RNI No.TELENG/2013/49469

INDIAN CHRONICLE

27 March, 2025|Thurssday | Volume No:13| Issue No: 35

Pages: 8+8

www.indianchronicle.com

Published from : Ranga Reddy (Telangana State)

∓ 2

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 belived 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 Kancha 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 Kancha 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

Modi supporting

Telangana cotton

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

Hyderabad. Addressing the Assembly on Wednesday,

Revanth Reddy stated that the land was handed over to a

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.

Bhatti dares KTR to prove allegations on percentages



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)

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.

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" ut tered by BRS MLAs that the government issued announcements irresponsibly in the name of Rajiv Gandhi civils, 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 constituen-

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 emphasised 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)

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 TammidihatiThe 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)

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Crippling debt trap

The AAP government in Punjab has been waging a var on drugs as well as corruption, but it hasn't put up a strong fight against fiscal indiscipline. Successive governments in the state have been living beyond their means, and the current dispensation is continuing in the same vein as if there is no tomorrow. Punjab is the second-most indebted state (after Arunachal Pradesh) in the country in erms of the debt-to-GSDP (gross state domestic product) ratio. There is nothing surprising or shocking about his dubious distinction. The state finished last among 18 najor states on the NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index just wo months ago. A similarly grim picture was painted by he Comptroller and Auditor General's audit report in Sepember last year — the state's expenditure has been consistently outpacing its revenue receipts.

Things have come to such a pass that fresh loans are being taken not only to repay previous ones but also o meet routine expenses. AAP never tires of blaming the Akali-BJP and Congress governments for the crippling lebt burden, but it has added to the mess by offering subsidies and freebies without bothering about the state exchequer's precarious position. It's obvious that tough inpopular decisions have to be taken. Having antagonised he farming community by evicting protesters from Shambhu and Khanauri borders, will AAP go on to withraw or rationalise free electricity for farmers? And will it also discontinue the freebie being given to domestic power onsumers? However, electoral compulsions may preent the ruling party from taking such drastic steps, even hough they may be beneficial for Punjab in the long un.Neighbouring Himachal Pradesh is also facing a financial crisis, despite conscious efforts by the Congress overnment to tighten its belt. Revenue from the tourism, lydropower and agriculture sectors has been dwarfed by nega borrowings to fund infrastructure projects.

Cricket betting racket busted, two held



Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): The sleuths of Commissioner's Task Force, South Zone Team, Hyderabad along with Abids Police apprehended two persons namely Ramdev Ladha and Pavan Agarwal, who are playing prohibited online cricket betting and providing User IDs and Pass words to the punters. The police seized a net cash of Rs 1,36,620/- and two Cell Phones at the instance of accused Ramdev Ladha of Ashok Nagar, Hyderabad. (Bookie) and Pavan Agarwal of Narayanaguda, Hyderabad. (Punter) and both are doing private business. On a tip off, the Commissioner's Task Force, South Zone Team, Hyderabad along with Abids Police apprehended the accused at Bombay Bar and seized the amount and cell phones. The apprehended accused and seized material handed over to SHO Abids PS for further investigation. The arrests were made by S. Raghavendra, Inspector, South Zone and SIs G. Anjaneyulu, K. Narsimulu, M. Mahesh, N. Naveen and staff of South Zone Task Force, Hyderabad City along with Abids Police, Hyderabad, said Ande Srinivasa Rao, Addl Dy. Commissioner of Police, Task

Two held in business & investment fraud

Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): Cyber Crime Police apprehended one accused in Cr.No. 3083/2024 1) Amarnath Singh, Rampal Chowk, Sector-7, Dwaraka, Delhi and Ranveer Singh, of Palam Village, South West Delhi, who was involved in Business & Investment fraud. The accused involved in 17 cases across India including one in Telangana. The victim, a businessmen of Hyderabad, stated that the cyber fraudsters contacted him over mobile and lured that they will provide business orders to the complainant's product, accordingly he believed and paid registration charges and became their client.

After that, fraudsters sent fake emails by stating that there is huge demand to the complainant's product in national and international market. On believing them, the com-



plainant paid Rs 9,50,531/- towards charges. After receiving the amount, the fraudsters disconnected liaison with him. The complainant realized that he was cheated by them and

lodged complaint. In this regard, police registered a case in Cr. No. 3083/2024 U/Sec 66 (C), (D) of Information Technology Act & U/Sec 318 (4), 319 (2), 111 (2) (b) of BNS of PS Cyber Crime, Hyderabad. Police said Cyber fraudsters are targeting business owners by falsely promising lucrative business orders for their products. Victims are lured into paying registration fees and additional charges under the pretence of high market demand. Once payments are made, fraudsters cut off all communications, leaving victims defrauded. Such victims can get immediate help by dial 1930 or visit cybercrime.gov.in, stated Dy Commissioner of Police, Cyber Crimes, Hyderabad. (NSS)

