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## Rashly driven Swift Dzire car hits Harley Davidson bike in Hyderabad; two youths killed

Hyderabad: Two youths were killed after a rashly driven car went out of control and ran into their motorcycle near Paradise junction in Secunderabad on Wednesday morning. The victims were identified as Y Harshith (20) from Babu Jagjeevan Ram Nagar in Bhoiguda and his friend Devi Pranay (18) of Chacha Nehru Nagar, both working for a pest control firm in Marredpally. The duo started from their office after the day's work on Harshith's Harley Davidson motorcycle and went to have tea near Paradise Hotel before going to their homes, when the incident occurred in the wee hours.

## Six-storied under construction building collapses in Bhadrachalam; Two workers buried alive

Bhadrachalam: At least two workers were buried alive and several others are believed to have been trapped in the debris, after a six-storied under construction building collapsed on Wednesday. The building under construction near Bhadrachalam Panchayat Office collapsed as the workers were fully busy in construction works. Police and fire service personnel rushed to the spot to take up relief and rescue operations. The officials have so far detected two bodies and at least five others are feared trapped in the debris. It was said that the building was being constructed without any permission. The building owner was said to be Srinivasa Rao, who is now absconding.

## Revanth Reddy defends Kancharla Gachibowli land auction, dismisses environmental concerns



GNS News Agency, March 26

Hyderabad: Amid rising criticism, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy attempted to defend the Congress government's decision to auction Kancharla Gachibowli lands for industrial development, dismissing protests by opposition parties, students and environmentalists as politically motivated. He accused critics of misleading the public and insisted that the land had no connection to the University of

Hyderabad. Addressing the Assembly on Wednesday, Revanth Reddy stated that the land was handed over to a private entity 25 years ago and was not under the University ownership.

He claimed his government fought a legal battle in the Supreme Court to reclaim it and had now transferred it to TGIIC for an open auction to attract multinational companies. "There are no tigers or deer in that area, but some cunning foxes are trying to obstruct development," he remarked, dismissing environmental concerns. He alleged that opposition groups were instigating student protests and filing Public Interest Litigations (PILs) to delay the project. To justify his argument, the Chief Minister asked why there were no protests when fraudulent firms like IMG Bharatha were given these lands during the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh rule. "Do you oppose industrial growth? Don't you want jobs for Telangana's youth?" he asked, urging the opposition to suggest compensation measures rather than outright opposition. He also asked BRS MLA T Harish Rao to clarify his party's stance on land acquisition for key projects like the Regional Ring Road and Future City. Revanth Reddy also brushed off speculation about by-elections in turncoat

MLAs' constituencies. Citing past precedents where leaders who switched parties were inducted into the Cabinet without facing bypolls, he said the same tradition would continue now. "If the BJP has its way, Assembly elections themselves may be held in 2029 as part of One Nation-One Election. No member should worry, no by-elections will come," he said, downplaying BRS's claims of imminent bypolls following the case against the turncoat MLAs in the Supreme Court.

He attempted to clarify that the meetings with MLAs from various parties were only for their respective constituency development, but photographs and videos are being published in the media misinterpreting them as political defections. The Chief Minister also announced a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to crack down on online betting, promising harsher punishments for app developers, promoters, and beneficiaries. He vowed strict enforcement of laws enacted by the previous BRS government in this regard. Responding to concerns over a recent rape attempt on an MMTS train, he argued that crime could not be predicted, and claimed that the government had acted swiftly despite the case being under Railway Police jurisdiction.

## Govt takes stringent action on online betting apps, games: CM Revanth

Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy announced that the state government has resolved to implement strict measures against online applications related to rummy, betting, and digital gaming. He emphasized that merely investigating through state agencies will not eradicate online betting fraud; serious inquiries must also be conducted by neighboring states and countries. While addressing the Assembly on Wednesday, Revanth Reddy indicated that the government plans to establish a Special Investigative Team to take comprehensive actions against the issue of betting. He affirmed that stringent measures will be enforced against anyone who actively promotes or participates in the operation of betting apps. "We are willing to amend legislation if needed to impose tougher penalties. Telangana will not be a hub for betting addictions," stated the Chief Minister. Certain political factions are claiming that law and order is not being upheld in Telangana. These assertions are entirely baseless, as the police are vigilant and respond to even minor incidents," he stated. The Chief Minister pointed out that the previous administration failed to act when a lawyer couple was brutally murdered in broad daylight. He also noted that the public remembers the incident involving the rape of a veterinary doctor, and highlighted that Telangana ranked fourth in the nation for incidents of rape against women in 2020. The Chief Minister accused opposition leaders of making statements about law and order with the malicious intent to obstruct investments in Telangana. "It appears as though there are deliberate attempts to undermine the progress of Telangana. They are plotting to destabilize the state's economy and damage its reputation. Our society will not stand for such schemes," he emphasized. The Chief Minister said the Congress government has been ruling the State without any disruption to law and order for the last 15 months. "Why is the Opposition so impatient? Why is the opposition hell bent and making such extreme comments," he questioned. The Chief Minister appealed to the opposition to take senior Congress leader Jana Reddy as a role model as an opposition leader and give suggestions to the government. (NSS)

## Modi supporting Telangana cotton farmers: Kishan Reddy



New Delhi, March 26 (NSS): Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy today said Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood by the Telangana farmers and added that when cotton was not getting the right prices in the open market (2024-25), the Central Government acted as a partisan of the farmers by procuring cotton in Telangana in large quantities at minimum support prices. He said the Central Government has set up 110 cotton procurement centers in Telangana through the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) and procured 210 lakh quintals of cotton. In Telangana, which ranks 3rd in cotton production in the country, the Narendra Modi government has procured cotton worth more than Rs. 58 thousand crores at the minimum support price through CCI from the 2014-15 crop season to the 2024-25 crop season. Thus, it has stood by lakhs of farmers. In this, in the 2024-25 crop season alone (till 17.03.2025), CCI has procured 210.19 lakh quintals of cotton worth Rs. 15,556 crores. Nearly 9 lakh Telangana cotton farmers have benefited this year due to the decision of the Central Government," he said. He also said in 2014-15, the minimum support price of cotton per quintal was Rs 3,750 and by 2024-25, it has more than doubled to Rs 7,121. "This is the assurance given by the Modi government to the cotton farmers. He said at a time when cotton prices are low in the open market, the Modi government had come to the aid of the farmers by procuring the cotton in bulk from Telangana farmers at minimum support price. "From soil tests to seeds, fertilizers, implements, crop loans, crop insurance, irrigation facilities, construction of warehouses, to purchase of agricultural produce at minimum support price, the Narendra Modi government is providing complete support to the farmers in every aspect of the agricultural sector. As per the instructions of the Commission for Agricultural Produce Costs & Prices, the central government fixes minimum support prices for 22 types of agricultural produce, including cotton, every year. The minimum support prices of the respective crops are decided so that they are at least 50% higher than the cost of production of the crop. When it comes to cotton crop, the Government of India, through CCI, is procuring cotton crop from farmers at minimum support price every time the price of cotton crop in the open market falls below the minimum support price to support farmers," he said. (NSS)

## Bhatti dares KTR to prove allegations on percentages

Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu has responded sharply to BRS MLA K T Rama Rao's statement on 'percentages'. The Member should prove his statement on allegation of percentages or tender an apology to the Legislative Assembly and people of the State, he thundered. "We came into politics with a responsibility and stood on behalf of downtrodden sections, oppressed, working class and victimised sections. We like you did not loot the State left, right and centre. Members while speaking in the House should do so with integrity and watch their tongue. Do you think you can get away with your loose talk", said an enraged Bhatti Vikramarka during a discussion on Budget in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday. Addressing the Chair, he wondered how could some members utter lies in the House in the name of debate and discussion. "The previous government had kept Rs 40,000 crore related to various works pending. Due to the wrong doings of previous rulers, a total of one lakh crore bills were pending. Those who executed the works were going round the Secretariat for the bills," Bhatti Vikramarka said. He took exception to the "lies" uttered by BRS MLAs that the government issued announcements irresponsibly in the name of Rajiv Gandhi civills, Abhaya Hastham "The government decided to give financial incentives to those who were selected for Mains and Interviews in the Civil Services examination. If our students from the State get the opportunity, State's reputation would be enhanced and if possible they would protect State's interests. This was the intention behind the government's gesture, he said. The Congress governments with the inspiration drawn from armed peasants struggle provided



rights to those who tilled the lands. But, after BRS party came to power, they introduced pattadar column and done away with cultivator column under the draconian Dharani Act, Bhatti criticised. While the Congress government allocated land to 24 lakh farmers through land reforms, BRS leaders placed these farmers under Part B of the Dharani system, causing many to repeatedly visit government offices. That administration authorized Tehsildars to register lands without proper verification, undermining the land laws that had been established after prolonged struggles," Bhatti Vikramarka noted. We assured the public that Dharani would be discarded into the Bay of Bengal. The people trusted us and voted for us," Bhatti emphasized. Ironically, the BRS eliminated the occupation column, prioritized patta holders, and once again enabled Jagirdars and Zamindars to reclaim ownership of those lands, he added. (NSS)

## KTR's comments create ruckus in House



Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): BRS party Working President Kalvakuntla Tarakarama Rao's 'commission'

comments against the ruling Congress government have created a ruckus in the Telangana Assembly. The Congress members protested against KTR's comments. Angry over these comments, Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka demanded an apology from KTR. In this sequence, the BRS party protested against Bhatti's comments leading to chaos in the House. Finally, when KTR's comments were removed from the records by panel Speaker, the BRS party walked out in protest and continued protests outside the Assembly. As part of the Telangana budget session, KTR said the Ministers should exercise restraint and added that if the government's promises were not implemented, they would ask about them while claiming that the ruling party MLAs are talking about the 30% commission to the ministers. These comments have enraged the ruling party MLAs prompting the deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka to respond on the issue. He said KTR should show evidence to prove his comments and added that he should tender apologies to the ruling party leaders. (NSS)

## Revanth Reddy downplays bypolls, Harish Rao calls out constitutional breach

GNS News Agency, March 26

Hyderabad: Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's remarks in the Telangana Assembly on Wednesday, dismissing the possibility of by-elections for the constituencies represented by 10 turncoat MLAs, triggered a fresh political debate. His claim that bypolls never took place under previous governments because of defections and would not happen now was met with strong objection from senior BRS MLA T Harish Rao, who charged him with disregarding constitutional provisions and judicial authority. In an attempt to dismiss the possibility of bypolls during the reply in the Assembly on Wednesday, Revanth Reddy said the past precedents suggested that bypolls would not be necessary. He pointed out that the past governments inducted defected MLAs into the Cabinet without facing by-elections and that his government was following the same tradition. When Harish pointed out that the matter, of disqualifying turncoat MLAs, was pending in the Supreme Court, Revanth Reddy

claimed that Assembly immunity allowed him to speak on sub-judice matters within the House. However, Harish was quick to counter, raising a point of order and questioning the legality of discussing a case that was currently pending before the Supreme Court. He cited legislative rules and Article 121 of the Constitution, which bar discussions on pending judicial matters in the legislature unless it pertains to a judge's removal. "The Chief Minister claims this House has immunity, allowing him to discuss Supreme Court matters. But Page 1021 of the Legislative Rules clearly states that pending cases cannot be debated in the House," he reminded the Speaker, adding that both the Parliament and judiciary were under constitutional obligations and could not encroach upon each others' jurisdiction. Meanwhile, Revanth Reddy justified his meetings with the defected MLAs, claiming that his meetings with MLAs from various parties were purely for the development of their constituencies.

