put pressure on the two fami lies for their marriage. "Muskan's family had even lodged a complaint of kidnapping against my son at the Brahmpuri police station. They were traced to New Delhi and were handed over to the families. But later, both families agreed for their marriage."Speaking to mediapersons in Meerut, Muskaan's mother Kavita Rastogi said, "Saurabh loved her a lot but I do not know what went wrong later. My daughter and her lover should be hanged for this heinous crime. We will raise Muskan's daughter."It was Kavita Rastogi who took Muskan to the police station on Tuesday, where she confessed to her crime, it is learnt. In her confession, Muskan said that she laced Saurabh's food on the night of March 3 with intoxicants following which he fell unconscious. Then the two stabbed him to death and cut his body into 15 pieces. Saurabh's elder brother Rahul Kumar, who filed the FIR on Tuesday evening, said, "He was working in merchant navy at the time of his marriage but quit that job in 2019. Then he got employed at a mall in London as a sales manager. Soon after their marriage, Muskan put pressure on Saurabh for living separately from his family and they rented a house. Their daughter was born in 2019. Saurabh flew from London on February 24 to celebrate his daughter's birthday on February 28." She was seeking divorce but my son refused since their daughter is small. They had been fighting frequently on the issue but we did not even imagine that she would go to such an extent," Renu Rajput told re-

#### Bengal BJP faces first test: Who will be its new state chief



GNS News Agency, March 25

According to party leaders, a host of names are doing the rounds - from current BJP president Sukanta Majumdar and Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari to former state BJP president Dilip Ghosh. Significantly, speculation began when the West Bengal unit of the BJP released a list of 25 organisational district presidents — including 17 new faces last Friday, when party insiders had said that the names of the state BJP president and the remaining 18 district presidents will be announced soon. With a year to go before next assembly polls, there have been hectic parleys not only within the state BJP unit but also with the national leadership as leaders make a beeline for Delhi. This comes at a time when there are reports of infighting and factionalism within the state BJP unit. Among the major contenders is Majumdar, who was appointed to the position in 2021 months after the assembly polls that year. According to a senior party leader who backs him, Majumdar has strong ties with the BJP's ideological mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. In the case of our state president, liaising with the RSS is very important and in that aspect, Majumdar is very strong," he said. But there's also a section backing Suvendu Adhikari, a former Trinamool Congress leader who joined the BJP in December 2020. In 2021, Adhikari, formerly a close aide of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and a minister in her Cabinet, defeated her in the Nandigram Assembly seat by 1,956 votes.

Adhikari "has become our main face after the 2021 Assembly elections", a senior leader said, adding that the state would then have "one centre of command". "So, many leaders think he should be the state president," he said. But there is a section of leaders that backs leaders such as MLA Agnimitra Paul, former MP Locket Chatterjee, and former Union Minister Debasree Chaudhuri as the "woman faces of the party", sources said. A senior leader also hinted at a name that "could not be guessed" which is also in the fray, describing the candidate as a "young leader who joined

the party just before the 2021 Assembly elections, but he is

very close to the Sangh". Among other prominent names, according to sources, is that of Dilip Ghosh, a former MP and ex-national vice-president of BJP who was state president during the 2021 assembly polls, when the party won 77 seats from the three seats in the 2016 polls. "I have been president twice", he said, outside the Assembly, where he was flanked by Adhikari and other party MLAs. The new president "would be elected democratically", he went on to say, before he added cryptically: "A player should be prepared to play on every pitch

## Class X exams officials axed as question paper circulated on WhatsApp



GNS News Agency, March 25

Hyderabad: An examination centre chief superintendent and department officer were suspended, and an invigilator was relieved in the Nalgonda district as the Class X question paper was circulated on WhatsApp on Friday the first day of the SSC Public Exams.

According to a senior official, the question paper was photographed and circulated on WhatsApp during the final stage of the examination. "With new security measures – QR code and security number – in place on the question paper, we could easily identify the centre from where the paper was sent out via WhatsApp. We identified the student and officials concerned. A malpractice case is booked and criminal action will be taken," the senior official said. School Education director EV Narasimha Reddy said some photographs of the question paper were circulated on WhatsApp in a deliberate attempt to vitiate the smooth examination atmosphere, creating confusion among students and parents.

Ranga Reddy WEDNESDAY26 MARCH 2025

### 2 farmers' protests, both over a year long: How this agitation was different from the one in 2020-21



GNS News Agency, March 25

From February 13, 2024 to March 20, 2025 — for 400 days — farmers under the banner of Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha non-political staged a sit-in protest (dharna) at the Shambhu border beyween Punjab and Haryana. The dharna was then cleared up in a quick operation by the Punjab police. This was a far cry from the previous farm protest of 2020-21, in which farmers, camping at Delhi's borders, had made the Central government give in to their demands of repealing three new agriculture laws. What were the similarities and differences between Kisan Aandolan 1.0 and Kisan Aandolan 2.0? Why was one successful and popular, and the other not? We explain. When, where and who staged Kisan Aandolan 1 and Kisan Aandolan 2.0?

Kisan Aandolan 1 was staged at Singhu, Tikri and Kundli borders of Harvana-Delhi from November 26, 2020-December 9, 2021. The total duration of the protest was 380 days, and the main demand was repealing of three farm laws. Finally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the repeal on November 19, 2021, but the dharna was lifted on December 9, 2021, when the government agreed to the main demand in writing and also gave an assurance about other demands, including a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP, or the rate at which the government buys certain cropsOver 750 farmers had died during the year-long protest. The farmers were largely from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttrakhand, and Rajasthan. This protest was held under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha, a flagship organisation of over 500 farmer unions across the country, with the support of trade unions. Farmers had lifted this dharna on their own and they had come home celebrating.

Kisan Aandolan 2.0, however, was led by Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) and SKM non-political. It was at the Shambhu and Khanauri borders on NH-44 and NH-52 between Punjab and Haryana. The main demand was seeking MSP as a legal guarantee, along with 11 other demands.

The SKM was not part of this protest, though they extended support.SKM non-political is an offshoot of SKM led by Jagjit Singh Dallewal while KMM is largely led by Punjab-based organisation Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC). KMSC was not part of SKM even in Kisan Aandolan-1, though they had organised a dharna at Kundli border in 2020-21. Nearly 45 farmers died during this 400day protest at both locations. Here, farmers were evicted from the dharna sites forcefully, thus resulting in loss of their belongings, as the temporary structures were demolished using cranes and tractors were lifted using lifting machines. Public supportThe 2020-21 farmers protest had a wide public support. Punjab's industry had even contributed funds for the protest, while shopkeepers had donated trucks loaded with garments, dry ration and various other things. Doctors, lawyers, etc. too had supported the cause. However, this time, farmer unions were not getting this support from the masses. Urban people were largely objecting to the closure of highways and the industry was angry with the AAP government for taking no action to lift

Punjab Pradesh Beopar Mandal had even called kisan unions a parallel government, and demands were raised for stringent laws to ban protests that block highways. Also, in the previous aandolan, AAP leaders had extended wide support to the protests. But this time, a protest against the Centre was hurting Punjab's economy, and also damaging the AAP government. Multiple rounds of talks between the government and the farmers had failed. Dilli Chalo was the call given in both the protests. And in both protests, farmers had sought a place to protest in Delhi, which was not given to them. The only difference was that this time, they kept on protesting within the jurisdiction of Punjab, and hence hurting Punjab's economy alone. The inner roads of villages close to Shambhu and Khanauri borders have been damaged. Many dhabhas, petrol pumps were running out of business in Punjab due to this protest. "Going to Delhi was almost like going to a separate country," said Upkar Singh, president of Chamber of Industrial and Commercial Undertakings. Farmers had followed an aggressive mode of protest this time, and as a result, tear gas shelling was used on them by Haryana security forces multiple times, injuring over 450 farmers in February last year in which one died and six lost their eyesight. In December last year as well, over 100 were injured in tear gas shelling by Haryana security forces when attempts were made to march ahead. Jagjit Singh Dallewal, convenor of SKM non-political, has been on a hunger strike from November 26 last year. Most leaders of KMM and SKM non-political have been arrested by the Punjab police. The union leaders who have been spared have stated their struggle will continue

### SKM, BKU (Ugrahan) decline AAP govt's dialogue offer: 'No congenial atmosphere'

GNS News Agency, March 25

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and Bharti Kisan Union (Ugrahan) Friday declined to participate in a meeting called by the Punjab government saying how can they engage in dialogue with the state dispensation when "our brethren are under arrest". The two farmer organisations also slammed the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in state for crackdown on farmers and evicting them from the protest sites at Shambhu and Khanauri border points with Haryana. The Punjab government had invited the SKM and BKU (Ugrahan) for a meeting with Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khuddian. The invitation came ahead of the SKM's call for a march to the Punjab Vidhan Sabha on March 26. It also came a day after the government crackdown on farmers wherein several union leaders were detained and arrested.

While Joginder Singh Ugrahan, the chief of BKU (Ugrahan) announced his decision to not attend the meeting in the morning, SKM leaders held a meeting in Chandigarh and later announced their decision to boycott it. Khuddian said that he had received a message that the farmer leaders would not be attending the meeting. "They have told us that they are not coming. We will send them an invite again. We will take them into confidence again. Dialogue should not end. I am a sewadar of the farmers. I will keep inviting them. All issues will be sorted via dialogue."SKM leader Harinder Singh Lakhowal, meanwhile, said that the environment for the meeting was not congenial."For holding a meeting, you need to have a congenial atmosphere. How can we hold a meeting with the government when our brethren, our elderly and woman members are under arrest. Our tractors and trolleys have been dumped in the agriculture fields. We have told the government that we are boycotting the meeting to protest against the oppression and excesses on farming community," said Lakhowal. The meeting was attended by farmer leaders Darshan Pal, Harmit Singh Kadian, Raminder Singh Patiala, Ruldu Singh Mansa and Jangveer Singh Chauhan. He said the SKM's proposed march to the Vidhan Sabha on March 26 has been called off. Instead, on March 28, SKM will stage protests outside all district headquarters from 11 am to 3 pm to oppose the action taken against protesting farmers. Asked id SKM leaders were fearing arrest, Lakhowal said, "We are not scared. We are boycotting the meeting to give them a message that they cannot gets leaders of an outfit arrested after calling them for a meeting. We are not running away from the meeting. We will talk only



when the environment is peaceful". The BKU (Ugrahan) said while it favours dialogues to resolve any issue, "the question arises whether having the meeting under these circumstances (detention of farmers) is right"."What is the guarantee that those invited for the talks will not be arrested later," Ugrahan asked in a video message. Ugrahan also said that they would not attend the meeting unless Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann would be a part of it. "CM had walked out of the last meeting midway. Now, he has to come back for the meeting and start from where he had left," said Ugrahan. He added, "It does not make any sense to hold a meeting when the trolleys and tractors have been dumped in the fields. We do not know how many farmers have been arrested yet. CM had said it is our democratic right to protest. The government should give us space. We will go and sit there. The government should first release all those farmers leaders who have been arrested," said Ugrahan. The SKM and the BKU (Ugrahan) were not part of the protests at the Shambhu and Khanauri that was led by SKM (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) since February last year before the Punjab Police cleared the two sites on Wednesday.

The SKM, which had led the 2020 agitation against the now-repealed three farm laws, is demanding implementation of the state's agricultural policy, purchase of six crops at MSP by the state government, a legal framework for debt relief after coordinating with the Centre, ownership rights of land tillers and payment of sugarcane arrears. It is also pressing to stop the "forcible" acquisition of land for the Bharatmala projects, jobs, compensation for kin of farmers who lost lives during the farmers' stir in 2020-21, revoke the policy of installing prepaid electricity meters, resolve the issue of stray animals and curbing black marketing of fertilisers and spurious seeds.

### Can Mohali maintain its cleanliness ranking without a dumping ground?

GNS News Agency, March 25

The Swachhata Survey has officially commenced across the country, with assessment teams actively inspecting Mohali for the past week. Last year, the Mohali Municipal Corporation secured the top position in Punjab and ranked 82nd nationwide. However, maintaining or improving this ranking appears uncertain, primarily due to the closure of the city's dumping ground for nearly a year.

Previously, the Mohali Municipal Corporation disposed of approximately 200 tons of waste daily at its local dumping ground. However, due to its proximity to residential and industrial areas, affected residents and industrialists approached the High Court, which led to the site's closure and a ban on waste disposal there. As a result, waste management in the city has suffered significantly. In response, the Municipal Corporation has set up processing plants at RMC points to manage waste. However, many of these facilities remain non-operational. The plant in Jagatpura, designed to process both wet and dry waste with a capacity of 150 tons per day, is expected to become functional in another 15 days. Meanwhile, the RMC point in Shahi Majra

is already operational. Additionally, the corporation has finalized a contract for mechanical cleaning. Despite the Municipal Corporation spending crores of rupees annually to improve cleanliness, garbage heaps remain a common sight along main roads, market parking areas, and sectors 78, 65, and Phase 2, including industrial zones. The city also struggles with managing fallen leaves, which accumulate in large quantities during this season. A cleanliness inspection on Friday found several locations littered with waste, including garbage scattered along main roads. At one site, a parking lot had been illegally converted into a dumping ground. Another major issue is irresponsible waste disposal by residents. Instead of using the designated dustbins provided by the administration, many residents discard their household waste in open spaces, further contributing to Mohali's declining cleanliness ranking. Additionally, stray animals have started gathering around garbage dumps in multiple areas. Many market dustbins are broken, and in several parks, only metal frames remain, with the actual bins missing. Cleanliness in villages and areas under the Municipal Corporation also remains a concern

### In Rajasthan, a former minister is taking keen interest in improving temples – MLA Yoonus Khan



GNS News Agency, March 25

Ever since the Budget Session began on January 31, one independent MLA has been taking particular interest in the upkeep of temples and the promotion of Vedic education in the state — Deedwana MLA Yoonus Khan, an exCabinet minister and a former leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Considered a loyalist of former Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje, Yoonus Khan, a former Transport And PWD minister of the state, has asked seven questions in the Budget Session thus far – mostly to do with promotion of temples and Vedic education in the state. On March 7, for instance, he asked if the state government had records of promoting Vedic education in Rajasthan. He has also raised multiple questions regarding the development and upkeep of temples in the state and sought details of the

honorarium given to the Vedic teachers in the 39 Ved Vidyalaya and scholarships provided to the schools' students. The state government said it pays Vedic school teachers Rs 15,000 and gives students Rs 500/month as scholarship.

A two-time Cabinet minister and a three-time MLA Khan left the BJP in 2023 after being denied a ticket to contest the assembly election and contested as an independent, defeating his nearest rival, Congress's Chetan Singh Chaudhary, by 2,394 votes. According to a local BJP leader in Deedwana, Khan's efforts to strengthen infrastructure in the assembly constituency during his tenure as the state's transport minister helped earn him goodwill across religious and caste groups. "His development work has made him a local hero," the BJP leader said. Shastri Kosalendra Das, a professor at the Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Rajasthan Sanskrit University, Jaipur, said regardless of a person's religion, "if there is a political leader who's taking up the issue of development of temples and honorarium to the priests, these efforts should be appreciated". Talking to the media after one session, Yoonus Khan said: "After I asked a question regarding the increase in the honorarium of Vedic teachers teaching in the Ved Vidyalaya, the government increased the honorarium amount of the teachers. Similarly, I asked whether the government is thinking of increasing the honorarium of temple priests and after that, the honorarium of the priests was increased from Rs 5,000 to Rs 7,500. This clearly shows that the government is sleeping and least bothered regarding the upliftment of the temples in the state"

### Ahead of Ayushman Bharat rollout, medical body flags 'payment delays, low tariffs' at meeting with Delhi CM



GNS News Agency, March 25

Delays in payment to healthcare providers, and low tariffs for medical procedures are some of the potential challenges that have been flagged by doctors from across Delhi in the implementation of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), the central government's flagship healthcare scheme, in the Capital. The concern has been raised ahead of the signing of an MoU between the Delhi government and the Centre on April 10 to implement the scheme in the national capital. The scheme's implementation was among BJP's key poll promises in its manifesto for the Assembly polls. A group of doctors from the Delhi Medical Association (DMA) met Chief Minister and Health Minister Dr Pankaj Singh on Friday where the issue of the delay in payment to the healthcare providers was discussed at length. The group of doctors said that payments to health care organisations (HCOs) are long delayed under the scheme. It should be done in a time-bound manner, they said. The doctors also discussed the issue of tariffs under the scheme, saying that these were too low for

"These will be unsustainable by our healthcare providers because of high infrastructure costs and manpower," said the delegation during its meeting. Dr Alok Bhandari, president, Delhi Medical Association, said the delegation requested for a joint committee to sort out the issues. "One size cannot fit all. The Ayushman Bharat has to be modified to be implemented in Delhi. There are adverse experiences in many places where payments have been delayed. Payment should be commensurate with the services expected...," he said, adding that in the meeting with the CM and Health Minister, the delegation requested to discuss the scheme before giving blanket orders and rolling the scheme out.DMA has over 20,000 doctors associated with it from private hospitals, nursing homes, and government hospitals across Delhi. It also requested a structured onboarding framework to facilitate wider adoption and ensure that many patients benefit from the scheme. It said that the process for empanelment and reimbursement needs streamlining, ensuring timely payments and reduced procedural burdens for hospitals. It has also proposed setting up a joint working group between the Health Department and representatives of private healthcare establishments to ensure the successful implementation of Ayushman Bharat. The newly-formed BJP government plans to enroll at least one lakh beneficiaries under the scheme within 30 days as part of its 100-day agenda. The scheme aims to provide annual health coverage of Rs 5 lakh per family. Under the scheme, an estimated 6.54 lakh of the poorest families in Delhi will receive health coverage up to Rs 5 lakh. Moreover, 4.5 lakh families with people over the age of 70 — some of whom may already be eligible for cover as per their economic status - are also

### After three-month delay, high drama marks Bar Council polls in Delhi

GNS News Agency, March 25

Two elections postponed due to "mismanagement", altercations including one outside the Delhi High Court, an injured lawyer and tonnes of physical posters despite a Bar Council of Delhi notice asking for their removal underlined voting at the capital's district courts Bar Association elections, where lawyers are choosing their representatives in the executive committees across the city, were held in line with last month's Delhi High Court order to the effect that these be held on March 21 — almost three months after these were originally scheduled.