Tested in India, Made for India – OPPO F29 Series, the Durable Champion launched in India



Hyderabad: OPPO India redefines smartphone durability and network reliability with the OPPO F29 Series, the true Durable Champion. Built for India and tested in India, the F29 Series combines world-class engineering, military-grade toughness, superior connectivity, and powerful battery performance, all packed into a slim and elegant design that's ready for every challenge — from bustling city streets to rugged terrains. Engineered for India, Tested for India The OPPO F29 Series, which boasts industry-leading dust and liquid protection—is designed to endure India's diverse and demanding environments, from Kerala's monsoons and Rajasthan's scorching heat to Kashmir's biting cold.

Tested in India by SGS (Société Générale de Surveillance), Bengaluru, against the highest IP66, IP68, and IP69 standards, the F29 Series is the toughest smartphone in its segment. Its IP66 rating certifies it against powerful water jets; ideal for users who work in wet conditions, from vendors to construction workers. The IP68 rating endorses it for submersion in 1.5metres of water for 30 minutes; this

means it is built to survive accidental drops in water-filled potholes and kitchen sinks, while its IP69 rating implies it can endure high-pressure, high-temperature water jets up to 80°C, making it perfect for those working in industrial settings or extremely humid weather conditions.

The F29 Series takes liquid resistance even further to offer enhanced protection against heavy rain, river water, hot springs, daily spills from juice, tea, milk, coffee, beer, household liquids such as steam, dishwater, detergent, and even exposure to ice water, cleaning foam, and muddy water. And after submersion, it emits a unique pulsating sound to drain water from the speaker. Savio D'Souza, Head of Product Communications at OPPO India, said: "The OPPO F29 Series is built for India — a true Durable Champion that blends strength, connectivity, and performance. From its industry-best IP ratings and military-grade toughness to our revolutionary Hunter Antenna and massive batteries — every aspect is engineered to support India's road warriors. All this power, packed into a slim, stylish device, sets a new benchmark in the segment."

Built Tough — 360° Armour Body and Military-Grade

Every inch of the F29 Series is crafted to protect. Its 360° Armour Body features Sponge Bionic Cushioning to absorb shocks from accidental drops. It is engineered with an elevated battery cover made out of fibreglass and reinforced side frames for structural strength, as well as a Strengthened Lens Protection Ring to guard the camera. Protection for the device is extended to the cover in the box with its Raised Corner Design that comes with extra padding to shield the corners, and a slight overlap over the screen to protect it from direct impacts.

Joint family better than nuclear family, says book penned by retired IAS officer

Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): India is known for Joint families, which are characterised by multiple generations living together. But things have changed. Now we are noticing more families prefer to stay as a nuclear family, and the joint family tradition is going out of practice. A joint family is always better than a nuclear family. Tolerance is the best culture to be cultivated in a joint family, said M. Gopalakrishna, IAS, (Retd), the author of 'Life of a Karma Yogi-Memoirs of a Civil Servant". The 85-year-old retired bureaucrat was in a fireside chat with Ayyadevara Srinivas, Past President of FTCCI and Hyderabad Management Association said the interaction was jointly organised by the Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI) and Hyderabad Management Association The Book, Life of a Karma Yogi, is a panorama of life in pre-and post-Independence India over three generations. It reflects the ethos of Civil Services, the Steel Frame, which has laid the foundations for the growth of a resurgent India. The book chronicles the memoirs of a Civil Servant over sixty years, covering historic events shaping India's efforts for peace, socio-economic development, and the quest for economic growth to become the 3rd largest economy of the world, the moderator announced."I was the first Telugu officer posted in Assam", Gopalakrishna said and shared many experiences serving as a bureaucrat in the North Eastern State of India. Recalling some of his experiences, he said they shared a cordial relationship with the then Chief Minister T. Anjaiah. Gopalakrishna introduced VAT (Value Added Tax) on alcohol in Andhra Pradesh for the first time as Commissioner of Commercial Taxes. When asked to rate the best Chief Ministers under whom he worked between Jalagam Vengal Rao, Dr Marri Channa Reddy and



NT Rama Rao, the Octogenarian said Jalagam Vengal Rao was the best CM to work with. Dr Channa Reddy was the best at getting his job done. NT Rama Rao had a cinematic flourish, and Chandrababu Naidu was a calm, calculating and good administrator, he told a 300-plus audiencWhen asked to give a message to IAS aspirants, Mr. Gopalakrishna said they must have 'I can do' spirit. He told young aspirants never to say 'I can't do'. Giving his opening remarks, Dr Suresh Kumar Singha, President of FTCCI, said M. Gopalakrishna's illustrious career has been an inspiration for many. As both a bureaucrat and an academician, he has significantly contributed to public service and governance. His insightful writings continue to serve as a guiding light for civil servants and professionals alike.K. Chandra Sekhar, President, HMA, Secretary of HMA, Senior VP of FTCCI R. Ravi Kumar and VP of FTCCI KK Maheshwari, Secretary of FTCCI Veena and many retired bureaucrats, industry leaders participated in the meeting.