## Govt received vigilance report on Medigadda Barrage: Uttam



Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): Minister for Irrigation and Civil Supplies, Uttam Kumar Reddy, stated that the State government has obtained a vigilance report regarding the Medigadda Barrage, and that repairs will commence only after the final report from the NDSA is received. In response to comments made by BJP MLA Palvai during the Assembly's discussion on demands on Wednesday, Uttam Kumar Reddy pointed out that there are significant defects in the design, construction, and maintenance of the barrages built as part of the Kaleshwaram project. He noted that the Detailed Project Report (DPR) specified the use of sheet piles for construction; however, sequant piles were actually utilised.

The Minister lamented the unfortunate accident in the SLBC tunnel and mentioned that rescue operations are underway, involving top-tier experts. He also highlighted that Chief Minister Revanth had reviewed the situation two days prior and had instructed officials to expedite the rescue efforts. The tunnel accident merely represented a temporary hurdle; however, the State government remains steadfast in its commitment to the project and is determined to complete the SLBC works as soon as possible.

Uttam Kumar Reddy stated. He emphasized that the State government is dedicated to constructing the dam at Tammihiati. The financial and technical assessment of this project is currently in progress.

The work will commence as soon as feasible, with an emphasis on projects that rapidly deliver water to extensive land areas at a minimal cost," Uttam Kumar Reddy noted. He also mentioned that, for the first time in the country, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is set to introduce a free supply of fine rice for ration card holders on March 30. "We will offer 6 kg of high-quality rice at no charge to ration card holders, an initiative that is unprecedented in our country. We welcome any suggestions or feedback from members regarding the fine rice.

"Approximately 84 percent of low-income individuals will benefit from this program. Moreover, essential goods will soon be made available to all ration card holders," announced Uttam Kumar Reddy. (NSS)

## Food delivery executive from Hyderabad dies in Riyadh while racing to deliver Iftar parcel

Dubai: A food delivery executive, who was racing against time to deliver a customer's Iftar food parcel, collided with another vehicle in the busy traffic and died on the spot in Riyadh. Mohammed Maqsood Hussain, 33, a native of Jahanuma in Hyderabad, fell off his bike after the collision and died on the spot on March 18. His body is expected to be repatriated soon. He was working as a motorcycle driver as per visa information and delivering food parcels for a leading food delivery app through a sub-contractor in Riyadh. The food delivery app business is popular across the globe including Gulf countries that draw scores of unemployed youths from India and other South Asian countries into the high-risk and low paid job.



# "In times of distress, our leaders are the saviors, says BRS Party Whip, MLA KP Vivekanand: BRS Leaders..."



Narendar Goud "Indian chronicle "Hyderabad "26-3-2025." "Koravar Narsamma's husband Basappa (36) from Balayya Nagar area of Gajul Ramaram Division and Joseph (48), the father of Keshav from Rangareddy Nagar, approached Kuthbullapur MLA KP Vivekanand two days ago regarding their health conditions. Concerned about their financial and health situations, BRS Party Whip and MLA KP Vivekanand, with special attention, arranged for L.O.C. (Letter of Credit) from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Basappa (2,00,000/-) and Joseph (2,00,000/-) were provided with the L.O.C. through their respective divisions. "Today, at the MLA's office in Chintal, the L.O.C. cheques were distributed to the beneficiaries by local public representatives

and leaders." "Speaking on the occasion, the leaders emphasized that the Chief Minister's Relief Fund provides financial security and health assurance for the poor in times of distress. They also highlighted that BRS Party Whip and MLA KP Vivekanand always prioritize the health concerns of the poor." "The event was attended by Rangareddy Nagar Division Corporator Vijay Shekhar Goud, Division President Aerv Shankarayya, PAX Director Parush Srinivas Yadav, Gajul Ramaram Division President Vijay Ramreddy, Senior Leaders Kasturi Bal Raj, Advocate Kamalakar, Balayya Nagar Colony Welfare President Nagesh, Senior Leaders Onkar Reddy, Sudhakar, Akhil, Raju, K. Nagabhushanam, and others.

# PM Modi to visit Tamil Nadu amid alliance talks with AIADMK



tionship between Mr. Palaniswami and Tamil Nadu BJP chief Annamalai, needed to be sorted out before any formalisation of a coalition.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's choice of the Ramanathaswamy temple and the timing of the visit, the birth celebrations of Lord Rama on April 6, is also significant. It was in January 2024, just before the consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, that Mr. Modi last visited the temple, describing the experience as one that he would "never forget". A Shiva temple, the site is also connected to the Ramayana, as the deity, the Shiva linga, is believed to have been installed there by Lord Rama. The New Pamban Bridge, to be inaugurated by the PM on his visit, is India's first vertical lift railway sea bridge, designed to connect the sacred island of Rameswaram to the mainland, touching on his "virasat bhi vikas bhi" (heritage and development) plank. The old Pamban bridge could no longer meet the demands of modern transportation and was suffering from erosion due to climactic factors of harsh sea weather. In 2019, the Indian government sanctioned its reconstruction. The New Pamban Bridge spans 2.08 kilometres (2,078 meters) and features 99 spans of 18.3 metres each, with a single 72.5-metre vertical lift span that can be raised to allow ships to pass underneath. Standing three metres taller than its predecessor, it provides greater clearance for larger vessels. The New Pamban Bridge's foundation is built with 333 piles and 101 pile caps, and the bridge is designed to accommodate two tracks. A robust surface protection system further enhances longevity of up to 58 years. A successful trial run of a goods train over a 1.5-kilometre section from the Mandapam end was conducted to verify the bridge's structural integrity.

GNS News Agency, March 26  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be visiting Tamil Nadu on April 6, on the occasion of Ram Navami, to pay obeisance at the Ramanathaswamy temple in Rameswaram, and inaugurate the Pamban bridge, amid a strong possibility that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will be finalising a coalition with the Opposition All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) ahead of Assembly election in the State. The visit, ostensibly part pilgrimage and part inauguration of railway infrastructure, comes at a time when the BJP's top brass, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and party president and Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda, met with AIADMK chief E. Palaniswami in New Delhi on Tuesday.  
This meeting has sparked speculation that an alliance, which had shattered in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha election, could be back for the next Tamil Nadu Assembly election. While Mr. Palaniswami met with Mr. Shah, it was said that a whole host of issues, not least the fraught rela-

# Congress moves privilege motion against MOS Rural Development for "false statement" on MGNREGS funds

GNS News Agency, March 26  
Accusing Minister of State for Rural Development Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani for making a false statement regarding comparative outlay of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) funds to Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, senior Congress leader and party's whip in Lok Sabha Manickam Tagore moved a privilege motion against the minister. Mr. Pemmasani had told Lok Sabha on Tuesday (March 25, 2025), "Tamil Nadu has a population of seven crores, UP has a population of 20 crore. UP draws close to ₹10,000 crore, Tamil Nadu draws more than ₹10,000 crore. There is no question of not giving money." The "At A Glance" report on the MGNREGS website shows that total expenditure in the ongoing fiscal year for Uttar Pradesh stands at ₹11,860 crore, while for Tamil Nadu it is ₹10,867 crore. So far this year, the Centre has released ₹9,758 crore to Uttar Pradesh and ₹7,414 crore to Tamil Nadu. The MGNREGA fund disbursement is not based on the State's population but only on the demand for work raised by the State. In a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Mr. Tagore pointing out these discrepancies said, "The statement made by the Minister of State for Rural Develop-



ment is misleading and factually incorrect, leading to confusion and misleading the House on an important issue related to the allocation and expenditure of MGNREGS funds." Mr. Tagore has urged the Speaker to direct the minister to provide clarification on the issue. "Given the importance of maintaining the integrity of statements made in the House and the impact of false information on public discourse, I request that a privilege motion be initiated against Mr. Pemmasani for misleading the House and causing confusion regarding MGNREGS funding," Mr. Tagore said.

# Prime Minister Modi to inaugurate new Pamban rail bridge on April 6

GNS News Agency, March 26  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to inaugurate the new Pamban rail bridge connecting Ramanathapuram with Rameswaram island on April 6 on the occasion of Ram Navami. To get today's top stories from the State in your inbox, subscribe to our Tamil Nadu Today newsletter. After inspecting the Pamban rail bridge, constructed at a cost of ₹531 crore, Southern Railway General Manager R.N. Singh told reporters that the after inaugurating the new bridge, the Prime Minister would also address a public meeting in Rameswaram. Delayed inauguration. Through the officials of Southern Railway have been repeatedly inspecting the railway bridge and were planning for the inauguration by the end of February, the inaugural function could not be held as the Prime Minister's Office did not confirm the dates due to Mr. Modi's foreign visits, a railway official said. Engineers of Rail Vikas Nigam Limited completed the bridge work to replace the century-old Pamban rail bridge by October last year. This included the construction of new vertical lift span of 72 metres, said to be first-of-its-kind in India. Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) A.M. Chowdhary completed his two-day statutory inspection of the new bridge on November 14 last year. Even as the local people were eagerly waiting for commissioning of the new rail bridge so that rail traffic could be restored between



Mandapam railway station in the mainland and Rameswaram island, a scathing report by the CRS on "glaring lapses" in planning and execution of the bridge work, which became public on November 27, put on hold its commissioning. He also laid a pre-condition to Madurai Divisional Railway Manager to carry out rectification works to remove certain deficiencies for operating trains over the bridge. An official said that all the changes suggested by the CRS have been completed. The Prime Minister would also flag off a new train service between Tambaram and Rameswaram on the occasion. However, the detailed programme of the Prime Minister was not yet known.