From e-libraries and new chambers in addition to training — especially for new advocates — to resolving parking issues, several promises have been made by contesting candidates. Around 1.75 lakh advocates have enrolled in Delhi and as many as one lakh of them are those who have recently joined. Outside the Rouse Avenue Courts — which went to the polls for the very first time since their inception in the year 2019 — pink, white and yellow papers are scattered on the ground leaving not even an inch of the asphalt underneath exposed. The delay in holding the polls was due to a dispute between warring factions seeking recognition as the official bar association representing the Court.

The dispute had reached the Delhi High Court last April when the Bar Council of Delhi declined the request of all but one bar association to be the official association. After the Delhi High Court ruled in favour of the Central Delhi Court Bar Association, the other associations approached the apex court. Hundreds of lawyers stood outside the Court complex chanting for the candidates they were in support of. Other than Rouse Avenue, elections were also held in Patiala House Court, Rohini Court, Tis Hazari Court and Dwarka Court. While the process in itself here was smooth. elections in Saket and Karkardooma Court could not be concluded due to "mismanagement". "Lawyers who knew they were losing, indulged in booth capturing," Shahdara Bar Association Secretary Raman Sharma told The Indian Express. In a video, a person is seen clicking the voting button incessantly. Sharma identified him as a local politician's brother.

"It is unfortunate that the elections in Saket couldn't be concluded... a decision will take place on Monday as to when these elections will be held," former Saket Bar Association Secretary Dhir Singh Kasana told The Indian Express.Last month, the Delhi High Court ordered that all bar association elections in the Capital will be held on March 21. Originally scheduled for December 2024, the elections were postponed to February 7, then February 28 and finally to March 21 owing to logistical challenges.In March 2024, the HC directed that these elections be held simultaneously (on the same day) and that the tenure of all such committees shall be for a uniform period of two years.In the run-up to the polls, bus stops, walls outside court complexes, pillars in the vicinity, and even trees had all been covered with election posters. In response, the Bar Council of Delhi is-



sued a notice stating that lawyers must remove their election banners and posters before polling starts or they will face "disciplinary action". Despite this, all district Courts that The Indian Express visited had posters spread across the exterior and interior. "Bhai ye Dilli ke lawyers hai. Apne Mann ki karte hain," a lawyer in Tis Hazari said. A candidate Panjak Kishore Gupta suffered an injury. A photo of his hand bleeding surfaced on WhatsApp Groups and social media.

Meanwhile, an altercation broke out outside the Delhi High Court of which a video surfaced. In the video two groups of lawyers can be seen throwing hands at each other. In a public notice on March 20, the Bar Council of Delhi had directed all advocates contesting elections to remove "all such banners, posters, etc. from the premises of the Court Complex inside and outside and throughout Delhi within 10 hours" or before polling was scheduled to start. It had also warned of "necessary disciplinary action", including the suspension of their licences, with immediate effect if this was not done.

## Congress borrowing Rs 1 crore every minute, says Maheshwar Reddy

Hyderabad: The Telangana Assembly saw a heated exchange over the State's rising debt. BJP floor leader A Maheshwar Reddy accused the Congress government of reckless borrowing, while Congress MLAs countered by blaming the BJP-led Centre for neglecting Telangana.Participating in the discussion on the State Budget on Friday, Maheshwar Reddy claimed the State was borrowing Rs 1,700 crore daily, pushing its total debt to Rs.8.6 lakh crore. He criticised the Revanth Reddy government for borrowing around Rs 1 crore per minute, warning that the per capita debt burden now stood at Rs 2.27 lakh. He slammed the borrowing spree, despite the Centre increasing tax devolution to States from 32 per cent under UPA to 42 per cent.

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### AIIMS can take the lead to bring gender parity in healthcare: President Murmu



GNS News Agency, March 25

AIIMS, Delhi AIIMS, Droupadi Murmu, President Droupadi Murmu, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairsPresident Droupadi Murmu with an awardee at AIIMS in Delhi on Friday. PIBPresident Droupadi Murmu on Friday raised concern over a few female patients coming for treatment at the preliminary stage of heart ailments and other diseases. "It is of course a larger social issue but the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) can take the lead in launching a campaign to bring gender parity in the healthcare protocol," she said. President Murmu made the remarks while addressing the 49th convocation ceremony

of AIIMS Delhi at Bharat Mandapam.

She added that life expectancy is rising with advancements in health care, and as a result, the aging population is bound to increase, leading to new challenges in this field. "The medical profession has been grappling with diseases which arise out of lifestyle changes in modern times," she said. Talking about mental health, the President urged the AIIMS faculty to launch an awareness drive. Every loss can be fixed except the loss of a precious life, she asserted.

The convocation ceremony was also attended by Union Health Minister for Health and Family Welfare Jagat Prakash Nadda, among others. He spoke about the institution's contribution to creating the present-day health system of India: "AIIMS is not only a medical institution; it stands as a testimony to India's commitment towards worldclass healthcare and medical innovations. The work being done here, be it in patient care, research, or academics, is commendable."He also added that the ecosystem that AIIMS provides is necessary for students to achieve the best of their potential. At the event, eight doctors received the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for their commendable service at AIIMS. Twenty-eight students and doctors received medals and book prizes and nine of them received appreciation prizes. A total of 1,886 degrees were conferred in various disciplines, including 191 MBBS, 172 MSc, 312 BSc, 77 PhD degrees, and 572 MDs.

### Delhi HC grants bail to Unitech founder in 2018 money laundering case

GNS News Agency, March 25

Delhi High Court, Delhi High Court bail to Unitech founder, Unitech founder money laundering case, money laundering case, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairsConcluding that Chandra was infirm, it took into consideration that in January 2024, he was taken to the emergency wing of AIIMS (Medicine Department), where the doctors observed that he had fallen unconscious for five to six minutes. The Delhi High Court on Friday granted bail to Ramesh Chandra, the founder of real estate firm Unitech, in connection with a 2018 money laundering case.

Taking into account that the trial has not yet begun in the Enforcement Directorate (ED) case, Justice Jasmeet Singh qualified the 86-year-old as an "infirm" and granted him bail.

The court observed that Chandra was not required to satisfy the twin test under PMLA as well as satisfied the triple test for the grant of bail — "there was enough reason to believe he was not guilty and not likely to commit any offence while out on bail", and "he was not a flight risk, and will not influence witnesses or tamper with evidence", respectively

Concluding that Chandra was infirm, it took into consideration that in January 2024, he was taken to the emergency wing of AIIMS (Medicine Department), where the doctors observed that he had fallen unconscious for five to six minutes. The medical report had shown his ECG was abnormal. Later, he was rushed to the emergency wing in August 2024, with chest pain; he was already undergoing treatment for cognitive decline.In the order, Justice Singh further said: "Given his diagnosed subjective cognitive de-



cline, it is clear that he needs supervision through the day, which cannot be adequately provided by jail authorities... I am of the view that beneficial legislation in favour of a class of persons, which is reflective of constitutional spirit, should not be considered narrowly and must be given a liberal interpretation. Thus the aforementioned infirmities in a senile stage, combined with the need for constant "monitoring" and frequent falls and forgetfulness, makes the petitioner "infirm" under the proviso to section 45(1) of PMLA." Chandra, who suffers from multiple ailments including advanced pseudodementia, was arrested in the case in October 2021 and has been released on interim bail since August 8, 2022, on medical grounds. Between 2006 and 2022, 62 FIRs were registered by the Delhi Police and the CBI, against the promoters of Unitech Group and their associates — based on complaints by homebuyers. It was alleged that homebuyers were persuaded to invest in the company for residential units therefore a significant portion of these funds was misappropriated by the Group for non-mandated activities.

### Illegal immigration syndicate busted; Aadhaar card agent, three from Bangladesh arrested: Police

GNS News Agency, March 25

Illegal immigration, Illegal immigration syndicate busted, delhi Illegal immigration syndicate, Bangladesh Illegal immigration, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairs The Crime Branch team cseized incriminating material, including Indian passports, Voter IDs, and Aadhaar cards. From deploying informants to officers posing as garment vendors — the Crime Branch team had recently widened its net in South Delhi markets amid the police's ongoing crackdown against illegal immigration, said officials. On Thursday, three persons from Bangladesh and an Aadhaar card agent were arrested and an illegal immigration syndicate was busted, said police.

Mohd. Iqbal Hossain, a Bangladeshi national, who allegedly assumed a fake identity and had been living as Farhan Khan in Delhi for several years, has been accused of illegally trafficking several Bangladeshi nationals to the Capital via Assam to join him in his garment business. "Presently, he is engaged in the business of selling garments in weekly markets and earning hefty profits. During this period, he also rented a ticketing shop at a mall in the city. To ensure the smooth functioning of his garment business, he needed workers, so he illegally trafficked several Bangladeshi nationals to Delhi via the Assam border with the help of human traffickers based in the NCR," DCP (Crime Branch) Aditya Gautam said.

According to officials, police personnel were deployed as workers at the shops of Nehru Place and nearby areas. From there, they got to know about Farhan, who ran a wholesale garment business out of Jamia Nagar. "The Crime Branch team conducted multiple raids and arrested the accused Mohd Iqbal @ Farhan from Nehru Place and Razeeb Miyan aka Amit Yadav and Mohd Momin aka Jitender Yadav from Badarpur Border. The team also seized incriminating material, including Indian Passports, Voter IDs, Aadhaar and PAN Cards, driving licenses with Indian names as well as their Bangladeshi documents and mobile phones having vital evidence," Gautam said. In custody, Razeeb and Momin allegedly told police that they came to Delhi via Assam, after illegally crossing the border from Bangladesh. Their fake Aadhaar cards were arranged for by a man they identified as Agrasen Kumar. They then started working for Hossain aka Farhan. Kumar was later arrested from Okhla, said police. "An authorised person to create Aadhaar Cards is actively involved in this scandal with other associates. It was further revealed that Agrasen Kumar and his associates have enrolled many alleged illegal Bangladeshi immigrants on Aadhaar by submitting false information in the government system," said DCP Gautam.

Hossain, police said, got out of Bangladesh in 2004, after working there in a rice mill for eight years. "In 2004, he first went to the United Kingdom on a work permit for two years, where he worked in delivery services and restaurants. He stayed in the UK till 2009 and then returned to Bangladesh, where he ran a grocery shop in Sunamganj until 2016," said DCP Gautam.By 2016, Hossain had already married in Bangladesh and had a daughter. In 2017, he allegedly illegally entered Assam and then travelled to Delhi by train from Badarpur Railway Junction, Assam. By 2018, he had set up shop in Jamia Nagar, a wholesale gar-



ment joint, and was married a second time to a woman from Madhya Pradesh by posing as an Indian citizen on a matrimonial site, police said. He had two daughters from this marriage and shifted to Panchsheel Vihar in 2022. He also visited Bangladesh, twice since 2021, on a business visa on Indian passport to meet his family.

#### 'Resorting to extreme tactics': Sirsa blames AAP for air pollution, Atishi hits back

GNS News Agency, March 25

Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Sirsa blames AAP for air pollution, Atishi, delhi aqi, Delhi air pollution, Delhi air quality, air pollution, air pollution level, Delhi severe air quality, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairs Dismissing allegations, AAP leader Atishi said:"It has barely been a month since he (Sirsa) became a Minister, yet his only focus has been to abuse AAP and Arvind Kejriwal. The BJP minister said that 'no excuses, we need change', but in just a month, he has failed, and is making excuses — it is unfortunate."Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Friday slammed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as he claimed that efforts were being made to deliberately increase pollution levels — "to defame the ruling BJP government". The AAP, however, hit back, alleging that the Minister was trying to make excuses instead of finding solutions. Accusing the AAP of "resorting to extreme tactics" to disrupt the city's air quality by setting parks and garbage heaps on fire, Sirsa posted a video message on X on Friday, saying: "Shocking and shameful! Last night, MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) deliberately set a fire in Rajouri Garden... a reckless act under the AAP-led MCD just when Delhi's AQI had improved in recent weeks. This is nothing, but a calculated move to pollute the air and then shift the blame onto BJP govt." This anti-people behaviour is criminal and needs immediate action. This is being done so that the BJP is defamed...," Sirsa wrote, urging immediate intervention and accountability from the government. "Those responsible, including the Mayor, must be booked and held accountable for endangering the public health and environment. I want to tell senior AAP leaders Atishi and Arvind ji, that you should accept defeat.

## Auto driver who abducted and killed woman, shot dead in UP encounter



GNS News Agency, March 25

Lucknow police, UP encounter, Lucknow police encounter, up police encounter, police encounter, Lucknow news, Uttar pradesh news, Indian express, Current affairsAccording to the police, they received information on Friday evening that Ajay would be passing through Malihabad on a motorcycle. Upon spotting police personnel, he opened fire.THE LUCKNOW police on Friday shot

dead an autorickshaw driver accused of abducting and strangulating to death a woman, whose body was found two days ago in a mango orchard in Malihabad. Police claimed hat the accused might have attempted to rape her and killed her when she resisted.

The victim, who was in her 30s, had gone missing after returning from another district and was going to a close relative's residence in an autorickshaw when the accused, Ajay Kumar, 26, who was driving the vehicle, abducted her, police said. Ajay Kumar had 23 criminal cases against him and carried a reward of Rs 1 lakh for information leading to his arrest, said Assistant Commissioner of Police Rishabh Yadav. Earlier in the day, the police arrested Ajay's 35-yearold brother, Dinesh Kumar, in connection with the case. However, Ajay had then managed to escape, said Lucknow DCP Vishwajeet Srivastava. The police recovered the victim's educational certificates from Dinesh's possession. According to the police, they received information on Friday evening that Ajay would be passing through Malihabad on a motorcycle. Upon spotting police personnel, he opened fire. The police retaliated and he was injured. Police took him to a hospital where he died.

# Deportees not instructed to remove religious head coverings: Govt cites US response in Lok Sabha; 295 more set to be deported

GNS News Agency, March 25

The statement comes after the row over several Sikh deportees allegedly landing at Amritsar airport without their turbans. The deportees, as well as Punjab NRI affairs minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, had alleged that their turbans were removed before they boarded the three military flights to India. In a written response to a query by Lok Sabha MP Raja Ram Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh said the MEA had registered its strong concerns regarding the need to accommodate the religious sensitivities and food preferences of the deportees.

"The US side has conveyed to the Ministry of External Affairs that detainees on the three deportation flights (that landed on 5th, 15th and 16th February) were not instructed to remove any religious head coverings and that the detainees did not request any religious accommodations during the flights aside from requesting vegetarian meals," the reply said. Since Donald Trump became US President this year, 388 Indians have been deported from the US, mostly in February. Of the 388, at least 153 are from Punjab. Since Donald Trump became US President this year, 388 Indians have been deported from the US, mostly in February. Of the 388, at least 153 are from Punjab. The minister also said India has "strongly registered" its concerns with US authorities on the treatment of the deportees who arrived on February 5 — "particularly with respect to use of shackles, especially on women". The first batch of deportees, including women, had landed in India with shackles, sparking an uproar in the country. Singh said no women or children were restrained on the next two deportation flights.

The reply stated: "The US Standard Operating Procedure to organise and execute deportations effective from November 2012 calls for the use of restraints on deportees. The US authorities have conveyed that restraints are applied to ensure the safety and security of the mission. While women and minors are generally not shackled, the flight officer in charge of a deportation flight has the final say on the matter."To a query by MP Kathir Anand, the ministry said at least 295 more Indian nationals were set to be deported from the US. "The Ministry of External Affairs, along with other concerned agencies, is currently verifying the details of these 295 individuals," the reply said. Since Donald Trump became US President this year, 388 Indians have been deported from the US, mostly in February. Of the 388, at least 153 are from Punjab. The MEA further said: "From January 2025 till date, a total of 388 deportees arrived in India from the US. Of these, a total of 333 Indian nationals arrived in Amritsar from the US on three deportation flights that landed on 5th, 15th and 16th February 2025 respectively. Separately, 55 Indian deportees arrived in New Delhi



from the US via Panama on commercial flights."

Replying to a query by Congress leader Manish Tewari, the MEA said that the deportations this year are part of larger "National Security Initiative" of the White House, adding that under this process, the deportees are placed for "expedited removal". The ministry said: "Since January 2025, the U.S Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) vertical has been carrying out deportation operations as part of the larger "National Security initiative" led by the U.S. White House - National Security Council (NSC). The individuals that have been deported in this operation were placed under "expedited removal" process, wherein a determination of inadmissibility can be made by the immigration officer without having to go through an immigration judge in the US."On the criteria being adopted by the US for deporting the individuals, the MEA replied: "The U.S. is deporting only those Indian nationals who have been apprehended for violating the U.S. immigration laws. Illegal mobility and migration has many other associated activities, also of an illegal nature. Moreover, those of our nationals who have been enticed into illegal migration have themselves become prev to other crimes. Those who have recently returned have testified to their harrowing experiences The Government of India is focused on identifying and taking strong action against the illegal immigration agents, the migration rackets and the entire criminal ecosystem, on which such illegal immigration thrives."On a query by Bathinda MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal on why Punjab's Amritsar airport was chosen for the landings said: "US aircraft ferrying deportees have landed in India after securing necessary permissions. The landing site for any repatriation flight carrying deportees is decided based on operational convenience, the specific route for entry into Indian air space, and particularly, proximity to final destinations of the arriving deportees."On February 6, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had said in a statement in Rajya Sabha that the government is engaging with the US to ensure that deported Indians are not mistreated

### Mumbai's Bhikha Behram Well celebrates its tricentenary as Parsi community rings in new year

GNS News Agency, March 25

Despite the din of the crowd that surrounds it round-the-clock, the Bhikha Behram well–tucked between the busy Churchgate station and Flora fountain—is conspicuous with its distinctive walls, stained-glass panels and lush greens. For the past 300 years, fresh water from Bhikha Behram no Kuvo (Bhikha Behram well) has quenched thirst, provided succour to the weary while being intrinsically linked to the Parsi community's faith. as the Parsi Irani community rang in Jamshed-i-Navroz (Iranian New Year), trustees of the Bhikha Behram no Kuvo (Bhikha Behram well) celebrated the tricentenary event of the well amid cheers and applause.