Medigadda project collapse culprits To should be punished: BJP MLA

Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): BJP MLA Palvai Harish Babu today made strong comments on the construction of Kaleshwaram lift irrigation project in the Legislative Assembly. He demanded action against those responsible for the collapse of the Medigadda Barrage. "A paid campaign was conducted to say that Kaleshwaram is the 8th wonder of the world. It is a big mistake to build Kaleshwaram on loose soil and loose foundation, which was engineered by KCR for that project. KCR and Harish Rao should be criminally prosecuted in connection with this project. The Congress government should take steps in that direction and prove its integrity," commented Palvai Harish. He also made key comments on the state budget. He said that the state government, which takes Tamil Nadu as a role model, was not following the policies followed by them. He reminded that the budget estimate was set 20 percent higher than the expenditure of the Telangana state. He reminded that the BRS government had also done the same in the past. He also reminded the comments made by CM Revanth Reddy in the Ghanpur public meeting on this occasion. He claimed that the State government was borrowing more than the RBI guidelines through overdraft facility . "These loans are also not adequate and they are looking to sell valuable lands



in the city. As part of this, the government has issued a notification to auction the Central University lands in Gachibowli. Those 400 acres are breathing space for the metropolis," He said and added that as the entire city is turning into a concrete jungle, it is everyone's responsibility to protect the 400 acres of forest area, which is a home for thousands of birds, peacocks, deer, and so on. He also suggested that the government should withdraw the decision taken on the sale of Gachibowli lands. (NSS)

BIS Hyderabad Raids Amazon Warehouse, seizes 2783 uncertified products

Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Hyderabad Branch Office, conducted a Search and Seizure operation on Tuesday at an Amazon warehouse located in Airport City, Shamshabad for violation of the provisions of the BIS Act, 2016. The enforcement operation was carried out under the direction of P V Srikanth, Director & Head, and led by Rakesh Tanneeru, Joint Director, along with Kavin K, Deputy Director, SPO Abhisai Etta and JSA Shivaji. During the raid, a total of 2783 consumer goods, including 150 Smart Watches, 15 Electric Water Heaters, 30 CCTV Cameras, 16 Domestic Electric Food Mixers, 10 Domestic Pressure Cookers, 1937 Stainless Steel Water Bottles, 326 Wireless Earbuds, 170 Mobile Chargers, 90 Electric and Non-Electric Toys, etc were found stored and offered for sale without the mandatory BIS Certification. These products fall under the purview of Quality Control Orders (QCOs) issued by the Government of India, making BIS certification compulsory. The seized products, which were being sold without the requisite BIS Standard Mark, are estimated to be worth more

than Rs. 50 lakhs. This act constitutes a clear violation of

Section 17 of the BIS Act, 2016, which prohibits the sale,

storage, or distribution of goods covered under QCOs with-

out appropriate BIS Certification. The Act provides for pun-

ishment including imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of not less than Rs. 2 lakh for the first contravention, and not less than Rs. 5 lakh for subsequent contraventions, which may extend up to ten times the value of the goods. The offence under this provision is cognizable in nature, and BIS will be initiating legal proceedings against the viola-

BIS Act, 2016 provides that the Central Government can make any of the Indian Standards mandatory for compliance through a Quality Control Order (QCO). Standards for 769 products have so far been made mandatory for compliance. The effect of the QCO is that no one can manufacture, import, sell or exhibit a product covered thereunder without a license from BIS. There are punitive measures provided in the BIS Act for violation on this requirement. In order to prevent manufacturers or retailers from distributing fake goods and mislead the wider populace, Bureau of Indian Standards is initiating search and seizure operations based on information of misuse. Consumers before purchasing a product, should confirm the status of the license through BIS Care App; if it is found to be Suspended/Deferred/Expired/Cancelled, then you may register a complaint. (NSS)

Kicking off IPL 2025, Ecolink associates with Punjab Kings as 'Official Partner'



Hyderabad:As the nation gears up for an electrifying cricketing season, Signify, the world leader in lighting, has announced the partnership of Ecolink with Punjab Kings for the highly anticipated Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025. This collaboration brings together two entities driven by a shared commitment to performance, innovation, and delivering exceptional experiences to the customers and fans.