# Mohammed Yunus is rendering religious minority leaders in Bangladesh vulnerable, UN told

GNS News Agency, March 26  
An Indian rights group has asked the United Nations to help stop Mohammed Yunus, the Chief Advisor of Bangladesh, from emboldening the religious fundamentalists in his country by denying attacks on the minorities in his country. The New Delhi-based Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) also said Mr. Yunus had been trivialising the acts of violence against the Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians in Bangladesh by describing them as outcomes of personal disputes, criminal acts, or accidents. His denial of atrocities against religious minorities had made the leaders of the Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council extremely vulnerable to further attacks, the RRAG said in an appeal to the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), and the heads of diplomatic missions and international organisations in Dhaka. In a rejoinder to the Unity Council's latest report on such atrocities, Mr. Yunus said on March 25: "With respect to the killings, preliminary investigations by the police indicate that these incidents were not connected to communal violence. Rather, these tragic deaths occurred at the hands of troublemakers, driven by a variety of factors such as prior enmity, theft, domestic disputes, and reckless behaviour."



report said. The RRAG said Mr. Yunus, without any investigation into any acts of violence against Hindus, stated on September 5, 2024 that these attacks were politically motivated. Four months later, the police substantiated his statement through an allegedly manufactured investigation. "The assertions of Mr. Yunus and the Bangladesh Police that there were no attacks based on religious belief are contrary to a conclusive finding of the UNHCHR, which investigated at his invitation," RRAG director Suhas Chakma said on Wednesday. He said the UN body's report, released on February 12, revealed Ahmadiyya Muslims were subjected to violent attacks by the mobs, apart from Hindus and the indigenous groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Targeted attacks on the religious minorities and destruction of their houses and places of worship were often under the pretext of revenge against Awami League supporters, he added. Seeking the international community's intervention, Mr. Chakma said Mr. Yunus' statements were unbecoming of a head of the government, and by condoning the violence as normal criminal acts, he was inciting radicals to target the country's religious minorities.

On March 13, the Unity Council said violence against religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous communities in Bangladesh continued unabated, as in the past. "In January and February, 92 incidents of violence targeting minorities and indigenous communities have occurred, including 11 murders, three cases of rape, 25 attacks on temples, one allegation of religious disrespect, six attacks on indigenous communities, 38 incidents of attacks, vandalism, and looting of homes and businesses, two cases of job dismissals, and six other attacks," the Unity Council's

# Will support Kunal Kamra if he comes to Pune: Uddhav Sena

GNS News Agency, March 26  
The Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray (UBT) has said that it will support comedian Kunal Kamra if he hosts a show in Pune. Gajanan Tharkude, city chief of Shiv Sena UBT, said that the party was not in touch with the comedian but if he hosts a show in Pune, the party will lend its support. "He (Kamra) is a satirist. He has made jokes on the Thackerays in the past as well. The Thackeray family is a family of artists, they are cartoonists. Raj Thackeray is also a cartoonist. They respect artists. But this was not even sarcasm, he has just stated facts." He added that it was Kamra's decision whether to come to Pune or not, but if he decides to come the Shiv Sena (UBT) will help him.  
However, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena has said they will oppose Kamra's show and not allow it to happen. "Let him organise the show, we will not let it happen in Pune. We will give an answer in Shiv Sena style," said Shiv Sena leader Nana Bangire. Ravindra Dhangekar, who recently switched from the Congress to the Shiv Sena, said that, "Any artist should stay in his lane. No one should insult any politician. No one should support this. Today he has spoken about one leader, tomorrow he might speak about some other leader. This kind of an envi-



ronment is not good." Kamra has been at the receiving end of threats by Shiv Sena politicians after he released a video where he took shots at Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, referring to him a "gaddar". Shiv Sena members led by Rahool Kanal were also booked for destroying the Habitat studio in Mumbai where the video was recorded. Soham is a Correspondent with in Pune. A journalism graduate, he was a fact-checker before joining the Express. Soham currently covers education and is also interested in civic issues, health, human rights, and politics.

# Mother approaches Bombay HC against 'illegal' order removing SPP

GNS News Agency, March 26  
payal tadvi suicide case, payal tadvi suicide probe, payal tadvi suicide accused doctors, payal tadvi mother, mumbai city news Payal Tadvi, a second-year gynaecology student at BYL Nair hospital, had died by suicide on May 22, 2019. Mother of Payal Tadvi, who died by suicide in 2019, allegedly due to harassment by her seniors, has approached the Bombay High Court against the notification that removed special public prosecutor (SPP) Pradip Gharat from the trial in the case. Tadvi had died by suicide allegedly due to alleged ragging and caste-based treatment.  
A bench of Justices Revati Mohite-Dere and Neela K Gokhale on Wednesday asked the state lawyer to take instructions from officials and sought response to the plea by Abeda Salim Tadvi, challenging the March 7 notification of state law and judiciary department that removed Gharat as SPP with immediate effect and appointed another lawyer as the SPP. The petitioner also sought direction to the government to reinstate Gharat as SPP. Advocate Lara Jesani for the petitioner sought direction to authorities not to act as per the impugned notification and pending hearing of the plea sought stay on its implementation and stay on proceedings in the case pending before the sessions court. Tadvi stated that while she wrote a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, seeking cancellation of a notification, the same yielded no response, prompting her to approach HC. The trial in the case against Payal's three seniors, Bhakti Mehare, Ankita Khandelwal and Hema Ahuja, is yet to begin. Gharat had moved an application before sessions court last month to add Dr Yi Ching Ling as accused, the then gynaecology department unit head at the TN Topiwala National Medical College and BYL Nair Hospital where Tadvi was studying in 2019. Gharat had claimed Dr. Ling had overlooked the harassment and ragging complaint made by Tadvi, including on the basis of her caste,



as she belonged to the Tadvi Bhil community, a Scheduled Tribe. After the trial court on February 28 directed Ling to be added as an accused in the abatement of suicide case, she approached the HC seeking to set aside the trial court order, which is likely to be heard on March 28. The plea by the mother stated that actions of the state Law and Judiciary Department along with the Home department to remove Gharat as SPP are "arbitrary and illegal," and "will lead to delay in the trial and risk of losing crucial evidence on account of such protracted trial, which cannot be allowed." "This would lead to the entire process of securing justice ineffective and a mere formality," it added. The plea further claimed that the actions by the government "indicate legal malice and amount to interference with smooth and proper administration of justice" and were in violation of the petitioner's right of speedy and fair trial. Moreover, the petitioner said the impugned notification violated provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, that provide substantive protection from discrimination and also against provisions of Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), therefore the same cannot be sustained.

# BRS MLCs stage unique protest holding symbolic gold bricks

Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): The BRS party MLCs today staged a symbolic protest at the Telangana Legislative Council to highlight yet another unfulfilled promise by the Congress Government—providing 10 grams of gold to eligible women for their marriage.  
The Congress Government, led by Revanth Reddy, came to power on the back of grand promises but has failed to deliver on its highly publicized commit-



ment to assist families by providing gold for their daughters' weddings. This failure has left several lakh households in financial distress, shattering the hopes of women who were eagerly awaiting the promised support. (NSS)

## Maharashtra extends deadline for High-Security Registration Plates to June 30



GNS News Agency, March 26

slow implementation. A large number of older vehicles are yet to comply with the regulation, prompting the Maharashtra Transport Department to intensify awareness campaigns, and therefore extend the deadline for another time. "Given the large number of vehicles still awaiting HSRP installation and those on the waiting list, there is a strong possibility that the deadline may be extended again," an official from the Regional Transport Office (RTO) said requesting anonymity.

In an official communication issued Thursday, Vivek Bhimanwar, Transport Commissioner, urged vehicle owners to install HSRPs before the deadline to avoid penalties. "Vehicle owners are urged to get their HSRP installed before June 30 to avoid penalties and ensure compliance with road safety regulations," Bhimanwar said. HSRPs are tamper-proof number plates embedded with a unique identification number and laser-etched code, enhancing vehicle security and aiding in theft prevention. These plates are mandatory for all vehicles registered before April 1, 2019. The Transport Department has also clarified that only HSRPs from authorised vendors will be recognised and updated on the VAHAN portal. Vehicles with unofficial plates will face a fine of 1,000 under Section 177 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.

## Before transferring Delhi HC justice Yashwant Varma, Supreme Court collegium made aware of video of cash burning at his residence



GNS News Agency, March 26

THE SUPREME COURT Collegium met Thursday evening and decided to transfer Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma back to his parent Allahabad High Court following an adverse report about recovery of cash during a fire at his residence. Highly-placed sources said the Supreme Court's five-member collegium unanimously resolved to recommend the transfer after the collegium members were apprised of a video purportedly of burning cash at Justice Varma's residence. The sources said there was, however, no estimate of the quantum of cash at the residence. After the CJI explained what had happened, there was no doubt in the judges' mind that Justice Varma should

be transferred out, said a source aware of the developments. CJI Khanna is learnt to have sought a fact-finding report from Delhi High Court Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya. The sources said the Collegium members had suggested to the CJI to try and get this at the earliest as that will assist the decision on whether to order an in-house inquiry or not. Calls and text messages to Justice Varma's office and staff by The Indian Express did not elicit a response. According to sources in Delhi Police, the fire incident occurred on March 14 at about 11.30 pm. "A call regarding a fire in a store room was received. It was a small fire. Two fire vehicles were sent and the fire was doused within 15 minutes," a Delhi Police source said. "A Daily Diary entry was made at Tughlak Road police station. But we did not mention any financial recovery part in the report," the source said. When contacted, the Fire Chief Atul Garg said since it was a minor fire, they are collecting details now. When the fire broke out on March 14, Justice Varma was not home and fire tenders and police who reached the spot to douse the flames allegedly stumbled on the money in a room, the sources said. This was communicated to the higher ups in the police and consequently, to governmental authorities who in turn intimated the office of the Chief Justice of India Sanjay Khanna. The CJI called for a meeting of the five-member Collegium on Thursday to discuss what should be done in the case. Sources said the Collegium members were of the view that the development is distressing and unanimously resolved to recommend transfer. The sources said that some of the members were also of the view that an in-house inquiry should be conducted, but a final call on this has to be taken by the CJI. The Collegium resolution on the recommendation to transfer the judge is yet to be uploaded.

## How these lesser-known non-veg dishes from outside Maharashtra have become a hit in Pune



GNS News Agency, March 26

aim of bringing authentic Bengali flavours to Pune. Initially, we focused on staple Bengali dishes like Kosha Mangsho, Luchi, and Chingri Malai Curry, but soon we realised there was a growing demand for Kolkata-style biryani. That is when we introduced Aloo Biryani with chicken and mutton to our menu, and it quickly became a best-seller," says Chatterjee. "Pune-kars, who are always open to trying new flavours, fell in love with its mild yet aromatic taste, the use of potatoes, and the balance of flavours. Unlike Hyderabad or Lucknowi Biryani, which can be quite spicy, Bengali Biryani has a subtle, aromatic taste, with the use of whole spices, rose water, and saffron, making it a unique experience," she explains. The tradition of adding potatoes to biryani dates back to Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in the mid-19th century, says Chatterjee. "In Kolkata, biryani is milder, aromatic, and cooked in the 'Dum' style, with whole spices, saffron, and rose water. Unlike other biryanis, it is not overly spicy but has a well-balanced flavour," she says.