Commemorating the landmark milestone, the event also saw the launch of the volume, 'Waternamah: 300 years of Mumbai's Bhikha Behram Well', a collection of 32 essays by Zoroastrian scholars which has been edited by Bachi Karkaria. The book traces the evolution of the revered site over the past three centuries and the mythic significance of Ardvisura Anahita, the guardian spirit of water. The well gains its moniker after Bhikhaji Behramji Panday, a Parsi merchant hailing from Bharuch, who upon a divine intervention, sank the well in 1725. While its proximity to the sea initially raised questions over the feasibility of the digging, the earth spouted potable, fresh water as soon as the well was dug—further burnishing it as a revered site. Since then, the site is thronged by Parsis for prayers with the site witnessing larger congregations on Ava roj.

Speaking during the celebrations, Justice S J Kathawalla, retired judge of Bombay High Court, who was the chief guest of the event, said the well has been deemed the miracle well by scores of devotees over the years for bestowing boons and blessings in abundance. "All Agiaries have wells and in the olden days, most Parsi homes also had kuans (wells). Traditionally, Parsis have worshipped at all wells reverentially. We believe that water has a divine cosmic power that sustains our life. And whilst all water bodies evoke prayers among all Parsis, none is perhaps as powerful and beneficiary as the Bhikha Behram kuan," he said, sharing how the waters from the wells of Agiaries around Fort including perhaps Bhikha Behram well was used by fire fighters to douse a major blaze which was reported



at a famous Flora Fountain building on November 23, 1973. During its 300-year-long storied history, the sacred site has evolved significantly — as years passed, a canopy, pavilion as well as compound wall were erected around the well. Ahead of the tricentenary celebrations, the Grade II A heritage structure underwent a major restoration.

#### Telangana Olympic Association complains against fraudulent activities

Hyderabad: The Telangana Olympic Association (TOA) representatives lodged a complaint against a group of people alleging they had forged letterheads and fraudulently issued certificates of affiliation at Saifabad police sta-

In a complaint submitted on March 17, P Malla Reddy, general secretary, TOA, had alleged that SR Premraj, C Babu Rao, Shivshankar Tumkur and their associates had been involved in the fabrication of official letterheads of TOA and unauthorised issuance of affiliation certificates. Thereby, they are damaging sports organisations and stakeholders. They are running an illegal parallel association in the name of TOA. Such actions amount to forgery, cheating and criminal conspiracy, which warrant strict legal action, he said.

### UNICEF calls on Taliban to lift ban on girls' education as new school year begins in Afghanistan



GNS News Agency, March 25

The United Nations (UN) children's agency on Saturday (March 22, 2025) urged Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to immediately lift a lingering ban on girls' education to save the future of millions who have been deprived of their right to education since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. The appeal by UNICEF comes as a new school year began in Afghanistan without girls beyond sixth grade. The ban, said the agency, has deprived 4,00,000 more girls of their right to education, bringing the total to 2.2 million. Taliban's education ban forces girls and women into 'dull' online classes Afghanistan is the only country in the world that bans

female secondary and higher education, with the Taliban justifying the ban saying it doesn't comply with their interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law.

"For more than three years, the rights of girls in Afghanistan have been violated," Catherine Russell, UNICEF executive director, said in a statement. "All girls must be allowed to return to school now. If these capable, bright young girls continue to be denied an education, then the repercussions will last for generations.""A ban on the education of girls will harm the future of millions of Afghan girls, she said, adding that if the ban persists until 2030, "more than four million girls will have been deprived of their right to education beyond primary school."The consequences, she added, will be "catastrophic." Ms. Russell warned that the decline in female doctors and midwives will leave women and girls without crucial medical care. This situation is projected to result in an estimated 1,600 additional maternal deaths and more than 3,500 infant deaths. "These are not just numbers, they represent lives lost and families shattered," she said. Taliban insist Afghan women's rights are protected as U.N. says their bans cannot be ignoredThe Afghan Taliban government earlier this year skipped a Pakistan-hosted global conference where Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai condemned the state of women's and girl's rights in Afghanistan as gender apartheid.

#### India's marginalised Parliament in budgetary affairs

GNS News Agency, March 25

The Budget is more than just a financial statement, as it reflects a nation's priorities, economic vision and governance philosophy. Across democracies, parliaments exercise the power of the purse, which is critical in shaping national budgets, ensuring fiscal discipline, and promoting transparency. However, in India, parliamentary influence over the Budget remains minimal. The executive-driven process side lines legislators, leaving them with little opportunity to effectively shape or scrutinise financial policies. Parliament must evolve from being a mere approver of the government's financial proposals to actively shaping economic policy. This requires critical institutional reforms, including pre-Budget discussions and establishing a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO).

Budgeting is a fundamental democratic exercise that allocates public resources and defines the government's social and economic priorities. Historically, the power of the purse has been hard-won, with legislatures across the world asserting their right to oversee public finance. From the British Parliament's financial control in the 19th century to the fiscal policies of modern democracies, legislative scrutiny has been essential in preventing executive overreach. Globally, the degree of legislative influence over budgets varies. Some parliaments actively draft and modify budget proposals, while others act as rubber stamps. Certain legislatures hold in-depth committee discussions on budgetary allocations, whereas others rely on centralised finance committees. However, one common thread remains — Budget transparency and parliamentary engagement correlate with better social outcomes and economic

Parliament's role in Budget formulation and scrutiny in India is mainly ceremonial. The Finance Ministry singlehandedly crafts the Budget, keeping even Cabinet Ministers uninformed until its presentation in the Lok Sabha. Unlike other legislative Bills, the Budget proposal is not subjected to thorough cabinet discussions before being introduced in Parliament. The executive monopoly over financial planning results in fragmented debates and limited oversight, weakening the core tenets of representative democracy. Moreover, the Rajya Sabha, despite its democratic credentials, has no substantive role in Budget discussions. Ironically, while India permits a Finance Minister to be a Rajya Sabha member, they lack the ability to vote on their (own) Budget proposals in the Lok Sabha. This absence of budgetary bicameralism contrasts sharply with the British House of Lords, which wields some influence over financial legislation despite being an unelected body. The decline of parliamentary authority over budgetary matters is evident in the poor quality and brevity of debates and the ineffective scrutiny by subject committees. Parliamentarians lack the power to amend or significantly influence budget proposals, effectively reducing their role to passive approval. This status quo is neither democratic nor conducive to accountability. Two key reforms must be implemented for Parliament to reclaim its rightful role in Budgetmaking: introducing pre-budget discussions and creating a Parliamentary Budget Office.

Parliament should institutionalise pre-Budget discussions during the monsoon session to ensure meaningful engagement in the Budget process. A dedicated five to seven-day discussion period would allow legislators to assess the nation's fiscal health, outline Budget priorities, and present a broad economic framework for the government's



consideration. Such discussions would also encourage better coordination among subject committees, enhancing their ability to provide informed input. Pre-Budget debates would democratise the Budget-making process, allowing elected representatives to voice public concerns, suggest equitable resource allocation, and engage in policy deliberations. More importantly, they would facilitate greater public involvement, fostering transparency and trust in financial governance. Scepticism about active legislative involvement in budgeting often stems from concerns over fiscal discipline. Some economists argue that empowering legislatures may lead to populist spending and weakened financial prudence. However, placing unchecked faith in the executive to act in the public interest is naive. Regardless of ideology, no government has ever voluntarily ensured economic justice without oversight. A balanced approach, where the executive retains financial discretion but remains answerable to Parliament, is the hallmark of a healthy democracy. A crucial aspect of Budget reform is in strengthening Parliament's analytical and research capabilities. India lacks an institutional mechanism that provides legislators with independent and non-partisan Budget analysis. Establishing a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) would bridge this gap as there would be data-driven insights and expert economic forecasts. Modelled on institutions such as the U.S. Congressional Budget Office and similar bodies in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, a well-structured -BO in india would play a vital role in analysing govern ment spending, revenue projections, and fiscal policies. It would conduct independent economic forecasts, assess the fiscal impact of proposed policies, and evaluate medium-term and long-term budgetary trends. Additionally, the PBO would offer policy briefs to parliamentarians, enhancing informed decision-making. Rather than encroaching upon the executive's role, it would complement it by ensuring legislative scrutiny is backed by objective research. Such an institution would significantly enhance Parliament's capacity to hold the government accountable and foster evidence-based policy discussions. The current budgetary process diminishes the role of elected representatives, undermining democratic accountability. By integrating pre-Budget discussions and establishing a PBO, Parliament can transition from being a passive recipient of financial proposals to an active budget-influencing institution. These reforms are procedural adjustments and fundamental steps towards strengthening representative democracy. They would ensure public finance decisions reflect collective deliberation rather than executive fiat. A robust parliamentary engagement in budgeting would ultimately lead to more equitable economic policies, greater transparency, and a financial governance framework that genuinely serves the

### Trump pulls security clearances for Biden, Harris and Hillary Clinton

GNS News Agency, March 25

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday (March 21, 2025) took away security clearances for former U.S. President Joe Biden, former Vice President Kamala Harris, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others in his latest move against his Democratic opponents. The Republican president defeated Clinton in the 2016 presidential election and Harris in last year's election. "I have determined that it is no longer in the national interest for the following individuals to access classified information," Mr. Trump said in a late Friday memorandum that also included former Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

While the revocations may not have immediate impacts, it is another sign of the growing political rift in Washington as Mr. Trump seeks revenge on his perceived enemies. The memorandum was issued hours after Mr. Trump arrived at his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf property for the weekend. Mr. Trump also targeted Republican former Representative Liz Cheney, a sharp Trump critic, former Biden White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan and Fiona Hill, a Russia expert who served on his National Security Council during his first term.

Mark Zaid, a national security lawyer in Washington who represents whistleblowers, and Adam Kinzinger, a former Republican lawmaker who is a sharp Trump critic, were among several others who had their security clearances revoked. He had already revoked the security clear-



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ance for Mr. Biden, denying the former president to the traditional access to U.S. intelligence. Former U.S. presidents have traditionally received intelligence briefings so they can advise incumbent presidents on national security and foreign policy. In 2021, Mr. Biden revoked the security clearance for Mr. Trump, who was then a former president.

### Panic persists across Bangladesh as mob violence continues unabated



GNS News Agency, March 25

The heart of Bangladesh is heavy with grief and seething with outrage as an eight-year-old rape victim from Magura district lost her battle for life on March 12 after enduring unimaginable pain for a week. The news of her death has sent shockwaves across the country. In a visceral reaction to the news, enraged locals set fire to the house of the accused. Since the incident, Bangladesh has been engulfed in protests against rape and violence targeting women and children. The outcry has grown so intense that the interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, was forced to indefinitely ban demonstrations at key locations in the capital, Dhaka, as the movement for women's security gained momentum. The Magura case is not an isolated incident. Just days earlier, a second-grade student from Sirajganj was hospitalised after being raped. Activists and human rights organisations report that such incidents are becoming alarmingly frequent. The interim government has repeatedly issued warnings and promised action, but these have done little to stem the tide of violence.

Women in Bangladesh face not only the threat of violence but also societal scrutiny. A recent incident involving a Dhaka University female student underscores this troubling reality. While on her way to the campus, she was stopped by a man who criticised her clothing as "inappropriate". When she threatened to report him to the university proctor, the situation escalated. Although the accused was arrested after the incident went viral on social media, he was soon released — greeted by a cheering crowd

Dewan Sudeshna, a 28-year-old English language instructor in Dhaka's Mohammadpur area, shared her daily struggles with palpable fear. "I work until 5:00 p.m. and rush home before evening. People now judge women simply for being out after the dark. It's as if being on the street in the evening is a crime for us," she said. "The fault always lies at the feet of women. If I'm ever late, my parents grow anxious because the environment is so volatile. Some people feel entitled to question why a woman is out after the evening. It's terrifying for any girl or woman." Crime against children

According to the human rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), at least 85 women were raped in January and February this year in Bangladesh. Between 2017 and 2024, 9,677 children under 18 were victims of violence, with nearly half — 4,801 — being rape survivors. Similarly, the

Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) reported that between 2020 and 2024, at least 6,305 women and children were raped, including 3,471 minors. Human rights activists and organisations attributed the rise in violence to the collapse of law enforcement and societal structures following the regime change on August 5 last year in the country. Despite repeated government warnings against mob violence, such incidents continues unabated. On March 16, a young man named Sujan, accused in a child rape case, was beaten to death by a mob in Barisal. Earlier, on February 28, five people were killed in a similar mob attack in Shariatpur. They were accused of attempting to commit robbery and were caught by locals while trying to flee. The ASK reported that mob violence has seen a sharp rise in recent months. At least 27 people were killed in mob attacks in January and February alone. compared with the 32 incidents recorded in the first seven months of 2024, just before the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Following the August 2025 uprising, mob violence rocketed, with 123 incidents reported in the next seven months—a fourfold increase compared to the first seven months of 2024. According to the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), at least 114 incidents of mob beatings occurred in the seven months following the interim government's assumption of power in August, resulting in 119 deaths and 74 injuries. According to the Bangladesh Police Headquarters, 294 murder cases were registered in January 2025 alone, up from 231 in January 2024. Robbery and mugging cases also surged, with 242 cases filed in January 2025, a 69% increase from the previous year. December 2024 saw 230 cases, a 70% rise compared to December 2023.

Rising crime numbersCrime statistics also reveal an equally alarming trend. Over the past six months, up until January 2025, 1,145 cases of robbery and banditry were filed — a 50% increase compared to the same period the previous year. In response to the crisis, Information and Broadcasting Adviser Mohammad Mahfuj Alam said: "Regardless of their religion, beliefs, or affiliations, no one involved in these crimes will be spared. While the government has shown patience in the past, it is now taking an extremely strict stance." Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Sheikh Mohammad Sazzad Ali has announced special operations to apprehend criminals. However, for many citizens, these assurances ring hollow.

Advocate Saidur Rahman, chief executive of the Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF), told The Hindu that certain group of people are actively inciting and encouraging these heinous acts, often linking them to political entities such as the Awami League. "These instigators manipulate mobs into committing violence, and the side effect is the abuse of women." "Police presence has also drastically reduced. They are now patrolling far less, and many positions remain unfilled after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina. This shortage of law enforcement personnel has created a vacuum, allowing crime to flourish. There is also no initiative from the government, and social mobilisation is missing. Without these, the situation will not improve", he

### Elon Musk holds unprecedented Pentagon meeting, wants leakers prosecuted

GNS News Agency, March 25

Billionaire Elon Musk took his campaign to cut the U.S. federal government into uncharted waters on Friday (March 21, 2025), holding an unprecedented top-level meeting at the Pentagon and calling for the prosecution of any Defense Department officials leaking false information about his visit.Mr. Musk met U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth for 80 minutes in his first such talks at the Pentagon, which is responsible for a large chunk of federal government spending. It was unclear whether U.S. generals joined that meeting virtually.

The New York Times reported that Mr. Musk would be briefed on secret war plans for China, something Mr. Musk, Trump and others denied. Mr. Musk called the report "pure propaganda" and urged legal action against leakers." I look forward to the prosecutions of those at the Pentagon who are leaking maliciously false information to NYT. They will be found," he wrote on X before the Hegseth

President Donald Trump, who has not yet visited the Pentagon in his second term as President, also denied the story. "China will not even be mentioned or discussed." he said in a post on Truth Social on Thursday about the meeting. Later he told reporters the Pentagon meeting was to address costs. "Elon was over there to address costs -DOGE – a thing called DOGE, which you have heard about," Mr. Trump, referring to Mr. Musk's Department of Government EfficiencyAccess to a closely guarded military plan would mark a sharp expansion of Mr. Musk's role as the Trump adviser who is spearheading efforts to cut U.S. government spending. It would also fuel questions about conflicts of interest for Mr. Musk, who as the head of Tesla and SpaceX also has business interests in China. The White House has previously said Mr. Musk will recuse himself if any conflicts of interest arise between his business deal-



ings and his role in cutting federal government spending.Mr. Musk arrived in a motorcade at the Pentagon on Friday morning and quickly moved upstairs to meet Hegseth who said on X the talks would focus on "innovation, efficiencies & smarter production." As he departed, Mr. Musk was seen joking with Mr. Hegseth, and said the meeting went well.