With the onset of the Indian summer, this partnership perfectly aligns with Ecolink's upcoming lineup of innovative fan launches. Just as Punjab Kings strives for excellence on the cricket field, Ecolink is determined to breeze into the lives of millions of Indian families through its wide range of reliable and efficient products. This synergy makes the partnership a natural fit. Throughout the IPL 2025 season, Ecolink will enjoy prominent visibility through Punjab Kings' promotional campaigns, digital activations, and strategic brand placements, apart from being displayed on the back of the players' helmet and cap.

Nikhil Gupta, Head of Marketing, Strategy, Govt. Affairs & CSR - Signify, Greater India, said, "Cricket is more than a sport in India; it's a unifying force. We are thrilled to partner with Punjab Kings and connect with millions of passionate fans. This collaboration provides Ecolink with a powerful platform to strengthen our presence in the Indian market. We look forward to supporting the team and creating unforgettable experiences for fans, both on and off the field. Through this partnership, we aim to enrich homes and the cricketing world, demonstrating our shared commitment to excellence". Punjab Kings CEO Satish Menon said, "We are delighted to welcome Ecolink as our official partner for IPL 2025. This partnership reflects our shared pursuit of excellence and innovation, both on and off the field. We are confident that this collaboration will add immense value to the Punjab Kings family, while enhancing the experience for

Ecolink has built a strong reputation for providing durable, efficient, and high-performance lighting solutions, earning the trust and loyalty of its customers across 20+countries in the world. Similarly, Punjab Kings has cultivated a passionate fan base that stands by the team through every match. This shared legacy of trust and commitment to delivering value forms the foundation of this partnership, celebrating innovation, performance, and the unifying spirit of cricket.Punjab Kings enters IPL 2025 with a strengthened squad, featuring World Cup-winning former Australian captain Ricky Ponting as head coach, Shreyas lyer as the new captain, and a lineup of renowned cricketers including the likes of Arshdeep Singh, Yuzvendra Chahal, Marcus Stoinis, Glenn Maxwell.

Amazon Fresh Brings Quality Groceries to India's Smaller Towns, now Serving 170+ Cities

Hyderabad: Amazon India announced a significant expansion of Amazon Fresh, its full-basket grocery service. to over 170 cities/towns across the country. This expansion coincides with Amazon Fresh's impressive 50% yearover-vear growth in H2'24 vs H2'23, cementing its position as one of the fastest-growing categories on Amazon.in. Amazon Fresh offers a comprehensive range of wet and dry groceries, including fruits, vegetables, dairy including milk and bread, frozen products, beauty items, baby care essentials, personal care products, and pet supplies. The service aims to provide a seamless shopping experience with great savings, wide selection, and the convenience of slotted doorstep deliveries. To ensure freshness and quality. Amazon Fresh sellers source fruits and vegetables from over 11,000 farmers. All products undergo a rigorous '4step quality check' process before reaching customers' doorsteps. This commitment to quality has contributed to the increasing customer preference for Amazon Fresh, driven by its savings, vast selection, and reliable deliveries. Srikant Sree Ram, Director of Amazon Fresh India, said, "Our expansion to 170+ cities/towns allow Amazon Fresh to extend its reach into India's tier-2, tier-3 cities/ towns and beyond, offering consumers access to high-quality groceries at competitive prices, delivered conveniently to their doorstep. With 50% growth in the second half of 24 vs 23', we have seen consumers have appreciated Amazon Fresh for savings, vast selection, and reliable slotted deliveries. Our goal is to revolutionize online grocery shopping in India and make every purchase a seamless and rewarding experience for our customers."The expansion of Amazon Fresh to cities/towns like Gorakhpur, Chitoor, Ambala, Vijaywada and many more means more customers can now enjoy great savings and exciting deals from Amazon Fresh sellers and bank partners while building their weekly and monthly grocery baskets. This expansion is set to transform the online grocery shopping experience for

Annamacharya Sankeertana gosti ganam held

Tirumala, March 26 (NSS): The 522nd Vardhanti Mahotsavams of Tallapaka Annamacharya was observed at Annamacharya Kalamandiram in Tirupati on Wednesday. Dr Meena Lochani, Tallapaka Descendant from Chennai, rendered Annamacharya SankeertansJayanti Savitri rendered Harikatha Ganam on Annamacharya life History.Similar programs will also be held at Tallapaka Dhyana Mandiram and 108 feet statue of Annamaiah.

Earlier, Saptagiri Sankeertana Gosti Ganam were rendered by artists of Annamacharya Project.

The Project Director, Sri Rajagopal Rao and others were present. (NSS)

"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



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 relationship 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.

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 disbursal 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 newsletterAfter 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 Though 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

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



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.