What makes this biryani special? "The process follows the 'Dum' style of cooking, where everything is slow-cooked together to allow the flavours to develop fully. The potatoes are first fried until golden, then layered with marinated meat, fragrant rice, saffron-infused milk, ghee, and whole spices. The handi is then sealed with dough and cooked on low heat for hours, ensuring that every bite is infused with rich flavours. The addition of rose water and meetha itar (sweet essence) at the end gives it that signature Bengali touch. Unlike many other biryanis, Bengali Biryani does not use too many tomatoes or fiery masalas, keeping the taste balanced and flavourful," Chatterjee explains. "Today, Aloo Biryani is one of our most ordered dishes. We sell around 90 to 120 plates daily, and on weekends, it goes up to 150. Around 60 per cent of our customers order Aloo Biryani with chicken and mutton, making it our highest-selling dish.

Even during Lent, sales remain unaffected, as people crave biryani at any time of the day," says Chatterjee. A single portion of Aloo Biryani with chicken costs 320, while the Mutton Biryani is for ₹420. The dish is often paired with sides like Chicken Chaap or Mutton Rezala. Nepalese cuisine is not widely known in India, but one dish that has found a dedicated fan base in Pune is Kukhura-Ko Masu, a slow-cooked chicken curry with unique Nepalese spices.

Anvesh Sharma, Manager at Kuai Kitchen restaurant in Koregaon Park, says, "Kukhura-Ko Masu is a staple in Nepali households, known for its deep, smoky flavours. Unlike Indian curries, it does not use cream or cashew paste. Instead, it relies on fresh ingredients, roasted spices, and slow cooking to develop its bold taste. The key ingredient is Timur (Nepalese Sichuan pepper), which gives it a mild numbing heat." Kuai Kitchen started in 2019 with a focus on Chinese, Thai, and Japanese dishes. But when they introduced a small selection of Nepalese dishes, Kukhura-Ko Masu quickly became a hit. "While we specialised in Chinese, Thai, and Japanese dishes initially, we soon realised that the people of Pune had a growing interest in unique and lesser-known cuisines. That's when we introduced a small selection of Nepalese dishes, and Kukhura-Ko Masu became a favourite," says Sharma. "Pune has a diverse crowd, including students, professionals, and food lovers who are always eager to explore new flavours. What helped this dish gain popularity is the fact that it is both homely and exotic—familiar in its use of chicken and spices but different in its preparation and taste," Sharma adds. Kuai Kitchen currently sells around 70 to 90 plates of Kukhura-Ko Masu daily. "On weekends, orders jump to 110-120. Around 55 per cent of our non-vegetarian customers order this dish at least once. The growing number of Nepalese students and professionals in Pune has contributed to its popularity, but even locals have fallen in love with its rich, comforting taste," says Sharma.

## 'Film fest strengthens Chandigarh's position as growing hub for world-class cinema': Bina Paul, VS Kundu

GNS News Agency, March 26

You are back in Chandigarh with the second edition of CIFF. What were the takeaways from the first edition, the challenges, and what made you choose the city again for the second time?

Bina: We are very excited to be back in Chandigarh after a year. In the first edition, we realised that there was a strong appetite for films of varied genres among the city's audience. Such opportunities have been rare here, and the establishment of CIFF has introduced a new world of cinema to Chandigarh's cultured viewers.

What can audiences look forward to at CIFF 2025?

Kundu: This year, Chandigarh can look forward to a film programme that includes both well-known films and hidden gems. An exciting aspect of the festival is the exposure to regional cinema from across India. Many of these films, which create waves globally, are rarely accessible in regular theatres or on mainstream platforms. Our goal is to showcase the familiar while also helping audiences discover the unknown.

As festival director, what are your philosophies, intents, and hopes for CIFF?

Bina: As the artistic director of a new festival, the main challenge is to cater to two distinct needs. One is that of filmmakers, who are always seeking new audiences and opportunities for interaction. The other is that of audiences, who, despite having access to so much content today, often have short attention spans. Selecting films that balance these needs is both the role and challenge of an artistic director.

We hope visiting filmmakers will discover new styles of storytelling. As I mentioned earlier, the excitement of stumbling upon the unknown is one of the most rewarding aspects of such experiences. CIFF also brings filmmakers to the audience, facilitating meaningful interactions. What makes the festival significant is that it not only celebrates



cinema but also bridges the creative and business aspects of the industry.

Could you share the process behind selecting films for the festival?

Bina: The selection process is meticulous. Our programming team identifies, watches, discusses, and carefully curates films. The festival's theme revolves around accessibility and global perspectives in storytelling. Today, a great deal of experimentation is happening in how narratives are structured. While audiences enjoy being challenged, they also don't want to feel lost in overly esoteric stories. Striking this balance has been a key focus.

Indian cinema has evolved beyond its traditional emphasis on Hindi films, and the festival programme offers a glimpse into this new, broader definition of Indian cinema.

What is the philosophy of CIFF?

Kundu: As CIFF returns for its second edition in Chandigarh, I am honoured to be part of this vibrant celebration of cinema and storytelling. More than just a film showcase, this festival is a dynamic confluence of creativity, culture, and artistic excellence.

## 'Started mobilising force a day before': Punjab Police executed clean-up in a swoop

GNS News Agency, March 26

It was only Tuesday evening when the concentration of police force began at the two sites that there was widespread anticipation of a possible action to force farmers to vacate the protest sites. It was only Tuesday evening when the concentration of police force began at the two sites that there was widespread anticipation of a possible action to force farmers to vacate the protest sites. night, the Punjab Police undertook a significant operation to evict protesting farmers from key border sites along the Punjab-Haryana boundary, specifically at Shambhu and Khanauri. The action marked a decisive move by the AAP government to dismantle farmer protests that had persisted for over a year, primarily centered around demands for a legal guarantee on Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops, among other grievances directed at both state and central governments.

The well planned and well executed operation began late on Wednesday and extended till the early hours of Thursday. It involved a heavy deployment of approximately 3,000 security personnel, supported by bulldozers, ambulances, buses, and fire-fighting vehicles. A senior police officer said that once Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann gave the go ahead for vacating the blockades set up at Shambhu and Khanauri, a contingency plan was put in motion.

"The broad contours of the logistics involved were already known because we were prepared for such an eventuality for a long time. The mobilisation of resources was done in a deliberate manner so as not to create an alarm which would have enabled a reinforcement of farmers at the two sites," the officer said. It was only Tuesday evening when the concentration of police force began at the two sites that there was widespread anticipation of a possible action to force farmers to vacate the protest sites. "There was complete coordination with our counterparts in Haryana who had been forewarned of the impending action. The Haryana Police too had moved their personnel at the inter-state border in case farmers tried to enter Haryana," he said. At the Shambhu border, a critical protest site located near Ambala, police systematically cleared the area by removing temporary structures such as tents that farmers had erected. The process was methodical, with authorities issuing prior warnings to the protestors and the clearance occurred in the presence of duty magistrates to ensure legal oversight.

Several prominent farmer leaders were detained during the crackdown. The Punjab Police's actions were not



limited to physical evictions. Internet services were suspended in parts of Patiala and Sangrur districts to control communication and prevent coordination among protestors, a tactic often employed in such situations to maintain order. Bulldozers were used to raze makeshift camps, effectively dismantling the infrastructure that had sustained the protests since February 13, 2024. Visuals from the scene showed police removing items like fans and stages set up by the farmers, underscoring the thoroughness of the operation. The timing of the crackdown coincided with the ongoing negotiations between farmer representatives and a central delegation led by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. The seventh round of talks on Wednesday, which lasting for over three hours, failed to yield a resolution, with the next round of talks scheduled for May 4, 2025. This lack of progress may have prompted the Punjab government to take decisive action, especially given mounting pressure from traders and industrialists who had reported significant economic losses due to the prolonged closure of border points like Shambhu and Khanauri. Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema defended the police action, arguing that it was necessary to alleviate the hardships faced by traders and youth in the state. He emphasised that while the AAP government had supported farmers during earlier protests against the central government's farm laws, the current demands were primarily directed at the Centre, and the border closures had become untenable for Punjab's economy. Cheema highlighted that reopening the borders could boost trade, create jobs, and help address issues like drug abuse among the youth by fostering economic activity. The operation drew sharp criticism from farmer organizations and opposition figures.

## After Mann walked out of last meet, govt invites SKM for fresh dialogue today

GNS News Agency, March 26

The Punjab government Thursday extended an invitation to the Samyukt Kisan Morcha leaders for a meeting on Friday with Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khuddian, the move coming only a day after it ordered clean-up of the farmer protest sites at Khanauri and Shambhu border points of state with Haryana and state police detained several senior farmer union leaders. According to a letter of the Agriculture Department Director, which was released to the media by the SKM leaders, the meeting will be held at the Punjab Bhawan at 4 pm on Friday. Besides SKM, the Bharti Kisan Union (Ugrahan) has also been invited to the meeting, which comes ahead of the SKM's call for taking out a march to the Punjab Vidhan Sabha on March 26. The Budget session of Punjab Vidhan Sabha is starting on Friday. The SKM and the BKU (Ugrahan) were not part of the protests at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points that were spearheaded by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha.

During the last meeting with the SKM leaders on March 3, ahead of their Chandigarh Chalo call for March 5, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had walked out midway. Several SKM leaders were detained before they could start the march to Chandigarh. Mann had later said that he had left

the meeting as the farmer leaders were insisting on the march even as he was engaging in a dialogue with them. The SKM and BKU (Ugrahan), meanwhile, have given a fresh call for a march to Chandigarh on March 26. They have announced that they will march to the Vidhan Sabha on the day the government will present its budget for the next fiscal. While the SKM leaders said that they would be going for the meeting. "As of now, we are going for the meeting. If there is any change in the decision, then we will announce it Friday," said a farmer leader. He added that there were concerns that the government may detain the farmers leaders as was done to SKM and Kisan MAZdoor Morcha leaders on Thursday when they were returning from their meeting with union ministers in Chandigarh. Also, there are concerns that the government was trying to divide the farmer organisations as it fears there may be a call for unity after crackdown on SKM (non political) and KMM. "We understand this design. First, we were detained. Yesterday, SKM (non-political) and KMM leaders were detained. Now, suddenly, they have called us again for a meeting after the CM walked out of the meeting. We will consider all this," said the leader. 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.

## Delhi High Court seeks status report from UP police on inquiry into 'illegal' arrest of Delhi resident



GNS News Agency, March 26

The Delhi High Court recently sought a report from the Uttar Pradesh Police before April 4 on the present status of an inquiry it had ordered into their arrest of a Delhi resident in the national capital without following required protocol. A division bench last month termed the arrest "illegal" and sought a status report from the UP Police, to be filed by the Greater Noida commissioner of police, and directed a senior officer of the Noida police to remain present before the court on May 5. The bench also sought a response from the Noida police commissioner as to whether any protocol had been agreed to with the Delhi Police in case of inter-state arrest.