If there's anything I can do to be helpful, I would like us to have a good outcome here," Mr. Musk said as he departed.Mr. Musk's businesses Starlink and SpaceX have a number of Pentagon contracts, raising questions about conflicts of interest as he advocates for innovation and reprioritization of Pentagon spending to find efficiencies. Last week, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said she had ordered an investigation into leaks from inside the intelligence community and is also probing internal chat rooms for any misconduct by employees. During Mr. Trump's first term, his administration referred more media leaks for criminal investigation each year than in any of the previous 15 years, according to records released in 2021 by the Justice Department to the independent watchdog group, Project on Government Oversight, in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

## All you need to know about: multiple sclerosis

GNS News Agency, March 25

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a long-term condition that affects the brain and spinal cord. It can cause a wide range of symptoms, such as difficulty in walking, muscle weakness, vision problems, and fatigue. MS is an autoimmune disease where the immune system mistakenly attacks the covering of nerve fibres, known as myelin. Unfortunately, MS often targets younger individuals, most commonly between the ages of 20 and 40. It is also more common in women than in men. While MS can bring significant challenges, advancements in medicine and early diagnosis have made managing the condition easier, allowing many people to live active and fulfilling lives. The exact cause of multiple sclerosis (MS) is unknown, but several factors may increase the risk. Genetics play a role, as having a family history of MS slightly raises the likelihood of getting it. Environmental factors like lack of sunlight resulting in low vitamin D levels, along with viral infections such as Epstein-Barr virus, are linked to a higher risk.MS symptoms vary from person to person, but some of the most common include: blurry vision or double vision; problems with memory, concentration, or thinking clearly; trouble controlling the bladder or bowels; numbness or tingling, usually in the arms, legs, or face; muscle weakness or difficulty with balance and coordination and fatigue that doesn't improve with



rest. Early diagnosis of multiple sclerosis (MS) is essential, because its symptoms can mimic other conditions, delaying treatment. Detecting MS early allows neurologists to start therapies that slow disease progression and improve outcomes. Diagnosis involves reviewing medical history, conducting physical exams, and using tests like MRI scans to detect brain and spinal cord damage, lumbar punctures to identify specific markers in spinal fluid, and nerve tests to assess nerve function. Recent advancements in treatment have significantly improved patient outcomes. Disease-modifying therapies (DMTs) reduce flare-ups and slow progression, while experimental stem cell therapy aims to reset the immune system and repair damage.

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### Visakhapatnam - A city of military might and cultural splendour



GNS News Agency, March 25

Visakhapatnam, seat of the Eastern Naval Command and the 'Financial Capital' of Andhra Pradesh, is also a city of museums that celebrate the country's glorious military history and the rich cultural heritage of the Telugu people. Strategically located along the coast of Bay of Bengal, Visakhapatnam is home to INS Kursura Submarine Museum, the first such installation in South Asia. Located on Ramakrishna (RK) Beach, it is housed in a decommissioned Soviet-built I-641 class submarine.

This unique museum, open to visitors on all days except Monday (a maintenance holiday), offers people a glimpse into the complex mechanisms that make up the underwater vessel as well as the demanding life of submariners. The diesel-electric submarine was inducted into the Navy on December 18, 1969 and was decommissioned on February 28, 2001 after 31 years of distinguished service to the country. The entire submarine, including the armament package, was lifted from the sea and placed on a concrete foundation on Ramakrishna Beach Road. The submarine is 91.3 metres long and 8 metres wide. On April 30, 2002, the State government ordered the transfer of the entire submarine, including the surrounding areas developed for the museum, to the Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA) for maintenance

and upkeep. The museum was thrown open to the public by the then Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on August 14, 2002.

Opposite the submarine museum is the Tu-142 Aircraft Museum, featuring a Tupolev (Tu) 142M aircraft, a massive Soviet-era anti-submarine warfare aircraft that was a vital cog in India's naval aviation. The aircraft was converted into museum following its decommission on March 29, 2017, after 29 years of service. On the campus of the museum is an exhibition hall that displays equipment and aircraft parts such as sonobuoys, propellers, an engine, a survival kit and an anti-submarine missile. The premises also house a 'Sea Harrier Museum', made out of a decommissioned Sea Harrier jump jet. The unique British-origin fighter jets, capable of vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL), were inducted into the Navy in 1983, and they operated from both of India's first two aircraft carriers—INS Vikrant and INS Viraat—for a considerable period of time till both the ships were decommissioned. Here, visitors can get an insight into the life of a fighter pilot, who operated from both ship and land. The Visakha Museum, located near the YSR Junction, showcases artefacts such as musical instruments and military equipment from the Kalingandhra region. Inaugurated on October 8, 1991 by the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh N. Janardhana Reddy, it opens a vista into the rich heritage and history of the Telugu people. A similar facility, 'Telugu Museum', is located atop Kailasagiri in the city and is visited by tourists from across the State as well as those from Odisha, West Bengal, Telangana and Chhattisgarh.VMRDA Metropolitan Commissioner K.S. Viswanathan says that another defence-related museum is coming up on the beach. He said a decommissioned Sikorsky UH-3H helicopter was being converted into a museum. It will come up near the Tu-142 Museum and the INS Kursura Museum, he said. The large special operations and search-and-rescue helicopter was inducted into Indian Naval Air Squadron 350 at INS Dega and named 'Saaras' on March 24, 2009. It was decommissioned on June 28,

## Charting a route for IORA under India's chairship

GNS News Agency, March 25

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is an apex regional organisation that promotes open regionalism between the countries of Asia, Africa and Australia, connected via Indian Ocean waters. As the Indian leadership prepares to step up to chair IORA from November 2025 — it is now Vice-Chair — it can bring impetus to increased resilience in its governance structure. As IORA chair for the next two years, India will have three priorities: creating funding opportunities to enlarge IORA's budget; integrating technology for data management and policy analysis, and creating maritime-ready courses with academic and research institutions using collaborations.

The Indian Ocean Region and IORAGeostrategically, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is a subset of the Indo-Pacific, yet unique. The Indian Ocean, home to two-thirds of humanity, has a rich and diverse marine life. It also transports 75% of global trade and 50% of daily oil consumption. It produces \$1 trillion in goods and services, and its intra-IORA trade was \$800 billion in 2023. However, this region is also marred by poor development, troubled political systems, climate change-induced disasters, and environmental degradation. It also faces security challenges such as piracy, terrorism, and human and drug trafficking. These supranational issues compel the regional countries to cooperate and find workable solutions.

Therefore, as one of the oldest regional inter-governmental organisations, IORA has been working to further cooperation among its members by facilitating dialogue on cultural and academic exchanges and crucial issues such as disaster risk management. While the United States, China and the European Union are IORA's dialogue partners, it is mainly driven by only middle and small powers and, therefore, requires a tour de force to become more relevant.

Issues faced by IORAThe Indian Ocean region is relatively free of the great power competition yet has its own set of challenges, including funding. IORA's annual budget is member-dependent. Barring Singapore, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and France, the member-states are developing Asian and African economies. The budget is indicated to be just a few million. Incidentally, the Indian Ocean Commission, which has only five IO countries, has a \$1.3 billion budget for the 2020-25 time frame. Thus, the funds generated fall short of achieving IORA's growing areas of engagement such as maritime safety and security, fisheries management, disaster risk management, technology and innovation, and the blue economy.

Notably, each of these pillars is resource-intensive and requires constant engagement. One way to generate more funds would be to include private players as consultative partners as they are some of the biggest players in the maritime domain. From shipping companies to marine-re-



lated industries such as oil and gas, and marine tourism, these industries are relevant to the blue economy. These industries can be involved in maritime policy-making and also contribute to the IORA fund. The IORA has a small Secretariat with limited staff based in Mauritius. Since government-based structures and institutions have limited bandwidth for data processing, technology can be a big help in improving governance. Accounting for data is laborious with a large margin of error, and quick and efficient policy analysis would be made easier with digitised record keeping. Other suggestions for India

India's Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) vision rplements IORA's objectives and must leverage its excellent relations with IORA member-states to develop workable solutions. IORA members, such as Australia, have made significant contributions to research in marine science and technology. France and Singapore, have their strength in marine-related technologies, and the UAE and Oman can contribute through investments in sectors where IORA seeks help. Traditional knowledge that exists in coastal and small island nations (Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Mauritius) should be mainstreamed for developing sustainable methods of marine governance. To further productive outcomes, IORA needs sustained and improved collaborative avenues. Lastly, as marine and maritime-related employment opportunities will only multiply, industrial leaders should collaborate with educational and research institutions to provide problem statements and seek solutions, and to create newer, industry-related courses. Marine accounting is an interdisciplinary course that could help create a base for a blue economy. With the available talent in the region, scholars and practitioners are most likely to work out solutions.IORA holds immense promise for regional prosperity and India must use its leadership to overcome the existing issues at the institutional level. Pooia Bhatt is an Associate Professor at O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonepat and teaches maritime geopolitics and regional in-

### Charting a route for IORA under India's chairship

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is an apex regional organisation that promotes open regionalism between the countries of Asia, Africa and Australia, connected via Indian Ocean waters. As the Indian leadership prepares to step up to chair IORA from November 2025 — it is now Vice-Chair — it can bring impetus to increased resilience in its governance structure. As IORA chair for the next two years, India will have three priorities: creating funding opportunities to enlarge IORA's budget; integrating technology for data management and policy analysis, and creating maritime-ready courses with academic and research institutions using collaborations.

Geostrategically, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is a subset of the Indo-Pacific, yet unique. The Indian Ocean, home to two-thirds of humanity, has a rich and diverse marine life. It also transports 75% of global trade and 50% of daily oil consumption. It produces \$1 trillion in goods and services, and its intra-IORA trade was \$800 billion in 2023. However, this region is also marred by poor development, troubled political systems, climate change-induced disasters, and environmental degradation. It also faces security challenges such as piracy, terrorism, and human and drug trafficking. These supranational issues compel the regional countries to cooperate and find workable solutions. Therefore, as one of the oldest regional inter-governmental organisations, IORA has been working to further

cooperation among its members by facilitating dialogue on

cultural and academic exchanges and crucial issues such as disaster risk management. While the United States, China and the European Union are IORA's dialogue partners, it is mainly driven by only middle and small powers and, therefore, requires a tour de force to become more relevant.

Issues faced by IORAThe Indian Ocean region is relatively free of the great power competition yet has its own set of challenges, including funding. IORA's annual budget is member-dependent. Barring Singapore, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and France, the member-states are developing Asian and African economies. The budget is indicated to be just a few million. Incidentally, the Indian Ocean Commission, which has only five IO countries, has a \$1.3 billion budget for the 2020-25 time frame. Thus, the funds generated fall short of achieving IORA's growing areas of engagement such as maritime safety and security, fisheries management, disaster risk management, technology and innovation, and the blue economy. Notably, each of these pillars is resource-intensive and requires constant engagement. One way to generate more funds would be to include private players as consultative partners as they are some of the biggest players in the maritime domain. From shipping companies to marine-related industries such as oil and gas, and marine tourism, these industries are relevant to the blue economy. These industries can be involved in maritime policy-making and also contribute to the IORA

### A riot in Nagpur over a long-dead emperor's tomb



GNS News Agency, March 25

On the evening of March 17, Mohammed Aslam, a 61-year-old realtor, was sitting in his office with his son, 31-year-old Sohil Shaikh, in the Motha Taj Bagh area of Nagpur in Maharashtra, when he got a call from his wife, Shakeela Banu.Banu sounded really scared, recalls Aslam. "She said riots were taking place near our house and asked us to come home immediately. But minutes later, she urged us to stay put saying the situation had worsened," he says.Leaders Condemn 'Pre-Meditated' Nagpur Violence Amid Aurangzeb Tomb Protest

Political leaders and activists have strongly condemned the violence that erupted in Nagpur last evening over protests related to the tomb of Mughal ruler Aurangzeb. Several leaders have called the incident "pre-planned" and urged authorities to take strict action against those responsible. The clashes led to curfews being imposed in affected areas, with security forces deployed to maintain order. Aslam's home is 15 kilometres from his office in Mahal. His is the only Muslim family in the neighbourhood. Mahal. His house is located barely a kilometre from Dr. Hedgewar Bhawan, the headquarters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS is the ideological fountainhead of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the ruling party both at the Centre and in Maharashtra.

Defying Banu's warning, Aslam and Shaikh rushed back, parked their car a few blocks away, and ran towards their house. They recall standing like human shields at the centre of the violence, pleading for calm, as hundreds of people hurled stones and abuses at each other, and torched vehicles. "With our hands raised, we kept screaming, 'Stop, stop, stop!" says Aslam. "We didn't think twice," says Sohil. "The rioters, who were Muslim, were not from our area and didn't recognise us. They began attacking us, too. They broke my phone and the CCTV cameras, and threw stones at our house."

Aslam says, "Hindus then started throwing stones in defence, so we had to control both sides." Aslam, who has spent his whole life in Mahal, has never seen communal strife in the area. According to the police, early that morning, members of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a rightwing organisation; and the Bajrang Dal, its youth wing, assembled at Chitnis Park Chowk in Mahal. They demanded that the tomb of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, which dates back to the 17th century AD and which is located 500 km away in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district, be demolished. Aurangzeb, who had tortured and executed the second ruler of the Maratha empire, Chhatrapati (protector of the people) Sambhaji Maharaj, died more than 300 years ago. Sambhaji Maharaj was the son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the founder of the Maratha empire in the Indian subcontinent. While there were similar protests taking place elsewhere in Maharashtra, the protests in Nagpur took a violent turn when demonstrators set fire to a chadar (cloth). This angered Muslims. The police say this was inscribed with verses from the Quran. Hundreds of people then started attacking homes with stones, petrol bombs, and sticks. As tensions flared, 33 police personnel and five civilians sustained injuries. The colours of violence

Saffron flags flutter from the rooftops of homes and establishments in Mahal. A day after the incident, fading streaks of pink, yellow, and blue powder cover the roads and walls. These are the remnants of Holi, which was celebrated three days before the riots, on March 14. The signs of rampage are also evident everywhere. Blackened cars and two-wheelers lie damaged, with their frames twisted. There are stones and cement blocks on the streets and a faint smell of ash in the air.

Shaikh's neighbour, Swati Prashanth Dahikar, who runs a boutique, recalls what she describes as the "most terrifying moments of her life". "I get goosebumps just talking about the incident. I couldn't sleep the entire night, fearing something else might happen," says Dahikar, who remembers trying to protect herself and her 21-year-old daughter. Astha, from the rioters, "The mob threw our air cooler and started hurling stones and glass through the window. They kicked our doors and hit them with sticks and rods. Some of the rioters were on foot, some were on bikes. and all of them had covered their faces. Though it all lasted less than 10 minutes, it was simply frightening," says Dahikar, sitting in the hall of her house, which also functions as a workshop for her business. She trembles while pointing to the video footage of the violence that plays out on a Marathi news channel on TV.

According to Dahikar and the police, the mob entered the neighbourhood around 7.30 p.m., carrying bags filled with stones, and small packets and bottles of petrol. "As soon as some men from our locality gathered together and started throwing stones and sticks back in defence, the mob retreated," says Dahikar.The rioters moved from Mahal to Hansapuri, another area in Nagpur. Seema Gupta, a homemaker, says they came to her house, just 4 km away from Dahikar's house, in Hansapuri, at around 10.30 p.m.Gupta says her multi-storey building had been partially demolished as part of a road-widening project some time ago. "The rioters caused another round of destruction," she says, pointing to charred portions outside her house. "They set on fire more than a dozen vehicles parked in front of my house. We were terrified that the flames would spread inside."

Residents claim that the police were unprepared to handle the riots. "The police came late, and when they did, they did not seem equipped to control the situation. They took refuge in our homes. At least six officers were inside my house while the rioters were roaming the streets," says Sunil Peshne, a farmer who lives in Chitnis Park and whose car was torched by the mob.

The day after the riots, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, a legislator from the Nagpur South West Assembly constituency, held the Hindi film, Chhaava, depicting the life of Sambhaji Maharaj, responsible for the violence. Speaking in the State Assembly, he said the film's graphic portrayal of Aurangzeb's torture of Sambhaji Maharaj had "fuelled public anger" against the Mughal emperor. "This looks like it was a well-planned attack. People should not take law and order into their hands," he said. Chhaava hit the theatres on February 14 and has grossed more than ?550 crore at the box office till date. The film, directed by Laxman Utekar, sparked extreme reactions from the audience. In one video that went viral on social media, a man was seen vandalising a cinema screen

during an emotional moment in the film. Another video showed a fan riding a horse into a theatre, chanting "Har Har Mahadev!" Criticising the film for being "historically inaccurate", Samajwadi Party MP Abu Azmi first triggered controversy on March 3 while talking to the media in the Assembly premises. He said that Aurangzeb was not a "cruel administrator" and had "constructed many temples". The Mumbai Police registered a case against him. Azmi was suspended from the Assembly for the Budget session.

But the anger did not die down. On March 7. a descendant of Shivaji Maharaj, Udayanraje Bhosale, who is a Lok Sabha MP from Satara, called for the demolition of Aurangzeb's tomb while speaking to the media in Satara. A few days later, Fadnavis said at an event that while they all share the same sentiment (as Bhosale), the tomb is a protected monument of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and any action to remove it must comply with legal procedures. Responding to the Chief Minister's latest statement that the riots were provoked by Chhaava, the Maharashtra president of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) party, Imtiaz Jaleel, says, "Chhaava was promoted by the government. The entire Maharashtra Cabinet was taken to the theatre to watch the film. Now Mr. Fadnavis is blaming the film for the violence. There are so many important topics that need to be discussed, but Parliament and the State Assembly are busy discussing Aurangzeb. When the BJP is in power in both the Centre and the State, why are they playing such dirty politics?"

A driver in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district, where Aurangzeb's tomb lies, says he took his 10-year-old son to watch the film because he believes that it is important for every Marathi to know the story. He says, "My son was agitated after watching the film. I told him this is just a story from the past. But when he grows up, he must decide what side he takes."

As violence escalated in Nagpur, which is represented by the Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, in the Lok Sabha, the police imposed a curfew in 11 areas. On March 20, they partially lifted the curfew. Nagpur Police Commissioner Ravinder Singal says the police have filed 13 First Information Reports and arrested 99 people so far, including Fahim Khan, the city head of the Minority Democratic Party. Khan has been accused of sedition and spreading misinformation on social media during the unrest. The police allege that a woman constable was molested during the violence.

The police say restoring normalcy was their top priority not only because Nagpur is the headquarters of the RSS, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, or because it is represented by Fadnavis and Gadkari, but also because Prime Minister Narendra Modi is visiting the district on March 30, on the occasion of Gudipadva, the first day of the Hindu calendar. Modi will lay the foundation stone for the Madhav Eye Hospital, an RSS-backed initiative. He is also likely to go to the Hedgewar Smruti Mandir, a memorial dedicated to K.B. Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar, leaders of the RSS. This will mark his first visit to the site since becoming Prime Minister and the first visit to the site by any sitting Prime Minister.