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

GNS News Agency, March 26

The Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasaheb Thackrey (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

payal tadvi suicide case, payal tadvi suicide probe, payal tadvi suicide accused doctors, payal tadvi mother, mumbai city newsPayal 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 Fadnavis, 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 abetment 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

BRS MLCs stage unique protest holding symbolic gold bricks

Hyderabad, March 26 (NSS): The BRS party MLCs today staged a symprotest 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

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

A High-Security Registration Plate is a tamper-proof number plate introduced to standardise vehicle identification across the country Registration Plate is a tamper-proof number plate introduced to standardise vehicle identification across the country. The Maharashtra Transport Department has once again extended the deadline for installing High-Security Registration Plates (HSRP) on vehicles registered before April 1, 2019. Originally set for March 31, this year, and later pushed to April 30, the deadline has now been further extended to June 30, due to

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.

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



GNS News Agency, March 26

Pune, a city known for its love of food, has always been a melting pot of flavours. While traditional Maharashtrian cuisine holds a special place in people's hearts, the city's growing population of students, professionals, and food lovers has created a demand for diverse culinary experiences. In recent years, some lesser-known but authentic non-vegetarian dishes from different parts of India—and even Nepal—have gained immense popularity in Pune. Champaran Mutton, also known as Ahuna Mutton or Handi Meat, is a slow-cooked dish from Bihar that has found its way into Pune's culinary scene. Cooked in an earthen pot and sealed with dough, this dish retains its rustic flavours, making it a favourite among meat lovers.

"Champaran Mutton hails from the Champaran district of Bihar and is deeply rooted in the region's culinary traditions," says Divyansh Tiwari, a staff member at Champaran Handi Junction restaurant in Wakad. "The preparation involves marinating mutton with mustard oil, ghee, garlic, onions, ginger, and a blend of spices. It is slow-cooked in an earthen handi over a wood fire, giving it an earthy flavour that modern cookware simply cannot replicate," Tiwari adds. According to him, the dish was introduced in Pune a few years ago by people passionate about authentic Bihari cuisine. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. "At our restaurant, we serve around 100 to 150 orders daily.

The popularity remains steady throughout the year. even during the Lent fasting season. The unique cooking method and the tender, flavourful meat have made this dish a hit among Punekars," says Tiwari. A standard plate of Champaran Mutton, with three pieces of mutton, rice, two rotis, and salad, is priced at ?949, while a more elaborate Mutton Thali is also available for the same price. On the speciality of Champaran Mutton, Tiwari says, "It lies in its traditional cooking technique and the use of an earthen pot, which imparts a distinct earthy flavour that is hard to replicate with modern cookware. The slow-cooking process ensures that the meat becomes tender and absorbs the rich blend of spices, resulting in a dish that is both aromatic and flavourful. The inclusion of whole garlic bulbs adds a subtle sweetness and depth to the gravy, making it a standout delicacy."He adds, "Despite being a non-Maharashtrian dish, Champaran Mutton has carved a niche for itself in Pune's culinary landscape. The city's residents have always been open to experimenting with diverse cuisines, and the introduction of this Bihari speciality has been met with enthusiasm. Word-of-mouth recommendations, positive reviews, and the unique dining experience we offer have all contributed to its growing fame in Pune.""When it comes to biryani, most people think of Hyderabadi or Lucknowi versions. But in recent years, Kolkata-style Aloo Biryani—where golden-fried potatoes are a key ingredient has won the hearts of people of Pune," says Archna Chatterjee, manager at FoodBengal restaurant in

"FoodBengal in Chinchwad started in 2017 with the

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. "Punekars, 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 Hyderabadi 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 slowcooked 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 ittar (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 resta 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.

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 Shambu 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 for the meeting, which comes 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,

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 factfinding 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 Sanjiv 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.

'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.

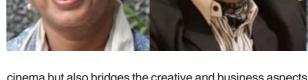
What can audiences look forward to at CIFF 2025?

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': How 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 wide-spread 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.

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 plat-

form 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

and Hyderabad, among others. The Bengaluru team has a WhatsApp group where they connect, and meet up a few times every week in the office. When Sharma travelled to Bengaluru, the city team was there and he was even invited to their homes. "Other than that, the everyday interaction with colleagues is missing. Every couple of months, we tend to get together and meet our other teammates who work in other geographies," he says. On the positive side, Sharma says he doesn't have to travel to office, and avoids being stuck in traffic that makes a one-way commute to the IT hub of Hinjewadi stretch to almost an hour. "The way people drive their cars and ride two-wheelers in Pune nowadays, I don't like driving anymore. It's become really erratic," he says. Atul, another IT professional, says he was allowed to work from home once in a while even before the pandemic. "Ninety-five per cent of the time we worked from the office, and a day or two we could work from home. It would be a real pleasure if we could work from home," he