The directions had come in a habeas corpus petition

moved on behalf of one Satinder Singh Bhasin after the UP Police allegedly arrested him from Connaught Place, New Delhi, on February 18 without informing the Delhi Police. He was allegedly taken to an unknown location, with his whereabouts unknown. In its February order, the bench recorded that "the matter requires a deeper look as none of the other prescribed procedures appears to have been followed". The court had observed that "no grounds of arrest also appear to have been communicated at the time of arrest" and had recorded, "If the procedures prescribed are not followed, the arrest itself would be contrary to law... The prima facie view of the court is that the steps required were not taken and hence the arrest itself is illegal."

In an application filed by Bhasin for the preservation of CCTV footage, a bench of Justices Prathiba Singh and Rajneesh Kumar Gupta directed the same on March 12. Bhasin informed the court that he had not yet been called by the UP Police to record his statement, stating, "therefore, no steps appear to have been taken in this regard." Bhasin pointed out that there are CCTVs at 25 locations that would provide evidence of how he was removed from Delhi near his office and taken to Uttar Pradesh. "It is made clear that all the CCTV footage which is available for the said date recording the incident wherein the appellant was picked up from Connaught Place and taken to Noida shall be preserved and placed before this Court in a pen drive," the court noted as it issued a notice to the counsel representing the UP Police.

## Himachal Dy CM Mukesh Agnihotri, DGP Atul Verma, and 30 others have narrow escape as flight makes emergency landing at Shimla Airport

GNS News Agency, March 26

Himachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri and Director General of Police (DGP) Atul Verma, along with 30 other passengers, had a narrow escape when their Alliance Air flight from Delhi to Shimla made an emergency landing at Shimla Airport. Following the landing, the passengers, including Agnihotri and Verma, were stuck inside the aircraft for more than 20 minutes.

Speaking to the media, Deputy CM Mukesh Agnihotri said, "The flight did not land at the designated spot, nor did it stop where it was supposed to. I would rather say that the runway at Shimla Airport fell short for the landing. DGP Atul Verma was also on board, along with around 30 other passengers. Indeed, it was an emergency landing." Agnihotri, who had travelled to Delhi on Saturday, added, "The flight landed at Shimla Airport at 8.20 am. An announcement was made that we would be taken to the airport terminal in taxis, but later, the aircraft took a turn and reached its designated parking spot."

According to sources at Shimla Airport, the aircraft was immediately grounded for inspection following the incident. The issue arose during the plane's descent when the pilot reported a malfunction in the braking system. Deputy CM Agnihotri, who was on board, described the tense moments after the landing. Recounting his experience, he said, "We



reached Shimla by flight this morning. There was some issue with the landing... I don't know the technical details, but as a layman, I can say that when the plane was about to land, it did not touch down where it should have. It failed to stop and reached the end of the runway." Later, Mukesh Agnihotri also described the morning's incident during the ongoing budget session in the Assembly. Replying to a question from BJP MLA Trilok Jamwal pertaining to the Bhanupalli-Bilaspur-Berri railway line in Bilaspur district, Agnihotri said, "... besides working on the railway lines, we also need to work on the expansion of runways and airports. The situation I and our respected DGP went through today morning, I believe everyone sitting here knows."

## After crackdown, Punjab Government releases 450 farmers from police custody

GNS News Agency, March 26

The Punjab Government said Monday it will immediately release 450 more farmers, who were taken into custody after the crackdown on the protest sites at Shambhu and Khanauri last week, from police detention.

Dr Sukhchain Singh Gill, Inspector General of Police (IGP), Headquarters, said Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has directed the immediate release of farmers including women, differently-abled individuals, farmers with medical conditions, and those above the age of 60. "In line with the directives of the Punjab Government, we are prioritising the release of such farmers and about 450 farmers are being released today," he said. Gill said the Punjab Government has already released nearly 800 farmers from police custody. He added the government has issued strict directions that nobody will be permitted to misappropriate the belongings of farmers. "To address the concern about the belongings of farmers, the Patiala district police have



also appointed SP-rank officer Jasbir Singh as the nodal officer, and farmers facing issues related to their possessions can directly contact him on mobile number 90713-00002 for immediate assistance," said Gill. He also said the Patiala police have already registered three First Information Reports (FIRs) in this regard.

## BMC inspects Kunal Kamra show venue, says Habitat management pulled down unauthorised shed

GNS News Agency, March 26

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Monday afternoon carried out an inspection to identify unauthorised construction at the Habitat—the venue in Mumbai's Khar (west) where stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra's performance ran into trouble with the Shiv Sena. In the morning, a group of civic officials carried out an inspection of the ground-plus-three structure, where they found a shed at the entryway of the venue that was erected illegally. The officials said the management of the venue pulled the shed down after the authorities pointed out it was erected illegally.

"We are analysing the building's original blueprint with the current structure. The development plan rules state that the property owner needs to inform civic authorities whenever there's an additional structure being erected. The shed was



erected without our permission, and we had served them a notice, following which they removed it under our supervision," said an official. In a video that went viral on social media, civic officials and labourers were seen entering the property with hammers. At present, the entire ground-plus-three building has been barricaded from all sides and officials from the BMC's building fac-

tory department are present at the spot along with police officials. The civic officials said that the authorities were also reviewing other parameters like the no-objection certificate on fire safety. The Habitat management issued a statement in the morning that it was shutting down the venue. "We are shutting down till we figure out the best way to provide a platform for free expression

without putting ourselves and our property in jeopardy," read the statement posted on the Habitat's official Instagram account. "We have never been involved in the content performed by any artist, but the recent events made us rethink about how we get blamed and targeted every time, almost like we are a proxy for the performer," the statement stated.

## 5 years of Covid lockdown: In Pune, IT professionals say WFH has given them opportunities as well as challenges



GNS News Agency, March 26

Pune-based IT professional Mayank Sharma had started enjoying his new office, which was just a 10-minute walk from his home, when the coronavirus-induced lockdown was imposed five years ago. Amid the lockdown, Sharma had to organise the house so that he and his wife could work from home—he took the drawing room and his wife their bedroom. Through the years of the pandemic, Sharma became a part of the workers worldwide who were making the transition to remote working, overcoming initial technical glitches, and perfecting the system to work efficiently.

"During COVID, many organisations, that were not open to WFH (work from home) before, had to adapt. They figured out that work could also be done from home. You don't necessarily have to be in the office to make sure that everything is done. You don't necessarily need to meet people every day to make sure that things are getting completed on time," he says. After the pandemic ended, remote working has made way for a hybrid work culture as well as a return to office. Some organisations, such as Sharma's, have allowed employees to continue working from home.

"The pandemic also helped companies realise that WFH reduces costs. My current company had a very big office in Mumbai that they had rented. Since COVID hit, they gave the team members benefits, such as an allowance to purchase a table, a chair and a monitor, among others, to work from home. They could let go of their office space in Mumbai," he adds. He says he and his team members do not need to travel to the office because most of their work is done on calls. While there is one more member of his team in Pune, the rest are based in Bengaluru

## Violinist RK Shriramkumar, who has accompanied MS Subbulakshmi and TM Krishna, awarded Sangita Kalanidhi by the Music Academy

GNS News Agency, March 26

In 1988, when 12-year-old TM Krishna, hailed as a child prodigy in Chennai's music circles, debuted at the Music Academy as a part of the 'Spirit of Youth' series, he was accompanied on the violin by RK Shriramkumar, a decade his senior and the grandson and student of the noted violinist RK Venkatarama Sastry from Rudrapatnam who trained under iconic voinka Veena Subbanna and renowned violinist Mysore T Chowdiah (Chowdiah Memorial Hall in Bengaluru is named after him) in the early 20th century. Three decades later, Shriramkumar who imbibed the nuances of violin from Sastry, with Arun Prakash on the mridangam, continues to accompany Krishna besides many others; cajoling his violin so that it harmonises with and complements the vocals as intimately as possible.

Shriramkumar has accompanied generations of artistes including Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, MS Subbulakshmi, DK Pattammal, T Brinda and T Mukta, M Balamuralikrishna, and the current crop of significant artistes such as Sudha Ragnathan, Bombay Jayashri, and Krishna, among others. Shriramkumar has been named this year's Sangita Kalanidhi awardee by the Music Academy. The award, the highest honour in Carnatic classical music, given to Carnatic vocalist TM Krishna last year had sparked controversy due to a section of musicians uncomfortable with the musician's views on MS Subbulakshmi, Tyagaraja and political activist Periyar, a founding figure of the Dravidian movement. Musician duo Ranjani-Gayatri decided to not sing at the December Music Season, Chithravina Ravikiran returned his Sangita Kalanidhi.

In a statement for the announcement of the award, N Murali, president, Music Academy, said that in the past few decades, Shriramkumar had been acknowledged as an authority on composer and writer Subbarama Dikshitar, whose book Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini "remains one

of the best-known compilations of Muthuswami Dikshitar's compositions". "It is fitting that he has been chosen for this prestigious award in the year marking the 250th anniversary of the master composer," added Murali. Shrivakum comes from an illustrious family of musicians. Besides his famous grandfather, who taught him the nuances of violin, he also trained under noted vocalist DK Jayaraman to make sure that the violin understood how it is supposed to resound alongside a musician, never overpowering it.

After his debut at 15, he began playing with stalwarts of music and learned a slew of compositions from Subbulakshmi and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, thus expanding his universe. It also helped him turn into a composer. In 2017, when Krishna decided to sing Poromboke, turning a common Tamil slur into a bold environmental, social, political and artistic statement, which took on the unconcerned government and corporate hunger, Shriramkumar composed it for him. Shriramkumar as the Sangita Kalanidhi nominee will preside over the 99th annual conference and concerts of the Music Academy, which will be held this year in December.



## How temptation of three heavy metals in car silencers drove a new wave of thefts

GNS News Agency, March 26

In 2021-22, a new wave of automobile thefts was reported across Pune, with gangs adopting an unexpected modus operandi. Rather than targeting entire cars or general car parts, they focused on a seemingly odd target: the silencers of specific car models. The Pune City and Pune Rural police successfully busted multiple gangs involved in these heists, which were driven by the high-value internal coatings of catalytic converters of these silencers, made of a combination of heavy metals like platinum, rhodium, and palladium. Often referred to as "silencer gangs", groups with a similar modus operandi were active across India.