While the VHP has denied any involvement in the burning of the chadar, the police say they have video evidence. Local leaders also allege that protesters set the chadar on fire. However, Fadnavis denied in the Assembly that any cloth with Quranic verses was burnt. In a video message, VHP general secretary Milind Parande said, "Houses of Bajrang Dal workers were attacked. The Muslim mob targeted many houses of the Hindu community and even women were not spared. We condemn all this strongly. It is extremely shameful that on one hand, the lie was spread that the Hindu community had burnt the verses of the holy book of a community and on the other hand, a despicable attempt was made to incite violence." He added that strict action should be taken against all anti-social elements. Shakib ur Rehman, a leader of the AIMIM from Nagpur, says, "As Muslims, we have no objections people burning effigies of Aurangzeb. But why target the chadar, which is inscribed with verses from the Quran?"Although the State government labelled the violence as "pre-planned," the police say they managed to contain it in a few hours and prevent it from spilling over into other parts of the city. According to a senior police official, the police force across the State remained on high alert to ensure that the unrest did not spread to other cities and towns, especially Sambhajinagar.

At the heart of the controversyln Khuldabad town in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district lies Aurangzeb's austere tomb, at the heart of the controversy, surrounded by barricades. It is March 19. District Superintendent of Police (Rural), Vinay Kumar Rathod, says security has increased over the last eight days. Tourists continue to trickle in. Later that day, the tomb was covered by the ASI with tin sheets.

Police and State Reserve Police Force personnel, ASI staff, and home guards with vans outside the property are all on duty. "There is no conflict here, but we have to be on duty. Prevention is better than cure," says a SRPF member.Rathod says, "We have restricted tourists and visitors from offering flowers at the tomb. From March 19 to April 18, we have banned the use of drones in the area."

Every day, the security personnel deployed here participate in sehri (the morning meal eaten by Muslims before the sun comes up during Ramadan) and iftari (evening meal at the time of Ramadan) with the tomb's caretakers and workers. Parvez Kabir Ahmed, a 31-year-old caretaker of the tomb, is a khadim (priest). Ahmed's family has taken care of the tomb for six generations. "Aurangzeb was born in 1618 in Dahod (now Gujarat) and passed away in 1707. His body was brought here. He did not want any tomb over his mazaar (shrine) and wanted to be laid here like an ordinary man, under the open sky," he says. "In 1921, Lord Curzon, the British Viceroy of India, was disappointed when he visited the tomb and asked the Nizam of Hyderabad to beautify it with a marble floor and marble lattice screen."

Police personnel prepare for iftaar inside the dargah complex in Khuldabad in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar.

In the same premises lies the tomb of Aurangzeb's teacher, Khwaja Syed Zainuddin Shirazi. This portion is privately owned and maintained with the help of donations from visitors. The caretaker Javed Ahmed, 58, says, "Most people who come here are history enthusiasts and have a secular mindset. We have many non-Muslim visitors throughout the year. They offer flowers and chadar on the tomb," he says, Parvez's uncle Nisar Ahmad, 65, a senior caretaker of Aurangzeb's tomb, lives in Bazaargalli village behind the tomb. He regrets undergoing knee replacement surgery at a time when the area is under heavy police security. "Khuldabad has always been a secular society where people have lived together in harmony for generations," he says. "All this is happening because a few miscreants are trying to cause communal disputes. It is always the poor and jobless youth who are pushed to the front of these protests. And they are the ones who die or get injured, not the people who ignite the flames."Ahmad is particularly upset about the timing of the controversy.

Ranga Reddy | WEDNESDAY26 MARCH 2025

## How M-cups are slowly but surely transforming menstrual hygiene in south India



It was her first time using a menstrual cup, but Ashwini (name changed), a Chennai native, was more curious than apprehensive. "It involves insertion [into the vagina], so I was a little unsure. There was some initial discomfort, but after a few tries, I got used to it," says the 38-year-old.

Ms. Ashwini was one of the beneficiaries of the Thinkal project, as part of which about 2,000 menstrual cups, or Mcups, were distributed for free in select areas of North and South Chennai over the past two years. The project, launched by HLL Lifecare Limited — a government-owned company under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare — was then expanded to other parts of Tamil Nadu, including Dindigul, Erode, and Thanjavur.

Menstrual hygiene challengesMenstrual hygiene remains a significant challenge in India, particularly in lowincome settings, due to deeply rooted social and cultural beliefs and limited awareness. Common products like sanitary napkins and tampons are expensive, placing them out of the reach of many women, who are then forced to rely on unhygienic alternatives, which can cause numerous health issues and lead to poor reproductive health. Sanitary napkins and tampons also contribute substantially to environmental waste. Menstrual cups, on the other hand, are widely considered healthy, safe, and affordable alternatives. An M-cup is essentially a device that is inserted into the vagina during menstruation to collect blood. The cups distributed under the Thinkal project are made of non-absorbent, reusable, medical-grade silicone, and are bell-shaped, sealing against the wall of the vagina, just below the cervix. They can ideally be used for 6-12 hours depending on blood flow, must be boiled in water after each period, can be reused for a minimum of five years, and are suitable even when water

Sapna Raina, Senior Consultant and Clinical Lead in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department, Narayana Health City, Bengaluru, says menstrual cups have been shown to improve menstrual hygiene, when compared to cloth, sanitary pads, or even tampons. "Unlike cloth or sanitary pads, there are no issues of chafing with menstrual cups. They are also less likely to cause infections," she says.

During the 2018 Kerala floods, women in relief camps in Alappuzha — one of the worst-hit districts — faced se-

## Understanding the risks around acne treatment, and making safe choices

Acne is one of the most common of skin conditions, affecting millions of people worldwide. Over the years, benzoyl peroxide (BPO) has been a trusted ingredient in acne treatment, valued for its antibacterial properties and ability to reduce inflammation. However, recent concerns regarding benzene contamination in certain BPO-based acne products have raised questions about their safety. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), last week, issued a recall for several acne treatments after detecting in them, elevated levels of benzene, a known carcinogen. While the issue has been flagged in the U.S., it highlights broader concerns for global consumers, including those in India, where BPObased products are widely used. Understanding the risks associated with benzene contamination, as well as the necessary precautions, is essential for ensuring safe skincare choices. What is benzene?

Benzene is a volatile organic compound classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). Prolonged exposure is linked to serious health issues, including leukaemia, blood disorders, and immune system damage. In the case of acne products, benzene contamination is not an intentional ingredient but a by-product of chemical degradation. Studies suggest that under certain conditions—such as exposure to heat, sunlight, or improper formulation—benzoyl peroxide can break down, leading to the formation of benzene. Given India's climate, where high temperatures and humidity are common, the potential for such degradation is a valid concern. A study published in JAMA Dermatology investigated the role of product formulation in the formation of benzene within BPO products. The research highlighted that specific formulation factors, such as the inclusion of antioxidants and the method of processing (hot vs. cold), significantly influence benzene levels. Notably, leave-on BPO products generally exhibited lower benzene concentrations compared to wash-off products. ?Rochelle Monteiro, professor of dermatology, Father Muller Medical College, Mangalore and member of the Acne Special Interest Group (SIG), Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL)Centre, explains the risks: "Benzoyl peroxide is generally considered safe when used correctly, but the presence of benzene raises a red flag. Heat and improper storage conditions can accelerate the degradation process, increasing the risk of contamination. Patients using these products must be mindful of how they store them." She emphasizes that Indian consumers must be cautious, as regulatory oversight in over-the-counter skincare products is still evolving.

Several BPO-based acne products have been implicated in recent recalls, including La Roche-Posay Effaclar Duo, Proactiv Emergency Blemish Relief, and Walgreens Acne Control Cleanser. While these brands may not be directly available in India, similar formulations are sold under different names, making it crucial for consumers to stay informed. In India, BPO-based acne treatments are widely available under various brand names. Improper storage conditions, such as exposure to heat and light, can accelerate the degradation process, increasing the likelihood of benzene formation.? Many people rely on international ecommerce platforms or purchase imported skincare products without verifying batch details. "Consumers often assume that if a product is widely used abroad, it is automatically safe. But regulatory standards differ, and recalls in one country don't always translate to bans elsewhere," warns Dr. Monteiro. Given the potential risks, choosing safe and stable formulations of benzoyl peroxide is essential.

vere difficulties accessing and disposing of sanitary pads. The Thinkal project was launched in the Alappuzha municipality that same year to address some of these concerns. The programme involved identifying beneficiaries, educating them about the use of M-cups before their distribution, and analysing the product's acceptability through feedback. This was done with the help of anganwadis, civic bodies, healthcare workers, local NGOs, self-help groups, medical practitioners, and the State government. Thinkal was soon extended to other parts of Kerala, and in two villages in particular — Kumbalangi in Ernakulam and Kallikkad in Thiruvananthapuram — the acceptance of M-cups was so high that they were declared 'sanitary napkin-free' grama panchayats.

Besides Kerala and Tamil Nadu, over 10 lakh cups have been distributed under the project across six States and two Union Territories — Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Haryana, Lakshadweep, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as of March 2025. "This is an end-to-end activity; it starts with awareness and ends with post-supply support. We also have a dedicated helpline if the beneficiaries have any questions or concerns," explains Harikrishnan Namboothiripad, Associate Vice President at HLL, adding that the project focuses mainly on women from lower economic sections of society, in urban, rural, and tribal areas. "In certain areas we have taken our project to, M-cups are seen as an alternative to sanitary napkins, but in certain other places — for example, in the tribal villages of Jharkhand — women don't even have access to menstrual hygiene products. So, for them, this is the primary menstrual hygiene product," he

The adoption of a menstrual hygiene device like a menstrual cup, however, is neither easy nor quick, primarily because it requires insertion into the vagina, which is tied to various physical, social, and cultural perceptions. This is a concept that demands a high level of awareness, says Mr. Harikrishnan. There will be challenges when establishing a new concept, so frequent follow-ups are necessary to ensure sustained use, he adds.

An independent study conducted in 2021-22 on the project implemented under the Cochin Corporation limits, which involved 704 users of M-cup, showed an acceptance rate of 84.6%, meaning nearly 600 respondents continued to use the product during their period. Beneficiaries of the age group 25-35 years were more confident in using the cup, whereas those between 41 and 45 years were the least confident. Another independent study from 2020-21, published in Public Health in Practice, which examined the progress of the project in Alappuzha, also observed that there was a higher acceptance of menstrual cups among women in the age group of 25-45 years. Moreover, the usage was higher among beneficiaries who attended the awareness sessions than those who did not, the study found. As far as non-users were concerned, both studies noted that a lack of confidence in the menstrual cup, the fear that it might get stuck in the vagina, the discomfort of

using it in a public toilet, the fear of catching infections, the pain during insertion, the lack of support from family, and the fear of leakage were some of their major apprehensions. "The biggest challenge we have come across is fear. No matter how many awareness sessions we conduct or how many medical professionals we bring in, this fear needs to be addressed from within," says Krishna S.H., manager, Public Health Initiatives, HLL.

Dr. Krishna says they try to tackle this fear by using uterus models to show how the menstrual cup is inserted and how it is placed inside the vagina. "When a person is inserting it for the first time, it may not happen properly. This initial discomfort will trigger an apprehension, and they might stop using it," she adds. The key is to keep going, and having peer support helps, she says.Dr. Krishna says awareness among doctors and medical professionals is also necessary to make a project like this work, "Often, when women face some discomfort after using the product, they might end up consulting their local doctor. And these doctors may shame them for using a menstrual cup due to certain preconceived notions, which in turn might dissuade the users. Therefore, we make it a point to conduct classes for doctors too."While the post-supply studies from Kerala focused mainly on married women, Dr. Krishna says among adolescents, a major factor that contributes to the fear of usage of M-cups is the idea of hymen tear. When the device is inserted, it opens up from the inside. In some cases, it can lead to the hymen tearing or stretching, but this concept is shrouded in misinformation, she says. In India, the hymen is falsely considered an indicator of a woman's virginity, with the social practice of ensuring a newly-married woman has bled after sex often seen as proof of her chastity.Dr. Sapna says: "The hymen is a thin tissue that can stretch and tear due to other activities as well, like while playing a sport or cycling. Does that mean that we should stop those activities? The hymen is not an indicator of virginity." Adding that there is a need to create awareness about this, she says the concept of virginity itself is flawed as it puts a heavy burden on young girls and women, and if they don't satisfy certain conditions of virginity, they may be subjected to gender-based violence.

Dr. Krishna says the premise of the Thinkal project was to raise awareness among mothers first, and let them take the product to their daughters. "We conduct a need assessment survey before launching the project in any place. In Chennai, for instance, it focused mainly on married women. But now, we are slowly moving on to college students and the adolescent population because they have shown a lot of interest in the product," she adds.Moreover, perceptions are changing, Dr. Krishna says, adding that their studies observe that about 50% of mothers who have become comfortable with menstrual cups recommend it to their daughters.Ms. Ashwini, for instance, has a seven-year-old daughter. "When she gets her period, I will make sure this is her first product. I have been saving a lot of money by using menstrual cups, it doesn't leak, and it is very comfortable," she says.

### Meghalaya ramps up TB detection, registers a 126 % surge in presumptive TB examinations

death rate that hasn't indicated a significant fall, the land-locked Northeast state of Meghalaya has now ramped up its TB detection leading to a 126 % surge in presumptive TB examinations as per the latest data released by the State government. Data released indicates that testing has been increased from 845 people per lakh in 2015 to 1,911 per lakh in 2025."This effort is aimed at breaking the last stage diagnosis cycle and preventable deaths. We want to offer treatment as a first line of defence," said Abhilash Baranwal, deputy commissioner, RiBhoi district, Meghalaya.He added that the State is part of the Central government's ongoing 100 day intensified TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyan campaign to accelerate efforts in finding missing TB cases, reducing deaths, and preventing new infections, particularly in high-burden districts, through community involvement and targeted interventions

Meghalaya has brought in cutting-edge technology to detect and treat the



disease faster, including Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAAT) Machines and portable X-rays. "We have pushed up NAAT machines from 29 in 2021 to 80 in 2024. Additionally, 15 mobile X-ray units have been strategically deployed across the seven districts. This is to ensure that even the most isolated communities receive life saving screening and diagnostics," said B. Shanpra, district TB officer, East Khasi Hills, Shillong. The State has also brought in zero-cost diagnostics with all necessary laboratory tests and investigations fully covered. Amica Joan Rynjah, assistant programme officer, National

TB Elimination Programme,

Meghalaya explained that the 100-day TB Elimination Campaign is being implemented in five districts where the burden of the disease is relatively high: East Khasi Hills, Ribhoi, East Garo Hills, West Garo hills and South Garo hills. The programme notified 4,573 TB cases in 2024 in Meghalaya, and since December 7, 867 patients have tested positive for TB. The death rate of TB has been 5 to 6 per cent over the past 4 years and has now started falling. The State has also introduced free transportation for TB patients and one attendant — from home to the health facility and back."We are giving nutritional support

of ?2,000 per month to boost

immunity and ensure faster recovery for patients and their families, and are also providing skill development to those who have recovered. Health is a community subject and the idea is to ensure that patients recover fast and well, so that the disease doesn't push them into an economic crisis," said Ramkumar S, secretary and MD, National Health Mission, Shillong.

He added that the

He added that the Meghalaya comprehensive TB Care Programme also covers adolescents and makes them aware of TB through social media influencers, organising testing camps at educational institutes etc. "Catching patients early, offering robust treatment, ensuring that they stay on the treatment course and also that they stay safe from the disease in the future is vital. The patient-first approach is not just about fighting TB, it is about tackling economic and social challenges to quality TB care and reducing barriers to care for a disease that has a challenging treatment regimen and is often deeply

stigmatised," he added.

#### Raids reveal food safety violations at Kshatriya Foods, Varalaxmi Tiffins

Hyderabad: Violations of food safety norms were observed by Commissioner of Food Safety teams during their inspection of Varalaxmi Tiffins, Gachibowli and Kshatriya Foods, Kavuri Hills.

At Varalaxmi Tiffins, the kitchen was found in unhygienic condition with unclean walls and broken flooring including rats that were seen outside the kitchen area, exhaust was greasy and oil was found to be dripping. There was water stagnation due to clogged drains and food waste was being thrown directly into the drain and not being removed regularly, the inspecting team reported.

At Kshatriya Foods, Kavuri Hills, the flooring was found to be dirty with broken tiles and water stagnation was observed. The chimneys were found greasy with oil/grease dripping down. The drainage was found to be clogged with food waste and houseflies were found in vegetable cutting area. The refrigerator was found in unhygienic condition. The vegetarian and non-veg food stored together. Chicken/Mutton blood found seeping and frozen.



At Varalaxmi Tiffins, the kitchen was found in unhygienic condition with unclean walls and broken flooring including rats that were seen outside the kitchen area, exhaust was greasy and oil was found to be dripping. There was water stagnation due to clogged drains and food waste was being thrown directly into the drain and not being removed regularly, the inspecting team reported.

## Unqualified persons offering dermatological treatments in Karala has lad to spike in

Kerala has led to spike in health issues: skin specialists



Skin specialists in Kerala have flagged an alarming trend of unauthorised practitioners and beauticians offering dermatological treatment in clinics across the State. Dental surgeons, practitioners of Ayurveda, homoeopathy, naturopathy, and Unani, beauty parlour staff who are not qualified, those holding unrecognised or overseas degrees such as postgraduate diplomas in clinical cosmetology, DSc (Dermatology), and MSc (Dermatology), and even some doctors holding MBBS degrees with unrecognised diplomas are reportedly treating patients. An anti-quackery cell of the Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists, and Leprologists (IADVL) has identified 25 such "clinics" in Kozhikode, 20 in Kannur, and 10 in Malappuram districts.