When the pandemic began and they were forced to work from home, "it was slightly difficult getting used to". While they didn't have a routine, had to keep their laptops open throughout the day, and take multiple calls, he says nobody was watching over his shoulder. As he continues to work from home, Atul says, "Earlier, there were hours in a day when you would not be connected to the grid, such as while driving. Today, WFH means that you are on the system all the time. When you are working with people across the globe, from multiple time zones, some people expect vou to be available all the time. You have to draw the line somewhere saying that no I'm not going to work after this point," he says. As the infrastructure has improved, Atul has become used to working from home. "I would rather go to the office just for a chance to catch up with some folks. I am used to this lifestyle now," he says. He says the workfrom-home option has given him more flexibility, and opened the possibility of more travel. "You could be a digital nomad who can travel to any part of the country or the world as long as there is a good internet connection for you to log into the system and work," he says, adding that, from a company standpoint, they are savings on electricity and rent."As long as you're getting the work done, I don't think there is an issue with where one works. At this point, a lot of people are comfortable with WFH. Unless you're in a service industry, where the client requires you to be in the office, a person can choose where they want to work," he

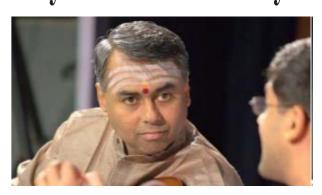
Violinist RK Shriramkumar, who has accompanied MS Subbulakshmi and TM Krishna, awarded Sangita Kalanidhi by the Music Academy

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 vainika 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 Ragunathan, 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. Shivakumar 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 Kalbhor 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 them 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 Kalbhor 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

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."

Hamas official Ismail Barhoum killed in Israeli strike on Gaza hospital, says militant group source



GNS News Agency, March 26

An Israeli air strike on Sunday (March 24, 2025) killed a member of Hamas's political bureau as he underwent treatment in hospital, a source in the Islamist movement said, after Israel confirmed it targeted "a key terrorist". "The Israeli army assassinated Hamas political bureau member Ismail Barhoum," the Hamas source said, requesting anonymity to speak more freely.

"Warplanes bombed the operating room at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, where Barhoum was receiving treatment after sustaining critical injuries in an air strike targeting his home in Khan Yunis at dawn last Tuesday (March 18, 2025)."AFP photos showed the building of about fourstoreys largely undamaged except for fire blazing in one

section off a stairwe

Barhoum is the fourth member of Hamas's political bureau killed since last Tuesday (March 18, 2025) when Israel resumed air strikes in the territory after an impasse over continuing a ceasefire. Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz confirmed in a statement that Barhoum had been targeted in the strike. The Israeli military said it hit the hospital with "precise munitions" following extensive intelligencegathering. It said the target was a key member of "the Hamas terrorist organisation who was operating inside the Nasser Hospital compound."The Ministry of Health in Hamas-run Gaza said Israeli forces "have just targeted the surgery building inside the Nasser Medical Complex, which houses many patients and wounded individuals, and a large fire has erupted at the site."The Ministry later confirmed that one person had been killed and said many others were injured, including some medical staff. The entire department was evacuated, the ministry said in a statement. Gaza's civil defence rescue agency said the hospital's emergency department had been targeted. Earlier Sunday (March 23, 2025), Hamas said an Israeli air strike the previous day near Khan Yunis killed Salah al-Bardawil, a senior member of its political bureau. Bardawil, 65, was killed along with his wife in a camp in al-Mawasi, the group said. The Israeli military confirmed that it had targeted Bardawil, saying that "as part of his role, (he) directed the strategic and military planning" of Hamas in Gaza. His "elimination further degrades Hamas" military and government capabilities", it added.

Basking under the spring sun

GNS News Agency, March 26

The ancient tradition of Nowruz, meaning "new day" in Persian, which can be traced back over 3,000 years to the period of Zoroastrianism, is far more than just the start of a New Tear. A celebration of life, rebirth, and the triumph of light over darkness, Nowruz unites diverse cultures across Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and beyond, offering a rich tapestry of customs, traditions, and shared values. For many, the celebrations also symbolise the aspirations of Kurdish people in Syria, Turkiye, Iran, and Iraq.

Celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox, Nowruz heralds the arrival of spring, considered by many cultures as the rebirth of nature. The popular feature of the festival, especially in Iran, is the Haft Sin table. People aesthetically arrange a table with seven items symbolising different attributes of life: sabzeh (sprouted grains) symbolises rebirth and renewal; samanu (sweet pudding) for affluence and fertility; senjed (dried fruit) for love; seer (garlic) for health; seeb (apple) for beauty; somaq (sumac berries) denotes triumph of good over evil, and finally, serkeh (vinegar) represents age and wisdom. Apart from food, fire forms another key feature of the festival. Regional variations of rituals involving bonfires can be found associated with Nowruz, like the Chaharshanbe Suri in Iran where people jump over bonfires to purify and energise themselves, casting away the cold of winter and bringing in the warmth of spring.