In April 2022, a team from the detection branch of the Loni Kalbhori police station in Pune city was probing at least six different thefts registered in its jurisdiction in 2021 and 2022, in which the silencers of specific multi-utility vehicles (MUVs) were stolen. The team gathered information from various possible sources on these specific types of thefts, including ground-level intelligence and technical leads. Their probe revealed that these thefts were committed with the motive to extract the metal dust from silencers, which is sold at a very high cost in illegal markets. The team studied cases that were reported from other parts of India. On April 16, 2022, following a tip-off from informants, a trap was laid, and two suspects travelling in a car were detained from Uruli Devachi. In the subsequent probe, the police seized from their metal dust, which is believed to have been extracted from over a dozen such silencer units. The two suspects, in their early 20s and both from Alandi, were using a car from these thefts and had stolen several silencers not just from Loni Kalbhori but across Pune.

In April and May 2022, a team from the local crime branch of Pune Rural Police arrested two automobile me-

chanics from Parner in Ahmednagar district. However, the mastermind they had been working for kept evading the police. Finally, in June 2022, they arrested him from the Ranjangaon area. The probe revealed that the gang had stolen at least 10 silencers in the Shikrapur, Shirur, and Ranjangaon police station limits in 2022 alone. The cases against these gangs are pending in court. A senior officer who was part of Pune Rural Police at the time said, "Our probe revealed that the rackets we busted were low-level operatives who just executed the thefts. We found out that the larger pan-India syndicates operating specifically for silencer dust were spread over many cities of India. In 2022, the new emission norms in the country had become mandatory, and all new vehicles were required to have catalytic converters in their silencers or emission systems." The officer added, "The catalytic converter in these silencers filters the pollutants that the combustion of engines produces. For this purpose, the inside surface of these converters is coated with a mixture of platinum, rhodium, and palladium. If a vehicle is new, then these metals are in higher quantities in their silencer units. That is why most of the vehicles targeted were new purchases. While multiple models of cars have these layers, the reason the silencers of this specific make of MUVs were mostly targeted was that they had the coating in higher amounts and comparative ease to detach the unit from the car."

An officer from Pune City Police who was part of the probe said, "These gangs, after stealing the silencers, used to scrape the coatings—which had impurities along with the three valuable metal coatings. This scraped dust was then sold on the black market in the range of Rs 3,000 per gram. While rhodium is valued multiple times more than platinum, palladium is also very costly. These dustings were then used to extract the heavy metals."





## States and the challenge before the Finance Commission

States, which are near to people, bear substantial developmental expenditures, and, hence, their share should be further increased substantially. The financial strain on the States has been particularly severe due to increases in counter-part funding for centrally sponsored schemes on the one side and inadequate devolution on the other side. Hence, a fair and equitable share for States would be 50% devolution of the gross central taxes, allowing States greater fiscal autonomy in funding and implementing locally relevant schemes.

On horizontal devolution, it is evident that the redistribution policy followed for the first four and a half decades in our country has yielded limited results in driving real growth. Hence, the fundamental question would be this: should the focus be on a smaller national pie with a larger share for less-developed States or a larger national pie with equitable distribution that provides greater absolute resources for all? The answer is difficult, yet a more balanced approach would ensure a larger national economic pie, allowing for reasonable shares for less-developed States and adequate resources for progressive States to continue their upward trajectory. This would clearly necessitate a progressive resource allocation methodology for the performing States so as to allow them to fulfil their potential to be India's growth engines. Unique challenges in progressive States Amidst this, it is also important to note that progressive States such as Tamil Nadu also face unique challenges in demography and urbanisation. With a median age higher than the national average, the State's capacity to generate consumption-based tax revenue is declining, even as the costs of supporting an aging population are rising. It is imperative to ensure that such States do not fall into the "middle-income trap", where growth stagnates and they "grow old before becoming rich". Next, the challenges due to urbanisation in fast-growing States merit adequate addressal. A State like Tamil Nadu is witnessing the fastest rate of urbanisation in the country, due to which it will have a 57.30% urban population in 2031, against the expected national average of 37.90%. The resources for fulfilling the infrastructure needs of urbanisation should be earmarked to ensure the long-term sustainability of our growth. We should keep in mind that the mandate of the Commission goes beyond fiscal arithmetic. It is about envisioning a future where every State contributes to and benefits from the nation's progress. Whether it is fostering manufacturing, addressing urbanisation challenges, or ensuring climate resilience, the Commission's decisions will impact millions of lives and determine the trajectory of the country's destiny, to take its place among the world's leading economies.

## Amid key victories in fight against TB, states face one battle: Shortage of drugs



Last month, the World Health Organisation highlighted two significant milestones in India's fight against TB: an 18% dip in cases over the past 10 years, more than double the global rate; and a 24% reduction in deaths in the same period, higher than the global average of 23%.

This frames the Government's 100-day intensive campaign beginning December 7 to enhance detection in select high-burden districts but these bright spots in the mission to eliminate TB by 2025 have a shadow: shortage in supply of key TB drugs since 2023, according to records investigated by The Indian Express. India's TB treatment schedule has two stages: a two-three month Intensive Phase (IP) marked by a combination tablet of four antibiotics, and Continuation Phase (CP), where a patient gets another combination medicine with three antibiotics for four to seven months. These are called fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs. Data for 2022, 2023 and 2024 shows a progressive dip in the supply of FDC drugs from the Centre. For 2023, data shows a 56.5 per cent decline in the supply of drugs for the first phase (IP) compared to 2022; and a 23 per cent drop for the second (CP) across the same period.

Supplies have improved in fits and starts but this year, data available until June shows, there was a 23.04 per cent dip in supply for the first phase, compared to the first six months of 2023, and a 28.8 per cent dip in supply for the second phase across the same period. Records show this prompted the Centre to send several letters to states on these delays urging local procurement. The key factors behind the shortfall: the nodal procurement agency cancelled nine of its 26 tenders to purchase these drugs due to "administrative reasons"; and, three suppliers were blacklisted for violations ranging from forged bank guarantees to faulty pricing. Amid key victories in fight against TB, states face one battle: Shortage of drugs

The Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare did not respond to a detailed questionnaire from The Indian Express on the state of the shortage. But a letter sent by the Ministry to states this March said that TB drugs would "get delayed due to unforeseen and extraneous circumstances." It directed states to procure them locally for a period of three months, with no restrictions on size or formulation. "On case by case basis, reimbursement of costs towards drugs to the patient, if the district/health facilities are unable to provide free drugs," it said.

Mission 2025It was during the "End TB Summit" in New Delhi in March 2018 that the Government announced a deadline of 2025 for elimination of the disease. According to the latest WHO data, India was estimated to have had 27 lakh TB cases in 2023, of which 25.1 lakh patients (85 per cent) were receiving medication — a significant achievement since more than 50 per cent of those in this category succumb to the infection without treatment. The treatment of Drug-Susceptible TB (DSTB) — mainly for newly diagnosed patients — involves six-nine months of antibiotics. The drugs involved are Rifampicin, Isoniazid, Pyrazinamide and Ethambutol in a single daily tablet for Intensive Phase; and Rifampicin, Isoniazid and Ethambutol in a single daily tablet for Continuation Phase. The duration and dosage of these tablets can vary, depending on age, infection level and treatment history. While treatment is free in government facilities,

patients opting for the private sector may end up shelling out around Rs 10,000 for six months of IP and CP and Rs 20,000-30,000 per month for drug-resistant cases. Under the National TB Elimination Programme, the Centre is responsible for the procurement and supply of TB drugs, while states receive limited funds to make emergency purchases as a temporary measure.

Ideally, stocks for three months are maintained at the district, state and national levels and for two months at the block level. Experts say buffer stocks are crucial because those who miss scheduled doses risk contributing to the growing threat of drug-resistant TB, which primarily results from an incomplete course of treatment. Among the states topping the charts in reported TB cases are: UP (6.3 lakh), Maharashtra (2.27 lakh), Bihar (1.86 lakh), Madhya Pradesh (1.84 lakh), and Rajasthan (1.65 lakh). Overall, India accounts for 26 per cent of global TB cases and 29 per cent of TB deaths. Letter after letter

The shortage was reflected in a series of letters sent to states, urging local procurement of medicines, mainly Isoniazid, Pyrazinamide, and Rifampicin, by the Central TB Division, which is the Union Health Ministry department responsible for implementing the elimination programme. In eight letters, the Centre eased permission norms to give a three-month extension for local procurement. Records show that another key hurdle for the availability of drugs was the cancellation of at least nine tenders issued by the Central Medical Services Society (CMSS) — the agency that procured drugs for Government health programmes — between January 2023 and August 2024 due to "administrative reasons." To compound the crisis, records show, at least three of the government's TB drug suppliers were blacklisted by CMSS this year for various alleged violations.

UP-based Unicare India Ltd was barred from CMSS tenders for Ethambutol for two years this February for failing to deliver the medicine after allegedly quoting incorrect prices; Maharashtra-based J Duncan Healthcare was barred for two years after allegedly submitting forged bank guarantees, including for two TB drugs tenders worth Rs 215.5 crore; and, Gujarat-based Centurion Laboratories was blacklisted for two years for alleged delays in supply. For instance, the order blacklisting Centurion Laboratories warned: "Please note the significant delays in supply resulted into crisis in Anti TB Drugs among patients and hence, severely affected the National Programme." The three companies did not respond to requests from The Indian Express seeking comment.

States scramble for stocksTo bridge the shortage, the government issued at least two tenders in July and August against the ones that previously failed. States are also preparing themselves better. Said a state official: "The crisis we faced earlier this year has abated... but we do not have the kind of buffer stocks that we used to maintain before." However, records show that states also faced challenges in local procurement. For example, on March 26 this year, responding to a Central letter on shortage, Health Minister of Congress-ruled Karnataka Dinesh Gundu Rao wrote to the then Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandavdya that the Centre's "delayed communication to procure a critical drug" had come at a time when the Model Code of Conduct for the general elections was in place. "It has been learnt that neither these medications are available in the quantities required by the state nor the procurement process can be hastened," Rao wrote, adding that this has "adversely affected" procurement efforts. A senior official from another state said they tapped into the buffer stock of loose medicines rather than procure afresh. "We were constantly moving medicines between facilities and monitoring stock levels. We also allocated funds to districts to purchase medicines from local stores," an official said. Another state official said, "We had to provide patients with supplies for four or five days, asking them to return thereafter, when normally we would give them a month's supply." According to a senior official from a fourth state, local procurement was difficult without a state-specific rate contract — an agreement setting fixed prices for commonly used items for a certain period. "Without a robust procurement system, securing short-term supplies is challenging," the official said.

## Long Covid lasted beyond 2 years, left 70% survivors breathless, says AIIMS study

GNS News Agency, March 26

Long-term breathlessness was associated with those who were infected during the second wave of the pandemic, when the Delta variant was predominant. Long-term breathlessness was associated with those who were infected during the second wave of the pandemic, when the Delta variant was predominant. Ankan Jaiswal, 47, still gets dizzy and breathless when she climbs a flight of stairs or walks more than a kilometre. Sometimes her mind is in a haze. Three years after a Covid infection landed her in ICU, its after-effects still seem to get the better of her. She and other survivors were tracked at the long Covid clinic at AIIMS, Delhi, for three years as part of a study that found that 70.7 per cent of them weren't breathing properly or getting sufficient oxygen from the air to their blood.