According to S.V. Rakhesh, president, IADVL, Kerala, there has been a surge in dermatological complications over the past two years due to several procedures and treatments being performed by such unqualified persons. Many of these centres operate by displaying the name of a qualified dermatologist on their boards, while actual treatments are carried out by unqualified staff and quacks, he says. Recently, a patient suffered severe side effects after undergoing a dermatological procedure conducted by a dentist in north Kerala. Burns, scars, and pigmentary changes are being reported from improperly performed laser procedures. Disfigurement, skin necrosis, and nerve damage are seen due to poorly administered Botox treatment to reduce wrinkles and dermal filler procedures, he says.

Other IADVL functionaries point out that platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injections are being given even in beauty parlours projected as "clinics". Severe infections, hair loss, and scarring are resulting from botched hair transplants and PRP therapy. Multiple cases of tuberculosis infections were reported from an unsterile hair transplant centre. Another major concern is the uncontrolled and unethical prescription of potent dermatological medications—especially topical steroids—by these unauthorised practitioners. Such misuse leads to severe skin complications, worsens underlying conditions, and often results in irreversible damage, doctors say.

Who can treat dermatological conditions?

Only individuals holding recognised medical degrees such as MD (Dermatology), Diploma in Venereology and Dermatology, Diploma in Dermatology, or DNB (Dermatology) are authorised to diagnose and treat skin, hair, and nail conditions, including performing specialised dermatological procedures.IADVL functionaries claim that social media has become a breeding ground for deceptive advertisements by unqualified people posing as skin specialists. Gullible patients, lured by flashy promotions and misleading testimonials, often fall prey to these practices, they say.

The IADVL Kerala unit has now filed complaints with District Collectors, district medical officers, the president of the Dental Council of India, and the chairperson, National Council for Clinical Establishments. The anti-quackery cell has also launched reels and posters on social media to raise awareness about the problem. QR code scanners are being installed at clinics run by IADVL members so that members of the public can check their credentials.

## Childhood obesity is indicator of risk of developing chronic lung disease later: Study



New Delhi: Children overweight or obese may be at an increased risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in adulthood, according to a study. COPD is a progressive lung disease that makes it hard to breathe and worsens over time. While smoking is a major risk factor for COPD, other risk factors like environmental, occupational, and even early life factors are increasingly being recognised.

The study led by researchers from Copenhagen University in Denmark focuses on examining the link between a high body mass index (BMI) in childhood and COPD.

The team found that compared to women with an average childhood BMI, risks of chronic COPD were 10 per cent higher for those who had an above-average BMI trajectory. For women with an overweight trajectory, the risk was 26 per cent higher and for those with an obesity BMI trajectory the risk was 65 per cent higher. Similarly, compared to men with an average childhood BMI, the risks of COPD were 7 per cent higher for those with an above-average trajectory. For men with an overweight trajectory, the risk was 16 per cent higher and those with an obesity trajectory the risk was 40 per cent higher.

In contrast, a lower risk of future COPD was observed only for women with a below-average childhood BMI trajectory — 9 per cent lower compared to women with an average childhood BMI trajectory. "Having a BMI trajectory above average in childhood may increase the risk of subsequent COPD. Thus, our results suggest that being overweight during this early period of life is an indicator of risk for the development of COPD," said Frida Richter, from the Center for Clinical Research and Prevention, at the varsity. The study included data from 276,747 Danish children (137,493 girls) born from 1930-1982, who had between 2 and 12 weight and height measurements between ages 6-15 years

### Parliamentary panel urges Centre to extend PLI tenure, curb red tape



PLI tenure, Production Linked Incentive, labour-intensive industries, leather, apparel, toys, jewellery, handicrafts, Indian express news, current affairs"The committee recommends that the scope of the PLI scheme be expanded to include other sectors with high employment potential, such as the chemicals sector and labour-intensive industries like leather, apparel, toys, jewellery, and handicrafts," the panel report stated. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce on Friday gave its recommendation for the government to extend the tenure and scope of the ongoing Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to more sectors and improve its effectiveness by reducing "administrative delays" and "compliance burdens".

"The committee is of the view that the PLI's effectiveness could be further enhanced by extending its duration, reducing administrative delays, and easing compliance burdens. The committee recommends that the scope of the PLI scheme be expanded to include other sectors with high employment potential, such as the chemicals sector and labour-intensive industries like leather, apparel, toys,

jewellery, and handicrafts," the panel report stated. The committee highlighted that capacity development in value-added garments within the man-made fibre (MMF) segment requires government attention. "The government must engage with Export Promotion Councils and other stakeholders to address demands for changes in the PLI scheme, such as covering additional high-potential MMF apparel products and reducing the value addition criteria," the report said.

Regarding the pharmaceutical sector, the panel noted that India's pharmaceutical industry is a significant contributor to foreign trade and has consistently played a crucial role in export growth. "However, obstacles hindering the expansion of pharmaceutical exports need prompt attention. The committee, therefore, suggests that suitable provisions be made in the PLI scheme, in consultation with stakeholders, to safeguard manufacturers against price fluctuations in international markets," the report stated. The panel also fied and are at various stages of implementation. As of December 2023, actual investment of Rs 1.07 lakh crore had been realised, leading to production or sales worth Rs 8.70 lakh crore and the creation of around 7 lakh direct and indirect jobs. Exports have exceeded Rs 3.40 lakh crore, with significant contributions from electronics, pharmaceuticals, and food processing, the report added. Reuters reported on Friday that the government has decided to let the PLI scheme lapse. According to two officials cited in the report, the scheme will not be expanded beyond the 14 pilot sectors, and production deadlines will not be extended despite requests from some participating firms. However, the report stated that the end of the PLI programme does not indicate an abandonment of the government's manufacturing ambitions, since alternative strategies are being planned.

### Grok, unhinged! Who is responsible for AI chatbot's sensational responses on X?

With the Indian government in touch with Elon Musk's X over stirring responses generated by its artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot Grok, the question that many in the government are grappling with is: Who is actually responsible for the retorts that the AI has been producing on the social media platform? Laden with profanities, sweeping takes, colouring some conservative users, including X founder Musk, as the biggest spreaders of misinformation — Grok's responses to questions posed by Indian users have so far turned out to be an amalgamation of the attitudes and demeanour familiar to those who frequently use the social network.

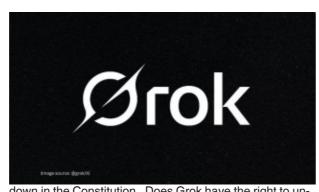
Here are some facts: Grok is not a person, at best, it is a computer code running on high-end compute at the back end, and at its worst, that code periodically churns out the underbelly of the data that has been fed to it. Grok is artificial, its intelligence debatable. So, when Grok uses a misogynist Hindi expletive when responding to a user about their most prominent mutuals, or calls Musk one of the biggest sources of misinformation on the social media platform — it led to people asking Grok a flurry of questions, directly through their posts, or as comments to other posts.

This piece aims to demystify three main concerns around what's happening with Grok: who is responsible for its responses, are the people asking it questions somehow liable, and if Grok is a source of truth.

Who is liable, can people be penalised?

Internet platforms such as X, Meta, and YouTube have legal protection from the content that their users post. This, in law, is called safe harbour — the argument being platforms have no control over what users are posting. They are mere conduits, so they can not be held liable for hosting third-party content. While that convention itself is currently being debated given virality and the potential of speech on such platforms to cause real world harms, the million dollar question is whether Grok, an artificial output generator, can have safe harbour protections.

That is a complex question to deal with for lawmakers. X has told the Indian government that it has been trained on the open-Internet, which presumably also includes content that users post on X. So, in a way, everything that Grok generates is based on what people spending years on the Internet have produced. But can then they be held responsible? That is like asking if the ocean can be sued for being wet. Besides, speech is a highly protected category in India, with the Indian Constitution affording the freedom of expression as a fundamental right, with some reasonable restrictions. But, those rights are available to human beings. Humans' speech should be censored only under select circumstances when they obviously violate restrictions laid



down in the Constitution. Does Grok have the right to unfettered free speech? And what is Grok's free speech even? Its code essentially determines what the next word in a sentence should be, which is a factor of the underlying dataset it has been trained on, which in turn is generated by

Both the code, and the content in the language model. So, many would argue that the liability of Grok's responses primarily lies with xAI, its creators, and X for allowing Grok to produce responses without any filters. But that too raises some pertinent questions. How does one hold creators of an algorithm responsible? Is it the highly-paid people who have written the code, or the low-wage data annotators? These are questions that regulators around the world are unlikely to have a quick, and accurate answer to. "Grok is certainly not a real person, it's an artificial entity. But some of its responses are definitely problematic. It's an interesting, and difficult problem, that us in government will have to figure out," a senior government official said.

Should you trust Grok?

The short answer to that question is, AI responses should not be treated as accurate pieces of information, no matter how much they satiate one's socio-political beliefs. Already, platforms are applying filters on their AI models to restrict their political speech in order to stay safe from government scrutiny.

As India headed to Lok Sabha elections last year, Google said it will restrict the types of election-related questions users can ask its artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot Gemini in the country. Earlier, Krutrim, the chatbot developed by an Indian AI startup founded by Bhavish Aggarwal of Ola, had been found to self-censor on certain keywords. AI platforms are built to predict the next word in a phrase, and to try and satisfy the query a user has asked — and models like Grok have so far shown they will do anything to achieve that, beg, borrow or steal.

## India's oil import dependency on course to hit fresh full-year high in FY25 amid growing demand, stagnant domestic production

Growing demand for fuel and other petroleum products amid stagnant domestic crude oil output led India's reliance on imported crude oil increasing to over 88 per cent in the first 11 months of the current financial year ending March (FY25), indicating that the import dependency for the full financial year could breach the all-time-high level of the last financial year.

Latest data released by the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC) shows that India's oil import dependency was 88.2 per cent in April-February, up from 87.7 per cent in the corresponding period of FY24. For the full FY24, reliance on imported oil was 87.8 per cent. Industry watchers believe that the import dependency level for the entire FY25 could be a tad higher than the April-February level, as was the case in the previous financial year.India's energy needs are consistently growing, leading to higher oil imports. This is fuelled by factors such as growing energy-intensive industries, increased vehicle sales, a rapidly expanding aviation sector, growing consumption of petrochemicals, and a rising population. India's reliance on imported oil has generally increased over the years, with the exception of FY21 when demand was suppressed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. India's oil import dependency was 87.8 per cent in FY24, 87.4 per cent in FY23, 85.5 per cent in FY22, 84.4 per cent in FY21, 85 per cent in FY20, and 83.8 per cent in FY19.

India's heavy reliance on imported crude oil makes its economy vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations. This also impacts the country's trade deficit, foreign exchange re-

serves, the rupee's exchange rate, and inflation rate, among others. The Indian government aims to reduce the country's reliance on imported crude oil but faces challenges due to sluggish domestic oil output amid rising demand. In 2015, the government aimed to reduce reliance on oil imports to 67 per cent by 2022. However, import dependency has only increased. The government has implemented several policy reforms to encourage investments in India's oil and gas exploration and production sector, the latest being the Oilfield (Regulatory and Development) Amendment Bill, which was recently passed by the Parliament. The government is also promoting electric mobility, biofuels, and other alternative fuels to reduce oil imports. While there has been an increase in electric mobility adoption and the blending of biofuels with conventional fuels, it is not sufficient to offset petroleum demand growth. India's crude oil imports rose to 219.9 million tonnes (mt) in the 11 months to February from 213.4 mt in the year-ago period. Meanwhile, domestic oil production declined slightly to 26.2 million tonnes from 26.9 million tonnes. Total domestic consumption of petroleum products in April-February rose 2.6 per cent year-on-year to 218.3 mt, of which only 25.8 mt of products are estimated to have been produced from domestic crude oil, resulting in a selfsufficiency level of just 11.8 per cent, according to PPAC data. The calculation of the extent of import reliance is based on the domestic consumption of petroleum products and excludes petroleum product exports since those volumes do not represent India's demand. India-the world's thirdlargest consumer of crude oil and also one of its top importers—is a net exporter of petroleum products.

#### What's Sunita Williams doing in gravity rehab? Neurologist details body reconditioning exercises that get every space traveller back on their feet



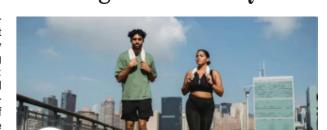
Now that astronaut Sunita Williams is back on terra firma and is going through a process of physical rehabilitation, space travel — which now includes orbital flights with private civilians — presents an extraordinary challenge to the human body. While floating in microgravity may seem effortless, the absence of gravitational forces affects nearly every physiological system. That's why the body takes time to restore its normal functions after adapting to weightlessness. How to counter muscle atrophy and bone lossOn Earth, muscles constantly work against gravity, whether we are standing, walking, or simply maintaining posture. In space, the lack of gravitational resistance leads to muscle atrophy, particularly in the legs, back, and core. That's why astronauts need endurance and motor control upon return. In space, bone density decreases at a rate of 1-2% per month, making astronauts vulnerable to fractures upon their return. Progressive weight-bearing exercises: Treadmill walking, running, and resistance training are key to rebuilding muscle mass and strength Calcium and vitamin D supplementation: These are essential for bone mineralization and recover Hydrotherapy (water-based exercises): This helps reintroduce gravitational load without excessive strain on weakened muscles and bones. How to manage cardiovascular changesOn Earth, gravity pulls blood toward the lower body, but in space, fluids shift upward, causing astronauts to have puffy faces and thinner legs. This redistribution confuses the body's regulatory systems, leading to a reduced production of blood volume, which can cause astronauts to faint and feel dizzy upon returning to Earth. Additionally, without gravity, the heart doesn't have to work as hard to pump blood against resistance, leading to slight cardiac atrophy. Cardiovascular reconditioning: Light cycling, rowing, and swimming gradually rebuild heart strength.

Tilt-table training: Lying on a tilted surface to help the body re-adapt to proper blood flow regulation. Compression garments: These help prevent blood pooling in the lower body, reducing dizziness. Without a constant sense of "up' and "down," astronauts often experience space motion sickness, disorientation, and nausea in the first few days. Upon return to Earth, astronauts struggle with imbalance, dizziness, and delayed reaction times. Balance training: Walking on unstable surfaces, using stability balls, and practising eye-tracking exercises help retrain spatial awareness. Neuromuscular therapy: Activities that challenge coordination and motor control (such as tai chi or virtual reality simulations) accelerate the brain's adaptation back to Earth's environment. Gut health imbalance Gravity plays a significant role in digestion by helping food move downward through the esophagus, stomach, and intestines. In space, food moves more slowly. Space travel alters the gut microbiome, reducing beneficial bacteria. This is compounded by dehydration, which is common in space due to fluid shifts.A lesser-known effect of microgravity is Spaceflight-Associated Neuro-Ocular Syndrome (SANS), when fluid shifts cause increased pressure on the optic nerve, leading to blurry vision and difficulty focussing. This occurs due to flattening of the eyeball and swelling of the optic disc. Eye exercises are needed to restore focus and depth perception while controlled salt and fluid intake reduce intracranial pressure. So even if you are not an astronaut but an orbital traveller, a protocol is available to get you back on

### Is moderate physical activity enough or do you need to exercise longer? Here's busting an online myth

As a practising cardiologist, my discussion with patients often hovers around how they should exercise to get to their desired weight and cardio-vascular functioning. Many ask me if physical activity only counts if you do it for long periods of time. Some even over-stretch themselves. Fact: You don't need to be active for long periods to stay fit. I find that if a patient pushes himself to extreme levels of exercise, his motivation level quickly dies down and he kind of gives up easier than a patient who indulges in moderate levels of exercise. But exercise five to six days a week. You could include about 30 minutes of exercise per day. The period of exercise can further be divided into a warmup phase of about 10 minutes followed by an intensive exercise phase of about 15 minutes and then a cooling down phase of about five minutes. So the total duration could be as low as say 30 minutes in a day. You could break it down to 10 minutes or 15 minutes twice a day

The level of exercise should definitely be enough to push up your heart rate to around 110-120 bpm (beats per minute). If you are a regular exerciser, then push it up to 130 or 140 bpm. This peak level of exercise should last not more than 10 minutes of your total exercise schedule. A good level of exercise should be enough to make you break into a sweat but then not so intense that it leaves you tired. The blood pressure and heart rate tend to go up. However, after you stop exercising, the heart rate and the blood



pressure come down and go below the level recorded at the beginning of the exercise. Over time, there is a more sustained response in the form of lower blood pressure. This beneficial effect may last for as long as eight to 12 hours after exercise. Exercise causes vasodilation, which is a process of opening up the blood vessels so that they can supply blood to tissues better. As for lungs, their capacity increases as you breathe heavier and deeper during exercise. More air, and therefore, oxygen, goes into the body. Moderate exercise lowers the blood pressure in the lungs, enabling oxygen exchange. Gut motility improves too. The happy hormones that get released during moderate exercise are good for brain health. Do not exercise or walk in a group or take office calls as these activities can take your mind off exercise and slow you down. Don't be so slow that your activity becomes boring.

### The 'MEDSRX' formula promises to help boost your immunity: 'Aapko cancer nahi ho sakta'

A robust immune system is the foundation for a healthy life, which can help prevent or manage certain common and even lifethreatening diseases like cancer. In a conversation with podcast host Raj Shamani, Dr Taarang Krishna shared a 6-letter acronym that encapsulates his philosophy to boost immunity and live a healthy life."Agar aapne veh 6 letters follow kar liye, toh aapko cancer nahi ho sakta (If you follow these 6 letters, you cannot develop cancer," he said.According to him, following MEDSRX can pave the road to healthy life. In addition, we asked other experts on their view.