The UN has recognised March 21 as the International Day of Nowruz while UNESCO has inscribed Nowruz on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity to acknowledge the cultural significance of the



tradition. This year's Nowruz, which coincides with the Muslim holy month of Ramzan, comes with a backdrop of uncertainty. The decades-long struggle of Kurdish people for a state is left in limbo after Abdullah Ocalan, imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, made a call for the group to lay down arms and dissolve itself in hope for establishing peace with Turkiye. In Syria, the interim government headed by Abu Mohammed al-Jolani has managed to convince Kurdish-led, U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in Rojava to integrate with government forces, leaving doubts on the future of the autonomous Kurdish region carved out during the Syrian civil war. While the aspirations of the largest ethnic group without a state in the world remain unfulfilled, Nowruz brings them together in joy and restores their hopes as they feast in the freshness of spring.

India imposes anti-dumping duty on five Chinese products

GNS News Agency, March 26

India has imposed anti-dumping duty on five Chinese goods, including vacuum flasks and aluminium foil, during the month so far to protect domestic players from cheap imports from the neighbouring country. These duties were imposed as these products – Soft Ferrite Cores, a certain thickness of vacuum insulated flask, aluminium foil, Trichloro Isocyanuric Acid, and Poly Vinyl Chloride Paste Resin – were exported to India from China at below normal prices

In separate notifications, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, Department of Revenue, said that the duty imposed "shall be levied for a period of five years" on imports of Soft Ferrite Cores, vacuum insulated flasks, and Trichloro Isocyanuric Acid. The anti-dumping duty of up to \$873 per tonne was imposed provisionally on aluminium foil for six months. The government has imposed the duty in the range of \$276 per tonne to \$986 per tonne on imports of the acid (a water treatment chemical) from China and Japan.

On imports of Soft Ferrite Cores (used in electric vehicles, chargers, and telecom devices), up to 35% duty was imposed on CIF (cost, insurance freight) value. Similarly, on vacuum insulated flask, \$1,732 per tonne anti-dumping duty was levied. The levy, which ranges from \$89 per tonne to \$707 per tonne, on Poly Vinyl Chloride Paste Resin was slapped on the imports from China, Korea RP, Malaysia, Norway, Taiwan and Thailand for five years.

These duties are imposed after recommendations for



the same were made by the Commerce Ministry's investigation arm, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR). Anti-dumping probes are conducted by countries to determine whether domestic industries have been hurt due to a surge in cheap imports. As a countermeasure, they impose these duties under the multilateral regime of Geneva-based World Trade Organisation (WTO). The duty is aimed at ensuring fair trading practices and creating a level-playing field for domestic producers vis-a-vis foreign producers and exporters.

India has earlier imposed anti-dumping duty on several products to tackle cheap imports from various countries, including China. India and China both are members of the WTO. China is the second largest trading partner of India. The country has repeatedly flagged serious concerns over the widening trade deficit with the neighbouring country, which stood at \$85 billion in 2023-24. s

Haryana Assembly proposes up to 2 years in jail for fake seed producers

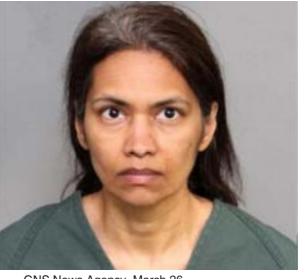
GNS News Agency March 24

GNS News Agency, March 24 The Haryana Assembly on Thursday proposed stricter penalties for the production and sale of fake and substandard agricultural seeds, including imprisonment of up to two years and a fine of up to Rs 3 lakh. Under the existing Seed Act, 1966, penalties for companies or individuals involved in producing or selling counterfeit, adulterated, or substandard seeds were minimal. For a first offense, the maximum fine was just Rs 500. The government says these low penalties have failed to deter offenders, leading to the continued sale of poor-quality seeds that harm farmers and the agricultural economy. To address this, an amendment Bill was introduced and cleared by the Assembly The Seed Act was first implemented in 1966 and amended in 1972 to regulate the quality of seeds for food crops, oilseeds, fruits, vegetables, cotton, animal fodder, jute, and other crops. Its goal was to ensure farmers had access to high-quality seeds for better yields. However, the government argues that the existing law lacks stringent provisions to curb the sale and distribution of fake and substandard seeds, negatively impacting crop production and increasing farming costs.