The study is significant because it shows that after-effects can be quite severe and last beyond two years after initial Covid diagnosis. This was common especially in women, the elderly, those who had severe infection and smokers. "It is one of the first studies from a low- and middle-income country (LMIC) to report long-term pulmonary sequelae (after effects) of COVID-19. Some of them still need oxygen support occasionally," says Dr Anant Mohan, head of the pulmonology department at AIIMS Delhi. He and his team conducted an observational study on patients who have been visiting the long Covid clinic regularly for three-and-a-half years. "We are still running it because we have a couple of ongoing projects. We had around 1,426 Covid survivors. Of them, 231 patients had been following up with us for over two years. We mapped their symptoms and found that they reported persistent dyspnoea (breathlessness and feeling suffocated) and impaired lung functions," he says.

### WHAT DOES THE STUDY SAY?

A total of 1,426 patients were registered in the post-Covid clinic from 2020 as a part of the long Covid multi-system observational study. Altogether 231 of them are still coming to the hospital for follow-ups. Most of them had not one but overlapping symptoms. So 36.4 per cent had persistent self-reported dyspnoea, 48.1 per cent had impaired spirometry (how much air you can breathe in and out, and how quickly you can exhale) and 70.7 per cent patients had impaired lung diffusion (lungs are unable to efficiently exchange gases or move oxygen from the air into the blood).

### WHO ARE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO LONG COVID? WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS?

Dr Mohan included all kinds of patients above 18 — those with severe, mild and moderate Covid infection and those with no symptoms at all. Apart from hospital records of physical visits, the two-year follow-up was done in-person or telephonically. "During physical visits, the patients



were invited to perform spirometry, lung diffusion test and a six-minute walk test," says Dr Mohan. Long-term breathlessness was associated with those who were infected during the second wave of the pandemic, when the Delta variant was predominant. The elderly had prolonged pulmonary function impairment, given their reduced capacity to repair lungs with ageing. There was a consistent association of women with long-term lung function abnormalities. Like Ankan, who has now moved to the US with her family as the pollution in Delhi worsens her symptoms. Seventy-year-old Savitri Devi was hospitalised at AIIMS for four days recently. "Her breathing difficulties worsen when pollution levels go up in Delhi. Post-Covid, she has not been able to walk long enough as she goes breathless and has coughing bouts," says her husband Mahavir, a resident of Delhi's Karawal Nagar. Meanwhile, 48-year-old Mithlesh Kumar, says he misses running and walking fast, something which he did pre-Covid. He can't walk and talk to someone at the same time, cannot climb the stairs and gets breathless when his son holds or hugs him tightly. Long Covid patients have also reported dietary changes, psychiatric changes and sleep disturbances, which are being looked at separately in other studies. "Other than respiratory symptoms, we found patients complaining of fatigue and sleep disturbances. We can now say we have a reasonable idea on what long Covid is all about," says Dr Mohan.

### WHAT SHOULD PATIENTS DO THEN?

The study, according to Dr Mohan, is trying to compile all the symptoms of long Covid so that patients can seek early medical attention to address them and prevent complications. "Breathing exercises should be taken up on a regular basis by long Covid patients," says Dr Mohan. The patients' demographics and co-morbidities were compiled along with their details on the initial Covid infection, including the date of positivity of laboratory test, the severity of the illness, the need for hospitalisation, their hospital records, out-patient prescription slips and patient recall.

## Sake, Japan's traditional alcoholic brew, finds spot on UNESCO's cultural heritage list

Luque: Sake, a smooth rice wine, is perhaps more Japanese than the world-famous sushi. It is brewed in centuries-old mountaintop warehouses, savoured in the country's pub-like izakayas, poured during weddings and served slightly chilled for special toasts. The traditional alcoholic brew that plays a crucial role in Japan's culinary traditions was enshrined on Wednesday by UNESCO on its list of the "intangible cultural heritage of humanity".

At a meeting in Luque, Paraguay, members of UNESCO's committee for safeguarding humanity's cultural heritage voted to recognise 45 cultural practices and products around the world, including Brazilian white cheese, Caribbean cassava bread and Palestinian olive oil soap. Unlike UNESCO's World Heritage List, which includes sites considered important to humanity such as the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, the Intangible Cultural Heritage designation names products and practices of different cultures

that are deserving of recognition. A Japanese delegation welcomed the announcement in Luque. "Sake is considered a divine gift and is essential for social and cultural events in Japan," Takehiro Kano, the Japanese ambassador to UNESCO, said. The basic ingredients of sake are few: rice, water, yeast and koji, a rice mold, which breaks down the starches into fermentable sugars like malting does in beer production. The whole two-monthlong process of steaming, stirring, fermenting and pressing can be gruelling. The rice — which wields tremendous marketing power as part of Japan's broader cultural identity — is key to the alcoholic brew. For a product to be categorised Japanese sake, the rice must be Japanese. The UNESCO recognition, the delegation said, captured more than the craft knowledge of making high-quality sake. It also honoured a tradition dating back some 1,000 years — sake makes a cameo in Japan's famous 11th century novel, The Tale of Genji, as the drink of choice in the refined Heian court.

## Where Viksit Bharat meets green growth

India's much-vaunted GDP growth rate — making it the world's fastest-growing large economy — slipped in the last year. Apart from the near-term consequences, this also means the longer-term goal of Viksit Bharat, to transform India into a developed nation by 2047, slips further away. Understandably, policy priorities are focused on getting back on the fast-growth track: Consistently over 8 per cent growth annually is needed to make it to the viksit threshold. But a different objective — green growth — might need equal attention. India's other long-term goal is to reach net-zero emissions by 2070. A lot needs to be accomplished in the near-term to get there, such as 50 per cent reduction of emissions intensity, 500 GW of fuel capacity from renewable sources, and around US \$290 billion in investments in new wind and solar energy sources — all by 2030.

The Fletcher School at Tufts University in the US and Worley, a leading global professional services company of energy, chemicals and resources experts, collaborated on a research initiative to better understand where the Viksit Bharat and net-zero journeys intersect. We found that to head towards one destination, you need to aim for the other as well. The topic has returned front and centre in policy conversations in New Delhi, including at the 2025 Raisina Dialogue in the context of the shifting ground beneath the "global green deal". Green growth will help keep India on the fast track: At first glance, the two directions of travel appear to be at odds. India's fast growth is heavily reliant on carbon-intensive activities. A major contributor to the recent slowdown in GDP growth was a slowdown in emissions-intensive manufacturing. Coal accounts for 55-60 per cent of the country's power generation with demand not expected to peak until 2030-2035. However, if India strays too far from its green growth journey, it could be knocked off the fast-growth path as well. High carbon-intensity activities escalate climate risks that, if unattended, will shave off the growth rate.

There are numerous ways in which this could happen: The impact of climate risks on agriculture could amount to a 2.8 per cent of GDP loss by 2030; lost labour productivity due to extreme heat could cost the economy \$220 billion by 2030. Overall, extreme heat could cut 2.5-4.5 per cent from GDP by 2030, climbing to a 10 per cent plunge by 2050; carbon cost penalties imposed by importers of Indian goods could cost \$150 billion annually in export revenues by 2040 if industries are not decarbonised; a reliance on imported fossil fuels — 85 per cent of crude oil and 50 per cent of natural gas are imported — could leave the economy exposed to price volatility, and geopolitical and supply chain shocks.

Conversely, green growth contributes to fast growth.



## Can you burn calories faster in water than on land? All you need to know about water aerobics



No matter what your fitness levels, water aerobics — also referred to as aqua fitness or water exercise — is an all-round, enjoyable routine. Water is nothing but soft resistance that burns calories. It provides buoyancy, which helps you do a full-body workout without feeling the stress as you would on land. Studies have shown how a person burns two more calories per minute in the water than on land. When standing chest-deep in water, the body is 80% weightless, bearing only 20% of its weight.

### HOW WATER EXERCISES HELP

The water pressure of the pool helps in better blood circulation. The resistance supplied by water is around 12 times greater than that of air, which means your muscles have to work harder to move through it. Because of this, even seemingly basic activities like walking, kicking, or running in water work several muscle groups and raise caloric expenditure. When combined with a healthy diet, water aerobics can burn a lot of calories and help people lose weight. Swimming means your whole body works together in tandem. It may not be very high intensity but provides better joint movements, brings about great comfort and the

resistance to muscles increases effort without damaging them. Water massages the whole body, so the lymphatic drain is better and blood circulation improves.

Water aerobics improves aerobic fitness while strengthening the back, arms, legs, and core. These workouts include dynamic stretches, swimming, walking, or running in the water and water resistance training with floatation devices or resistance bands. Because it works numerous muscle groups at once, this total-body method boosts calorie burn, making it perfect for weight loss. Water aerobics is a great cardiovascular workout that raises heart rate, which is important for losing weight. Another advantage of exercising in water is that it helps control body temperature. Longer workouts are made possible by the water's lower temperature, which helps you avoid overheating in a gym. The body must use energy for both movement and regulating its core temperature in the colder water when engaging in water aerobics. Compared to exercising on land in a warmer climate, this technique results in a higher energy expenditure and a greater number of calories burnt. Simply floating in water ensures optimal endocrine functions.

### WHICH ROUTINES CAN HELP

1) Face the parapet and hold the railings. Gradually, move any leg upwards and kick it sideways, to the right and left alternately. Make sure you breathe out when you kick and breathe in when you retreat.

2) While neck-deep in water, do arm raises up to the shoulder level. Alternatively stretch out your arms as you breathe in, and close them while breathing out. This is good for improving lung capacity.

3) Plyometric workouts, called jump training, are designed to increase power by having muscles exert their maximal force for brief periods. The water's resistance adds intensity to these exercises even as you hop, jump, splash, with your family or friends.

## AI-powered edge to help in screening, treatment of TB, become part of elimination programme



A simple strip test can now track whether a patient has been taking their anti-tuberculosis (TB) medicines regularly. Another test can pick up the infection in blood, saliva and stool samples. Meanwhile, drones can deliver medicines to patients and even pick up their samples from hard-to-reach areas. These are among the handful of innovations selected by artificial intelligence that may become a part of the country's national programme on tuberculosis elimination. They would help in widespread screening as well as ensuring follow-ups for treatment. Earlier this week, the experts went through demonstrations and data for 228 such innovations from across the globe, scored them depending on how close they are to use in humans, whether they are cost-effective, and if they can be implemented in India.