"Every day, pick whichever kind of meditation you want to do, and stick by it." said Dr

Krishna. According to Juhi Pandey, psychologist at Mpower, Aditya Birla Education Trust, meditation and psychological mindfulness focus on awareness, selfreflection, and gaining mental clarity. "From a psychological perspective, it can help achieve a sense of inner calm, greater awareness, and a deeper understanding of oneself by paying full attention to the present moment and observing your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations without judament,"

judgment," she said.Whether you love yoga or Pilates, taking long walks, going on evening runs or functional training in the

gym, Dr Krishna advised



moving your body for at least 30 minutes every day. "Pranayam, anulom vilom, or brisk walking and getting your 10, 000 steps in, whichever suits, juts sweat it out," he suggested.

Dr Deepika Tavade, senior physiotherapist, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Amabni Hospital, Navi Mumbai, said that exercise is a structured, goal-oriented physical exertion designed to improve strength, endurance, flexibility, or cardiovascular fitness, that improves mobility, and plays a crucial role in rehabilitation. For optimal health, focus on daily activity while incorporating structured exercise sessions to build endurance and prevent injuries."Eat clean, preferably vegetarian. Bu if you are a non vegetarian, then opt for chicken and fish. Try to stay away from red meat, " suggested Dr Krishna.

Dt. Umang Malhotra, clinical dietitian at Fitelo, believes that lean protein like chicken and fish are easier to digest than red meat. Avoid having them raw and uncooked. "Grilled or baked chicken and fish that has been thoroughly cooked is a safe option for non-vegetarians," he said.S: Sleep

ians," he said.S: Sleep

"Get 6-8 hours of sleep
every day. Have a set bedtime – try to sleep by 10pm
and wake up at 4, 5 or 6 am
in the morning," he said.Dr
Shreshtha Gupta, assistant
professor at Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi, concurred, stating that the ideal sleeping
time is dependent on one's
age — so for kids, it is 1620 hours and for adults 6-8

hours of night sleep is crucial to maintain the circadian rhythm. "Sleeping less leads to hormonal imbalance, increased cortisol levels (the stress hormone), as well as impaired REM sleep patterns," she explained.

"There is no point of doing anything when the relationships in your life are not strong. Put in effort to nurture and strengthen them, as they have the power to improve the quality of your life and overall wellbeing," Dr Krishna said in the video.Adding, Bhandekar, senior psychologist at Mpower Helpline, said making time for self-care, exercise, hobbies, and quality moments with loved ones can significantly contribute to emotional wellbeing and overall life satisfaction.

#### I saw the madness, big scores and crazy atmosphere of the IPL; I didn't expect to be part of something like that: Nat Sciver-Brunt



GNS News Agency, March 25

Nat Sciver-Brunt was in fabulous form at the WPL. She rattled up scores of 80 n.o., 57, 42, 75 n.o., 18, 37, 38, 69, 77 and 30. And she also picked up 12 wickets to play a big role — like she did in 2023 — in Mumbai Indians' triumph in the world's biggest women's cricket league. The thing with Sciver-Brunt is that she gets into fabulous form often. More often than most cricketers. Little wonder she is already one of the all-time greats. Excerpts from an interview Sciver-Brunt gave In the WPL's first edition, you were the player-of-the-match in the eliminator and the final. You may have been reminded of that, the way you performed this season, too.I have probably surprised myself, to be honest. I have played a lot of cricket in the last few months, not all of that has been as successful as it has been here. So yeah, it's really nice to be able to help contribute to some wins for Mumbai. Winning the first edition was special. I guess everyone's skills were in a great place. So if one person wasn't able to perform on that day, the next person would. I peaked at the right time for that tournament, which was really special

Another all-rounder in the squad, Hayley Matthews, has also been brilliant for MI. And you seem to enjoy each other's company while batting. I am really happy for Hayley because she had been struggling a little bit with her form and she was desperate to score some runs and get into the tournament. So for her to battle away and be there with me and put on a great partnership together was really special. We have had a pretty similar group since year one of Mumbai Indians. It is great to be together out on the pitch.

How did it feel when you were picked by MI in the first

That was pretty mad actually. We were playing a World Cup match whilst the auction was happening. So in our team, some people found out before the game, some people found out after the game. So that whole day was a bit surreal really. And yeah, finding out that I had been bought by Mumbai Indians was a really special moment. Multidimensional: In addition to winning the Orange Cap this season, Sciver-Brunt also claimed 12 wickets to play a big role in Mumbai Indians' second WPL title. | Photo credit: Getty Images

Did you do some number crunching, converting ?3.2 crore into British pounds?

Yes, I looked at the numbers. And were you impressed?

Very impressed. I started playing cricket when we weren't paid and I played in the first WBBL where I spent all of my money quickly. Getting picked for the WPL was a very special moment for me and my family. And we are really grateful for that. And for women's cricket to be heading in that direction is really, really special. I obviously watched the IPL before the WPL came along and saw the madness, the big scores and crazy atmospheres. I didn't expect to be part of something like that. My wife Katherine [Sciver-Brunt] has been a big supporter of RCB.

How do you find being part of MI?

They are a great franchise. They obviously want to win and want to do things really well in terms of the cricket, but also you get looked after really well. And you know, supporters like my dad and Katherine came out to support me. They also got really well looked after. So it is a special franchise to be part of. And we have created a great group, between the players and the coaching staff.

How do you think the WPL is impacting the women's game globally?

Being able to perform under huge pressure is a real positive for young girls growing up, aspiring to want to play for India or for their countries. To be able to perform in that kind of pressure is a very difficult thing to do. It is also a great learning curve for joining an international team. You have been playing at the top level for more than a decade. How much has the women's game changed over the years? It has changed massively, in the way that we play, the scores that we want to achieve and can achieve. And then the media attention around the game. The massive

attention on us brings positive and negative things.

You have played different sports. What made you choose cricket?

I had good hand-eye coordination from tennis and hockey and all sorts of sports, really. I guess by the time I was a bit older, I was playing cricket and football. So at that point, I decided I liked the cricket team more than the football team. I was playing club cricket and playing at my school. I decided I should probably just do one rather than both because I was going to tire myself out. Tough love: Dealing with wife Katherine's bowling has helped Nat improve with the bat. 'She is going to try to take your off-stump out or take your head off. She prepared me for facing some really hard bowlers.' Tough love: Dealing with wife Katherine's bowling has helped Nat improve with the bat. 'She is going to try to take your off-stump out or take your head off. She prepared me for facing some really hard bowlers.' | Photo credit: Getty Images

So you did not want to be an Ellyse Perry and score a lovely goal in the World Cup finals?

I don't think I was good enough for that.

Recently, you became the first woman to make 50-plus scores in six successive Tests. But you have played only 12 Tests since your debut in 2014, as women rarely get to play Tests these days. There is obviously a scheduling problem with playing Test matches, right? So I guess that sort of thing would have to be worked out. But I am glad we get to play at least the multi-format series, like the one against India. I know a lot of countries are really desperate to play Tests.

How do you look back at winning the 2017 World Cup at home?

That was a special tournament, really. Everything sort of fell into line. We probably didn't have the greatest of starts playing against India and coming off the pitch wondering what happened. That tournament sort of kick-started another level of our professionalism, I think. Just for it to be at home, and it was like the stars aligned, really. And to end with an amazing match at Lord's in front of a big crowd. That final, you know, sticks in a lot of people's minds, like a lot of the girls who are young in the England side now remember that game and being inspired by that. Did you watch Harmanpreet Kaur's brilliant knock in the semifinal against

Australia? That changed women's cricket here in India.

I definitely watched some highlights. While the match was on, we must have been training or something like that. When India and Australia come up against each other, it is going to be a big game. So we were keeping one eye on the score. Harman whacked it absolutely everywhere, didn't she?

Synergy: Sciver-Brunt has enjoyed playing under Harmanpreet's captaincy. 'With the bat, she has got a switch that she can flick at any time, really. She can just accelerate things like I haven't really seen anyone else do.' | Photo credit: Emmanual YoginiSynergy: Sciver-Brunt has enjoyed playing under Harmanpreet's captaincy. 'With the bat, she has got a switch that she can flick at any time, really. She can just accelerate things like I haven't really seen anyone else do.' | Photo credit: Emmanual YoginiHarman is always open to that communication with us all, and wants to learn from those experiences that are on the bench. She has got a switch that she can flick at any time, really. She can just accelerate things with the bat like I haven't really seen anyone else do.

The hardest batter you have bowled to?

Alyssa Healy. When she is on, it is extremely difficult to bowl to her. The same with Harman, too, to be fair. There are some people that just can, whatever delivery you bowl, it is as if they were waiting for that delivery.

The toughest bowler you have faced?

Katherine Brunt. She is going to try to take your offstump out or take your head off. With me and her, we never wanted to let the other one in. She prepared me for facing some really hard bowlers. Now it is not easy facing someone like Amelia Kerr. And Jhulan Goswami was also extremely difficult for a batter. She told me she has the photo of her getting me out. What she said was, 'You are on my wall'. And the story unfolded as to why I was on the wall. She was such a hard bowler to face. And she never missed a trick, did she?

Your favourite cricketers, male and female?

When I was younger, I really liked Freddie Flintoff. It is hard to pick one name among women as I have played a lot of franchise cricket with some of them, like Meg Lanning and Harman. I have played a lot of cricket against Australia and wondered how I could bring the sort of performances that Lanning did.

### Virat Kohli has a huge hand in my career... he even retained me: Mohammed Siraj

GNS News Agency, March 25

Mohammad Siraj has been a loyal servant of Royal Challengers Bengaluru since 2018. Though he did have some good years for the franchise he also had some forgettable years with the ball. However, when the Bengalurubased franchise decided not to retain him for the 2025 season it did come as a bit of surprise. Though Siraj would acknowledge that it was an emotional moment to leave RCB he would also reveal that it was Kohli who retained him and played a huge part in his career. "To be honest, Virat Kohli has a huge hand in my career. He backed me in my bad times - 2018 and 2019 - he supported me, he even retained me, and after that, my performance and graph went up. He has been very supportive. It has been very emotional for me to leave RCB. Let's see what happens when I come against RCB. The match is on April 2," Siraj said as quoted by ANI. Siraj has picked up 83 wickets across 87 matches for RCB with a best of 4/21. Siraj was instead snapped up by Gujarat Titans for Rs 12.25 crore on Day 1 of the auction process on Sunday, the same day India won



the first Test against Australia in Perth.Siraj also said his training is going very well at Titans. "My training is going very well with all the pacers in my team, and our bowling unit knows how to plan and execute. I am feeling very pleasant training with them all, teammates, and especially being here in Gujarat Titans," he said.Gujarat Titans will kick off their campaign against Punjab Kings starting on Tuesday at Ahmedabad with Shubman Gill leading the side.

### Lewis Hamilton hits back at critics with first Ferrari win in China sprint

GNS News Agency, March 25

Lewis Hamilton celebrated his first win for Ferrari on Saturday, answering his critics by leading the Chinese Grand Prix sprint from start to finish in only his second race for the Italian Formula One team. The seven-times world champion, starting from a surprise pole position, managed his tyres superbly to take the chequered flag 6.889 seconds clear of McLaren's Oscar Piastri with Red Bull's Max Verstappen finishing third in the 100km race.

It was the first time Hamilton, the winner of a record 105 regular grands prix who joined from Mercedes in January, and Ferrari had won a sprint since the shortened format was introduced in 2021.McLaren's Lando Norris, winner of the season-opener in Australia, stayed top of the standings after struggling to seize a point in eighth. Norris now has 26 points to Verstappen's 24.Hamilton's Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc was fifth, behind Mercedes' George Russell."I woke up feeling great today," said Hamilton, whose masterclass performance was watched by father Anthony from the Ferrari garage. "The first race (in Melbourne) was difficult," added the Briton of a Ferrari debutin which he finished only 10th.

"I really did feel a lot of people underestimated the steep climb it is to get into a new team, to become acclimatised within the team, understanding and communication — all sorts of things. "The amount of critics and people I've heard yapping along the way, clearly not understanding maybe because they'd never had the experience or just were unaware. "So it felt great to come here and be more comfortable in the car because in Melbourne I didn't feel comfortable in the car. From lap one here this weekend, (I was) really feeling on it. The engineers and mechanics have done a great job."

Hamilton led away cleanly from the start, with last year's sprint winner and reigning champion Verstappen slotting into second. The Dutch driver then slipped back into the clutches of Piastri, who overtook in the closing stages. "We didn't quite have enough pace for Lewis in front but we have some good ideas for this afternoon and tomorrow to see if we can go one better," said the Australian. "We have good pace in the car but have some competition this weekend as the Ferraris look rapid."Qualifying for Sunday's main grand prix followed later and four-times world champion Verstappen, who also won on Sunday in Shanghai last year, will still be a threat.

"Unfortunately, the last eight laps we didn't have the pace of the others so I was trying to survive out there," he said. "I definitely take P3. It was tough to manage the tyres, but it's OK, we will try to do better. "In general, we just lack a bit of pace so you have to push harder and that hurts your



Further back, Yuki Tsunoda continued to suggest he might have been a stronger option than Liam Lawson as Verstappen's new teammate with sixth place for sister team Racing Bulls. Italian 18-year-old rookie Andrea Kimi Antonelli was seventh for Mercedes, maintaining his 100% scoring record. Aston Martin missed out on points with Lance Stroll and Fernando Alonso ninth and 10th. French rookie Isack Hadjar, who crashed out before the start in his Australian debut, raced to 13th for Racing Bulls with Lawson 14th and Haas's Oliver Bearman 15th, ahead of teammate Esteban Ocon. Australian Jack Doohan was last for Renault-owned Alpine and summoned to stewards for an incident with Sauber's Gabriel Bortoleto.

#### Novak Djokovic snaps winless streak, Carlos Alcaraz makes shock exit

Novak Djokovic snapped his winless run with a dominating 6-0 7-6 (1) win on Friday against Australia's Rinky Hijikata in the Round of 64 of the Miami Open 2025. Djokovic came into the tournament after losing back-to-back firstround matches in the Dubai Championships and Indian Wells Masters. Prior to that, a hamstring injury put an end to his Australian Open campaign in the semis. But on his return to the Miami Open after five years since 2019, Djokovic put in a strong performance and will next face Camilo Ugo Carabelli of Argentina in the Round of 32. The former World No.1 also won his 410th ATP Masters 1000 match to equal Rafael Nadal's all-time record. After the match, Djokovic said that he was desperate to return to winning ways. "I wanted to make a statement to myself and to others, as well, that I'm still able to play on a high level. I lost (my last) two tournaments in my first rounds, so I really was eager to get the win in the first match in Miami Open." Djokovic said in the on-court interview

#### Lewis Hamilton wins Ferrari Sprint Race, hits back at critics

GNS News Agency, March 25

Shanghai: Lewis Hamilton delivered a statement win in the Sprint Race at the Chinese Grand Prix, securing his first victory for Ferrari and silencing the doubts surrounding his switch to the Italian team. The seven-time World Champion, who has dominated at the Shanghai International Circuit in the past with six Grand Prix wins, put in a commanding performance to finish 6.889 seconds ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri. The victory comes as a huge boost for Hamilton, who endured a difficult outing in Australia, where he struggled to get comfortable in the SF-25. After his disappointing performance in Melbourne, critics were quick to question whether he could adapt to his new surroundings at Ferrari.

However, Hamilton hit back at those doubts, highlighting the challenges of transitioning to a new team. "The first race was difficult, and I really do feel a lot of people underestimated how steep the climb is to get into a new team, to become acclimatised, to understand communication, and all sorts of things,"• Hamilton said after his win.He also addressed the negativity surrounding his early struggles with Ferrari, suggesting that those who doubted him lacked the understanding of what it takes to adapt to a new car and environment. "The amount of critics and people I've heard yapping along the way, just clearly not understanding maybe because they've not had the experience or are just unaware," he added.

Unlike in Melbourne, where he never looked settled in the Ferrari, Hamilton appeared far more at ease in Shanghai. Right from the first practice session, he felt a better connection with the car, and that translated into a dominant performance in the Sprint. He credited his team for helping him make the necessary adjustments to maximise performance. "From Lap 1 here this weekend, I really felt on it. We've done a great job — engineers, mechanics — everyone has worked hard to fine-tune the car, and it felt great today," he said.



Hamilton made a strong start in the Sprint and managed his tyres well despite the challenges posed by Shanghai's resurfaced track. The Briton admitted that the high grip levels on the new tarmac made tyre management tricky, but he was able to control the race from the front." I got a good start, and then there's so much grip on this new tarmac. It's really hard to look after these tyres, but I think everyone was struggling the same," he explained. However, he urged both the team and fans to remain patient, acknowledging that Ferrari still has a long journey ahead before they can consistently challenge for

"I know the Tifosi, I know the fans, I know the team wants to win. I know it means everything to them. But I said the other day, Rome wasn't built in a day,"• Hamilton said."One step at a time — we're not going to get ahead of ourselves." Hamilton emphasised that this is a long-term project and that while the Sprint victory is a great milestone, the focus remains on continuous improvement. "We're going to continue to push. We're going to be diligent and just remain focused. We'll be back at our desks after this and focused on Qualifying this afternoon. It's a long, long way. It's a marathon, not a sprint, so we've just got to take our

#### Ageless Sunil Chhetri shines as India maul Maldives 3-0 in friendly

GNS News Agency, March 25

Sunil Chhetri marked his international return with India's 3-0 win over Maldives, contributing to a dominant performance and showing signs of his old brilliance. Sunil Chhetri's international return couldn't have been scripted better. India's 3-0 win over the Maldives in an international friendly at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Shillong on March 19 was not just about the scoreline-it was about the return of the country's greatest football icon. After announcing his retirement from international football last June, Chhetri's comeback as captain was the centre of attention, and the veteran striker did what he does best-find the back of the net.Leading India onto the pitch, Chhetri looked as sharp and composed as ever. From the opening whistle, India pressed hard, creating early chances but struggling to apply the finishing touch. Despite dominating possession, the Blue Tigers lacked clinical precision in open play. However, their threat from set-pieces was evident early on.