### Why are innovations significant?

This comes even as India is working towards its goal of eliminating TB by 2025, five years ahead of the global target. "The idea behind the conference was to look for what we can do better. At the conference held last year, around 30 to 40 innovations from within India were demonstrated. Experts selected technologies like hand-held X-ray, low cost nucleic-acid amplification test (a type of RT-PCR test), and AI for reading the X-rays. These innovations have been utilised under the national programme now during the 100-day campaign. This year, we did a wider search and looked at innovations from across the world," said Dr Rajiv Bahl, director-general of the Indian Council of Medical Research. While India saw a decline in the estimated number of cases and deaths in 2023 — and an increase in the number of patients diagnosed, a positive sign that patients are not being missed out — it still remains far from its goal of eliminating TB by the end of this year. With 28 lakh estimated cases, India still accounted for global TB cases in 2023. And, with 3.15 lakh deaths, the country accounted for 29% of the global burden, according to the Global TB report 2024.

## Buttermilk or kanji? Which fermented home-made drink is best for the gut?

As the season warms up, it is the time for including probiotics (the good gut bacteria) in our diet. While commercial probiotic drinks like flavoured yogurts and packaged kefir are readily available, they contain added sugar and chemical additives that you can do without. Home-made probiotic beverages offer a more natural, cost-effective and chemical-free alternative and can be easily incorporated throughout the day.

1. Buttermilk (Chaas): This is rich in lactic acid bacteria, calcium, potassium, vitamin B12, and proteins. It can be low in fat and calories when made from skimmed curd. The lactic acid bacteria present in buttermilk can ease digestion, prevent bloating and restore the balance of gut microbiota. Additionally, the presence of calcium and vitamin B12 supports bone health and energy production.

2. Fermented Rice Water (Panta Bhat/Kanji): This is high in resistant starch and short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), contains vitamins B1, B6, minerals like magnesium and is rich in good bacteria like Lactobacillus and Bifidobacteria. Since it is rich in prebiotics and probiotics, it enhances digestion, prevents constipation and tames acid reflux due to its alkaline nature. The resistant starch in fermented rice feeds good gut bacteria, promoting a balanced microbiome. SCFAs keep the gut lining intact.

3. Beetroot Kanji: This is made by soaking beetroot and mustard seeds in water with a pinch of salt. During fermentation, Lactobacillus species thrive in the mixture, making it a powerful probiotic drink that supports gut flora. The fibre content in beetroot also acts as a prebiotic, feed-



ing beneficial bacteria in the gut. This is also high in antioxidants, iron, vitamin C, and nitrates which detoxify the liver and enhance cardiovascular health. The natural nitrates in beetroot improve blood circulation and stamina.

4. Sweet Potato Kanji: This lesser-known drink, prepared by fermenting boiled sweet potatoes in water, often with mustard seeds and spices, has good concentrations of Lactobacillus bacteria, which aid digestion and reduce inflammation in the gut. Additionally, the complex carbohydrates in sweet potatoes act as a fuel source for beneficial bacteria. They have fibre and the immunity-boosting vitamin C and beta-carotene.

5. Coconut Water Kefir: This is a fermented drink made by adding kefir grains to coconut water, allowing beneficial bacteria like Lactobacillus, Saccharomyces and Bifidobacteria to multiply. The fermentation process also breaks down sugars, making it a gut-friendly and low-calorie drink. This refreshing probiotic beverage helps balance the gut microbiome, reduces bloating and supports hydration.

## Swiss town lets doctors prescribe free museum visits as art therapy for patients



The world's woes got you down? Feeling burnt out at work? Need a little something extra to fight illness or prep for surgery? The Swiss town of Neuchâtel is offering its residents a novel medical option: Expose yourself to art and get a doctor's note to do it for free. Under a new two-year pilot project, local and regional authorities are covering the costs of "museum prescriptions" issued by doctors who believe their patients could benefit from visits to any of the town's four museums as part of their treatment. The project is based on a 2019 World Health Organization report that found arts can boost mental health, reduce the impact of trauma and lower the risk of cognitive decline, frailty and "premature mortality," among other upsides. Art can help relax the mind — as a sort of preventative medicine — and visits to museums require getting up and out of the house with physical activity like walking and standing for long periods. Neuchâtel council member Julie Courcier Delafontaine said the COVID crisis also played a role in the programme's genesis. "With the closure of cultural sites (during coronavirus lockdowns), people realised just how much we need them to feel better," she said.

Museum prescriptions as physical exercise Marianne de Reynier Nevsky, the cultural mediation manager in the town of 46,000 who helped devise the programme, said it built on a similar idea rolled out at the Fine Arts Museum in Montreal, Canada, in 2019. She said many types of patients could benefit. "It could be a person with depression, a person who has trouble walking, a person with a chronic illness," she said. Part of the idea is to get recalcitrant patients out of the house and walking more.

Expanding access to art as preventive and preparatory care So far some 500 prescriptions have been distributed to doctors around town and the programme costs very little. Ten thousand Swiss francs (about \$11,300) have been budgeted for it. If successful, local officials could expand the programme to other artistic activities like theatre or dance, Courcier Delafontaine said. The Swiss national health care system doesn't cover "culture as a means of therapy," but she hopes it might one day, if the results are positive enough. Marc-Olivier Sauvain, head of surgery at the Neuchâtel Hospital Network, said he had already prescribed museum visits to two patients to help them get in better shape before a planned operation. He said a wider rollout is planned once a control group is set up. For his practice, the focus will be on patients who admit that they've lost the habit of going out. He wants them to get moving. "It's wishful thinking to think that telling them to go walk or go for a stroll to improve their fitness level before surgery" will work, Sauvain said on a video call Saturday, wearing blue scrubs. "I think that these patients will fully benefit from museum prescriptions. We'll give them a chance to get physical and intellectual exercise." "And as a doctor, it's really nice to prescribe museum visits rather than medicines or tests that patients don't enjoy," he added. "To tell them 'It's a medical order that instructs you to go visit one of our nice city museums.' Some museum-goers see the upsides too. 'I think it's a great idea,' said Carla Fragniere Filligré, a poet and retired teacher, during a visit to the ethnography museum. "There should be prescriptions for all the museums in the world!"

## Here's what happens to the body if you use too much nasal spray

Overusing nasal sprays can lead to rebound congestion, dependency, and long-term health risks. Discover safe usage tips and alternatives to protect your nasal health. (Source: Freepik) Overusing nasal sprays can lead to rebound congestion, dependency, and long-term health risks. Discover safe usage tips and alternatives to protect your nasal health. Nasal sprays are often the go-to remedy for relief from a blocked nose or persistent allergies. Their quick, targeted action makes them a convenient option for many. But what happens if this seemingly harmless solution is overused? The answer might surprise you.

Dr Shama Kovale, Consultant ENT Surgeon at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai, explains that nasal sprays come in different types, each with specific uses Decongestant Sprays: These contain active ingredients like xylometazoline or oxymetazoline. They work by shrinking swollen blood vessels in the nasal passages, providing almost instant relief from congestion. Saline Sprays: The safest of the lot, saline sprays help prevent crusting in the nasal cavity without any side effects. Corticosteroid Sprays: Used primarily for conditions like allergic rhinitis, these sprays reduce inflammation and manage allergy symptoms effectively. Risks of overusing nasal sprays While nasal sprays offer immediate relief, Dr Kovale said overuse can lead to unintended side effects:

### 1. Rebound Congestion

Overusing decongestant sprays can result in rebound congestion. This condition occurs when the nasal passages become dependent on the spray to remain open, leading to a vicious cycle of usage and worsening symptoms.

### 2. Dependency

Frequent and prolonged use of decongestants can cause psychological or physiological dependency, making it difficult to breathe without the spray.

### 3. Dryness and Bleeding

Both corticosteroid and decongestant sprays, when overused, can dry out the nasal lining, leading to irritation and occasional bleeding.



### 4. Long-term Risks of Corticosteroids

Prolonged use of corticosteroid sprays can lead to side effects such as osteoporosis in rare cases, especially in vulnerable groups like postmenopausal women. Pregnant beneficiary, gujarat Pregnant beneficiary, maternity assistance scheme, Ahmedabad news, Gujarat news, India news, Indian express, current affairs Pregnant women should be careful about using nasal sprays (file)

### Who should use nasal sprays with caution?

Certain groups should avoid or use nasal sprays cautiously: Pregnant or Lactating Women: Safety during these periods is not always guaranteed, so consultation with a doctor is advised. Children Under 6 Years: Use is generally not recommended unless supervised by a medical professional. People with Glaucoma or High Blood Pressure: These conditions can worsen with decongestant sprays.

Safe usage tips To minimise risks, follow these guidelines: Stick to Recommended Dosages: Most decongestant sprays should not be used for more than 3–5 consecutive days. Consult a Specialist: Seek advice if symptoms persist. An ENT specialist can recommend safe alternatives or long-term treatment plans. Use Saline Sprays: If you need a safer, everyday option, saline sprays are an excellent choice.

## 'One of the scariest things': Samantha Ruth Prabhu reflects on experiencing solitude at silent retreat

In a post shared on her Instagram stories, actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu reflected on a profound experience — spending three days in complete silence, without any phone or communication. Sharing her thoughts, the Kushi star described the retreat as both challenging and rewarding. "Three days of silence. No phone. No communication. Just me for company. Somehow, being alone with ourselves has become one of the scariest things. Would I do it again? A million times, yes. Would I recommend you try it? A million times, yes," she wrote. Despite the initial difficulty of disconnecting, Samantha found the experience deeply transformative. Earlier, Grammy award-winning American singer SZA also tried the Samyama wellness programme at the same retreat, disconnecting from everything and focusing on inner cleansing through complete silence. However, many people struggle with complete silence and solitude, especially in today's hyper-connected digital age. But is that the case, and what does that reveal about modern lifestyles? An expert weighs in. Neha Cadabam, senior psychologist and executive director at Cadabams Hospitals, tells indianexpress.com, "A silent retreat offers a break from the relentless stimuli of daily life, allowing the mind to settle into a state of calm and clarity. In this quiet environment, indi-

viduals can observe their thoughts without interruption, leading to enhanced mental clarity and more deliberate decision-making. Emotionally, many experience reduced stress and heightened inner peace as they gain a clearer understanding of their feelings."

Struggle with complete silence and solitude Cadabam notes that many individuals feel uneasy in complete silence and solitude because modern life is dominated by constant stimulation — from smartphones, social media, and a 24/7 news cycle. This continuous barrage of external input conditions our minds to seek distraction and validation, making the sudden absence of noise feel like a void. "Such discomfort reveals that our current lifestyles often leave little space for introspection and self-reflection. We become so accustomed to external engagement that being alone with our thoughts can trigger anxiety, revealing an underlying dependency on external cues to structure our inner lives," she adds. Samantha Ruth Prabhu described the retreat as both challenging and rewarding. Samantha Ruth Prabhu described the retreat as both challenging and rewarding (Source: Instagram/Samantha Ruth Prabhu) Simple ways to incorporate moments of intentional silence into daily life For those unable to commit to a multi-day retreat,