The breakthrough came in the 35th minute when Rahul Bheke rose above the Maldives defence to head in a welldelivered corner, giving India a deserved lead. Chhetri was instrumental in the build-up, constantly combining with Liston Colaco and Naorem Mahesh Singh to create openings. While India's attacking runs showed promise, the final touch was missing. After halftime, a more determined India emerged. Chhetri's influence grew, and the Blue Tigers doubled their lead in the 66th minute. Once again, it was a set-piece that proved decisive, with Colaco heading in a superb cross to reward his tireless attacking efforts. The moment everyone was waiting for arrived just 10 minutes later. Colaco, who had been outstanding all evening, delivered a pinpoint assist to Chhetri. The captain timed his run perfectly and guided a glancing header past the Maldives goalkeeper. In his 152nd international match, Chhetri netted his 95th goal for India, marking a fitting return to the



Sunil Chhetri marked his international return with India's 3-0 win over Maldives, contributing to a dominant performance and showing signs of his old brilliance.

Where Did India Lack?

Despite the convincing win, India's tactical flaws under new head coach Manolo Marquez were evident. The midfield lacked creativity and struggled to make progressive runs through the centre. India's attack leaned heavily on the left flank, with Colaco carrying most of the load. This predictability could become a weakness against more organised sides like Bangladesh, whom India face next in the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers on March 25. Chhetri's return undoubtedly boosts India's morale, but addressing midfield issues and improving link-up play through the centre will be crucial in the games ahead.

### Seth Rogen's scathing showbiz satire can take Apple to the next level; it's a Ted Lasso-level triumph



The Studio has two things going against it. Films and shows about the entertainment business often struggle to crawl out of their niche corners, unless, of course, they're packaged like Argo. Second — and this might be a bigger problem — The Studio is on Apple. Nobody watches stuff on Apple. At most, they watch Ted Lasso and Severance and swiftly cancel their subscriptions. The best that The Studio can hope for is to organically find an audience like those flagship shows did, because it certainly deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as them. Clever, crafty, and caustic when it needs to be, it's the best new comedy series of 2025 so far.

The Studio features Seth Rogen in the lead role of Matt Remick, an executive who lives and breathes cinema, and harbours a long-held dream of becoming a studio head. In the first episode, he's handed the proverbial keys to the castle on a conditional basis by the head honcho of Continental Studios, played by Bryan Cranston in a performance so boozy that it might require a breathalyser test. Tasked with fast-tracking a movie based on the beverage brand Kool-Aid — you read that right — and turning it into a billion-dollar hit akin to Barbie, Matt finds himself torn between his artistic aspirations and the primal impulses of his lizard brain.

Sometimes, these two clashing personalities find themselves shaking hands, like when Matt offers Martin Scorsese \$250 million to make a movie about the Jonestown massacre. Two birds, one stone, he figures. The studio gets their Kool-Aid movie, and he gets to brag about bagging Scorsese. But when he's told that he cannot possibly do this, he pretends to have bought Scorsese's script only to take it off the market, and to stop rivals from besmirching the blessed name of Kool-Aid. The Studio is given a dash of prestige thanks to an appearance by Scorsese. He's one of the many industry big-wigs who drop by for quick cameos, usually to observe Matt making a mockery of himself. It's left to him to tell the iconic filmmaker that Continental wouldn't be going ahead with the Jonestown movie after all. Instead, Matt greenlights a cringe animated comedy that makes The Emoji Movie seem like a masterpiece.

In a particularly hilarious bottle episode in the middle of the season, Matt and his team get together to debate whether hiring a Black actor to voice the Kool-Aid Man is racist. Or, is it more racist to not hire a Black actor. Is it racist to even discuss such a thing? Would it be less racist if they hire an Asian actor to voice Kool-Aid Man's wife? Are we talking about a mixed-race family? Should they be queer as well? It's exaggerated to an absurd degree, but it's funny because you know that a version of this conver-

sation might actually be taking place in a studio conference room somewhere.

Episode three, titled The Oner, is perhaps the season's stand-out chapter. Filmed in a 'oner' itself, the episode follows Matt and his buddy Saul — he's played by Ike Barinholtz in the single funniest performance of the show — making their way to the set of Oscar-winner Sarah Polley's new film, starring Greta Lee. Matt keeps trying to project himself as an approachable boss, but fails spectacularly. He routinely ruins takes, makes a nuisance of himself, and antagonises Polley to a point where she has him ejected from set. The episode not only captures the chaotic nature of film production, but also makes delicate points about the human desire for connection, power dynamics, and petty politics. And as if this weren't enough, the one-take gimmick makes it a technical achievement as well.

A vintage Hollywood aesthetic wafts over every frame of the show — at one point, Matt proclaims himself to be the saviour of celluloid, and later, he gets into an argument with actual cancer doctors about whether making movies can change the world. To think that Rogen and his long-time creative partner Evan Goldberg have come from writing the semi-autobiographical comedy classic Superbad to helming something as technically refined as The Studio proves that talent finds its way, even in a town as hollow as Hollywood. This idea is represented in the show by the young executive Quinn, played by Chase Sui Wonders, who begins as Matt's assistant and grows in prominence through the season. Kathryn Hahn, on the other hand, is absolutely unhinged as Maya, Continental's tactless marketing head. Among other things, The Studio is also a workplace comedy, with Matt playing the eccentric boss archetype modelled on Ted Lasso and Michael Scott.Matt has that same desperation to be liked; it's a litt pathetic, but also very endearing. Becoming a studio head was his dream, and he's living it. But being forced to tell Ron Howard that the third act of his most personal film sucks, having to placate Zac Efron after crashing his party, and inadvertently giving Zoë Kravitz a tonne of drugs certainly burst his bubble about the high life. A running gag in the show involves him literally falling on his face. And yet, somehow, he appears to be failing upwards. Having survived Hollywood for three decades now, Rogen and Goldberg surely have an insight into the inner workings of the dream factory. There's jealousy, the allure of fame, the dangling carrot of eternal glory... Matt wants it all. The penultimate episode has Matt trying to get himself a thank you at the Golden Globes, for the behind-the-scenes role that he has played in getting a picture greenlit. He goes to incredible lengths to make this happen, including tampering with the teleprompter. It's a broad but largely accurate depiction of fragile egos. Annoyed that Ted Sarandos from Netflix gets god-level shout-outs from his people, he corners him in the bathroom and demands to know what sorcery is at play. Sarandos, who makes a surprise cameo as himself, tells Matt that his collaborators are contractually obligated to give him shout-outs. How sporting of him to confess such petty behaviour. Like the recent HBO sitcom The Franchise, a send-up of the risk-averse nature of contemporary Hollywood, The Studio doesn't merely want to bite the hand that feeds. It isn't even about the Faustian bargain that those involved in show business readily make in exchange of money,

#### 'I love Anushka Sharma': Pooja Hegde refuses to name her favourite male co-star as she talks about 'subtle sexism' in film industry

Pooja Hegde has worked with some of the biggest male stars in the country.Pooja Hegde has worked with some of the biggest male stars in the country. Actor Pooja Hegde has worked with some of the biggest male superstars in the country, across languages. She made her Hindi language debut opposite Hrithik Roshan in the film Mohenjo Daro, before going on to work with Vijay, Prabhas, Salman Khan, Jr NTR, Mahesh Babu, Allu Arjun, Ranveer Singh, Naga Chaitanya, Ram Charan, and most recently, Shahid Kapoor. In an interview, she opened up about the sexism that she has faced on film sets in her career, and said that she's incredibly happy when she reads news about a female actor charging hefty sums of money. She also confessed that she will be more selective about the projects that she signs on to going forward, and, when asked to name her favourite male co-star, she chose to name a woman

In an interview with Filmfare, Pooja was asked if she's ever had trouble with a male co-star, considering her vast experience with them. She said, "It's there in all the industries, but to different degrees. Some of it is very on the face, and some of it is very subtle. It's the little things, like how the male actor's vanity van would be parked right near the set, while us, with all our lehengas and all, will have to walk all the way... Sometimes, I'm like, 'Listen, ya, think about us, we're in such heavy costumes, and we're dragging ourselves to reach our vans'."

She continued, "This is subtle sexism. It could even be your name not going on a poster. Sometimes, the credit is not given to you, even if it's a love story. We all have to realise that it's a collaborative effort to make a film." Pooja said that she has worked with a lot of male stars who've 'earned the right' over decades, but she finds herself being treated like a second-class citizen even on sets where she's 'technically the bigger star'. Pooja was then asked about her experiences with 'massive stars' like Prabhas and Salman Khan, and if she has learned anything from them, or if she looks up to any of them for the work they've done and the career they've cultivated. She said, "Anushka Sharma is someone I really love. I relate to her the most, because she hasn't had any backing. I think our personality types are similar, because she doesn't like to go for parties, and I feel like, 'Thank god, there's somebody else like me'. In the West, Scarlett Johansson has done some incredible work. She does the Avengers movies, but she has also done indies like Lost in Translation and Marriage Story." The only male co-stars that Pooja praised were Vijay, Jr NTR, Allu Arjun, and Suriya, with whom she will appear in the upcoming film Retro. Pooja said that she doesn't fight for 'petty things' like bigger hotel rooms or nearer vanity vans. Pooja said that she would rather fight for her co-star to be actually present on set for emotional scenes, because often, they deploy body doubles in their place. "Stuff that



impacts the quality of my work, that I want to fight for," she

## Akshay Kumar, Madhavan starrer 'Kesari 2' to hit the screens on this date

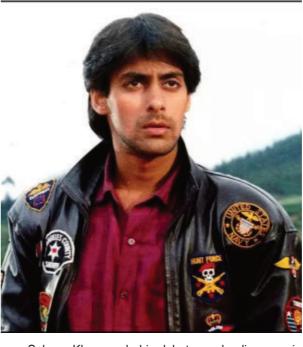
Mumbai: Bollywood star Akshay Kumar on Saturday announced that his upcoming film, "Kesari 2" will be released in theatres on April 18. Also starring R Madhavan and Ananya Panday, the movie is a sequel to Kumar's 2019 hit film of the same name.

The 57-year-old star took to social media to share the news about the release date of "Kesari 2", and also said that its teaser will be unveiled on March 24. "A revolution painted in courage #KesariChapter2 teaser drops this Monday! Brace yourselves! Releasing in cinemas on April 18!," the post read.

The second chapter, directed by debutant filmmaker Karan Singh Tyagi, is produced by Karan Johar's Dharma Productions, Kumar's Cape Of Good Films, and Anand Tiwari and Ampritpal Singh Bindra.

According to media reports, "Kesari 2" will bring out the poignant story of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The first part of "Kesari" narrated the tale of the Battle of Saragarhi, fought between Afghan tribesmen and the 36th Sikhs regiment of the British Indian Army in 1897. It directed by Anurag Singh and also starred Parineeti Chopra.

# 'Salman Khan didn't look like a hero, was a short guy,' Sooraj Barjatya recalls his first meeting with the actor: 'He came in to say no'



Salman Khan made his debut as a leading man in Sooraj Barjatya's 1989 film Maine Pyar Kiya but despite being a 'nepo kid', Salman's entry in the movies wasn't as a smooth ride. Salman is the son of screenwriter Salim Khan and when Sooraj was looking for a leading man, he heard through the grapevine that Salman was planning to become an actor. In a recent chat, Sooraj recalled how he decided to cast Salman even though he was quite unimpressed with the actor when he met him for the first time. Talking to Mid-Day, Sooraj said that when he first heard about Salman, he wondered "why would Salim saab's son work with us?" Sooraj was also making his debut as a filmmaker with Maine Pyar Kiya. He recalled that Salman had also come in with the idea of rejecting the proposal because he didn't

want to play a saintly man, and such was the image of most Rajshri heroes.

Recollecting his first impression of Salman, Sooraj said, "He was such a short guy, and didn't look like a hero at all. But when I saw his photos, he was outstanding. That is the power of camera presence." Talking about how Salman gradually got into the groove of the narration of Maine Pyar Kiya, Sooraj added, "By the time, we got to the interval point, we shook hands, and decided to do the film. But then, we faced a bigger issue."

Sooraj revealed that Salman's tests didn't go according to plan at all. "Not sure if it was my fault or his, but there was no throw in his voice. We then moved to dance sequences, got in Farah Khan for the rehearsals, and somehow, it was all going wrong, and he wasn't dancing well either. But then when I put him in a chair, and handed him a guitar, he just nodded a bit on the camera, and I knew it. His face, his style, his romance... everything was on point... but he wasn't able to talk," said Sooraj, who faced the next big obstacle when the team realised that Salman was making his debut with Biwi Ho To Aisi in a supporting role. "For six months, Salman sent other people, and asked me to launch them instead of himself. In fact, I visited him during a shoot just to say that I have to move on from him, but even there, he had a couple of people lined up, and wanted me to choose them for Maine Pyar Kiya," said Sooraj, who shared that it was this genuineness that made him stick with Salman. "How to tell a 'No' to this person. Credit goes to his personality, and how he has always been truthful. He always believed that the film was more important, and it is still there today. Even now, if I want to make a film with someone else, he'd be supportive, and even ask if I needed him to do a guest appearance."

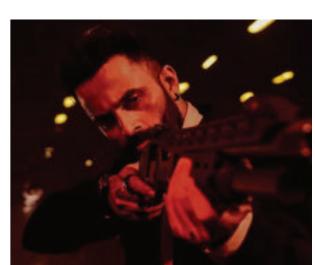
Salman Khan, who last starred in a Sooraj Barjatya film in 2015 with Prem Ratan Dhan Payo, is currently awaiting the release of Sikandar, his upcoming film with AR Murugadoss. The film, which also stars Rashmika Mandanna, is set to hit screens on March 30.

## Prithviraj Sukumaran defends violence in 'friend' Unni Mukundan's Marco: 'You watch a violent film and complain about the violence?'

The blockbuster film Marco broke the Rs 100 crore barrier at the box office recently, but it also attracted a lot of controversy for its hyper-violent content. The movie, starring Unni Mukundan as a vengeful mass murderer, involved scenes in which children were killed brutally and graphically. The film also raised questions about the Central Board of Certification's perceived lenience to violence, while it shows prudishness towards scenes involving sensuality. The film's television premiere was barred by the CBFC for this very reason.

In an interview with The Hollywood Reporter India, L2: Empuraan actor-director Prithviraj Sukumaran defended Marco, and said that the filmmakers behind it didn't dupe audiences. Prithviraj was joined by his Empuraan star Mohanlal, who also offered his two cents about violence in cinema. The legendary actor said, "It's all about the situation. If the situation demands that kind of bloodshed, it is fine. You have to justify it, that's the thing. Otherwise, we'll have a difference of opinion. Am I right?" He looked at Prithviraj, who said, "I disagree with people having a problem with a film like Marco."

He explained, "It never pretended to be anything else. Unni is a friend, and I know that from the time they set about to make the film. The first announcement itself was about violence. They told us that it would be never-before-seen violence, voyeurism upon violence, slasher film on steroids. That's what they kept saying. They never fooled you into thinking that it was about something else. They kept saying



it's the most violent film... And then you go watch it and complain about the violence? Come on."

Prithviraj said that action and violence need to be contextualised in films, while Mohanlal agreed that as long as the audience knows what its getting into, there should be no issue. Directed by Haneef Adeni, Marco was released in theatres in December, after which it debuted on SonyLIV in February. It made over Rs 100 crore worldwide against a budget of Rs 30 crore.

#### 'I'm less racist than Gandhi': Emilia Perez actor Karla Sofia Gascon claims she was targeted in a smear campaign

Spanish actor Karla Sofía Gascón, known for the Oscar-nominated film Emilia Perez, recently appeared in Madrid to promote her new book Lo que queda de mí ("What's Left of Me"). After days of silence, the actor finally addressed the backlash over resurfaced tweets that were seen as racist and Islamophobic by many. Karla said that she was the victim of a targeted attack which was focused on derailing her career. She claimed that she was "less racist than Gandhi" but did not elaborate more on the statement. "No one has to forgive me for anything," she reportedly told El Mundo. Gascón's new book is part autobiography, part fiction. She originally published it in Mexico but updated it after her recent experience of being "cancelled." The book includes stories from her successful career in Mexico and a complicated romance with a senator, "It's not a traditional memoir," she said. "Some things are true, some aren't. Readers will have to guess."

Gascón made history as the first transgender woman to be nominated for a Best Actress Oscar for her role in Emilia Pérez, also starring Zoe Saldana and Selena Gomez in key roles. The film won big at Cannes, and Gascón was gaining recognition across the world. But soon after her success, some old tweets from her past resurfaced that got her a lot of backlash. Netflix dropped her from its Oscar campaign and even her co-stars distanced themselves from her.In Madrid, when reporters asked if she felt people had forgiven her, she replied bluntly, "Nobody has to forgive me for anything." She maintained that if anyone felt hurt by things she said, they should talk to her directly. "When I ask people what it is about me that offends them, they can't even answer," she said. Gascón believes she was targeted on purpose as tweets that resurfaced were from 2016. "It's clear there was a campaign against me," she said and added, "They kept going until they got what they wanted." In her remarks to EL Mundo, the actor added, "They say I'm farright or racist. But all my life, I've fought against that. When



I was younger, I fought with skinheads.""Less racist than

The star from Alcobendas spoke about her feelings after being cancelled, saying, "I'm going to give you the headline: I'm less racist than Gandhi and less Vox than Echenique." The statement made her a trending topic on social media in the next few hours. She claimed that people tried to paint her as prejudiced during what she calls "a social media massacre." She also made it clear that while she respects Muslim people, she strongly opposes fanaticism and terrorism. "I have enormous respect for Muslims," she said and added, "But not for the terrible things done in the name of religion."The Oscar snubDespite her historic Oscar nomination, Gascón wasn't allowed on the main red carpet. "They made me go somewhere else," she explained, according to Euro news. "I only realised later I had skipped the carpet. They wanted me to be a robot, someone perfect. But I'm not perfect, and I don't want to be." She added, "Art comes from human imperfection. I don't represent anyone but myself.

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