Under the old law, for a first offense, the penalty was only a fine, with a maximum of Rs 500. In case of a second or subsequent offense, the offender could face up to six

months of imprisonment, a fine of up to Rs 1,000, or both. The proposed amendment introduces stricter penalties. For a first offense, the guilty party will face a minimum of one year and up to two years of imprisonment, along with a fine ranging from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 3 lakh. For a second or subsequent offense, the punishment increases to a minimum of two years and up to three years in prison, with a fine ranging from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh. Similarly, seed sellers found guilty of distributing fake, adulterated, or substandard seeds currently face a maximum fine of Rs 500 for a first offense. For a second or subsequent offense, the penalty includes up to six months in jail, a fine of up to Rs 1,000, or both. Under the proposed law, first-time offenders will face imprisonment of six months to one year, along with a fine of Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh. For repeat offenders, the punishment increases to one to two years in prison, with a fine ranging from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2 lakh. The government has also highlighted similar concerns with the Insecticides Act, 1968, stating that its lenient penalties have failed to deter the production and sale of counterfeit pesticides. Under the current law, a first offense carries a maximum of two years in jail and a fine between Rs 10,000 and Rs 50,000. For repeat offenses, the maximum punishment increases to three years in prison and a fine between Rs 15,000 and Rs

Indian-origin woman charged with slitting son's throat after Disneyland vacation



GNS News Agency, March 26

An Indian-origin woman has been charged with allegedly murdering her 11-year-old son after a three-day vacation to Disneyland. Saritha Ramaraju, 48, has been charged with one felony count of murder for slitting her son's throat, killing the boy after they went on a vacation to Disneyland during a custody visit. She has also been charged with one felony enhancement of personal use of a weapon, a knife. She faces a maximum sentence of 26 years to life if convicted on all charges, a statement from the Office of the District Attorney, Orange County, California said Friday (March 21, 2025).

Ms. Ramaraju, who moved out of California after divorcing the boy's father in 2018, was staying with her son at a motel in Santa Ana for a custody visit. During the visit, she bought three-day passes to Disneyland for herself and her son. On March 19, the day Ms. Ramaraju was scheduled to check out of the motel and return the boy to his father, she called 911 at 9.12 a.m. to report that she had killed her son and taken pills to kill herself. Santa Ana police

arrived at the motel and found the young boy dead on the bed in a room among Disneyland souvenirs. It appeared the boy had been dead for several hours before his mother called 911, the statement said. The boy was scheduled to be returned to his father that day. A large kitchen knife was found inside the motel room which was purchased the day before. Ms. Ramaraju was released from the hospital on Thursday after ingesting the unknown substance and arrested on suspicion of stabbing the boy to death.

"The life of a child should not hang in the balance between two parents whose anger for each other outweighs their love for their child," Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer said. "Anger makes you forget who you love and what you are responsible for doing. The safest place for a child should be in their parents' arms. Instead of wrapping her arms around their son in love, she slit his throat and in the cruelest twist of fate removed him from the very world she brought him into."While the statement did not name the boy, who was pronounced dead at the scene, a report in NBC Los Angeles identified him as Yatin Ramaraju. The report added that Saritha Ramaraju had been in a custody battle with her husband Prakash Raju since last year, when she had accused him of making medical and school decisions without her input and alleged he had substance abuse issues. Prakash Raju had said in court papers that he was born and raised in Bengaluru, India, the NBC report said, adding that the couple had divorced in January 2018. Mr. Raju was granted the son's custody and Saritha Ramaraju received visitation rights, according to court records. The report, citing court papers filed in November, said that the mother was living in Fairfax, Virginia, and wanted her son to live with her.

Ms. Ramaraju had accused her former husband of a "history of substance abuse issues" and added he "gets very aggressive under the influence of alcohol, drugs and smoke."She accused him of having "severe control issues" and said their son "is very scared to talk to mother as he'll get into trouble with dad."Mr. Raju had accused his ex-wife of "citing completely false and untrue abuse and substance abuse issues," the report added.

Kerala private universities bill 2025: A shift in left's education policy

GNS News Agency, March 26

The Kerala State Private Universities (Establishment and Regulation) Bill, 2025, marks a significant policy shift for the CPM-led LDF government, as it reverses the Left Front's long-standing opposition to the privatisation of education. Once passed, this Bill will pave the way for private universities to establish campuses across Kerala. The Bill includes a crucial provision, stipulating that 40% of seats in these private universities must be reserved for permanent residents of Kerala. Furthermore, these institutions will be required to adhere to the State's reservation policy, as mandated by law. This move is expected to have far-reaching implications for the State's education sector, and its implementation will be closely watched. According to the provisions of the Bill, only credible sponsoring agencies with experience in the education sector may apply to establish a private university in the state. This is to ensure that the institutions are managed by organisations with a proven track record in delivering quality education.

The draft Bill mandates that the University must own land as per the guidelines set by regulatory bodies and deposit 25 crore as corpus fund in the State treasury. For multicampus universities, the main campus must cover at least ?10 crore. These requirements ensure that the universities have the infrastructure and financial stability to operate effectively. What explains policy reversal Significant challenges have driven the LDF government to adopt such a decision. This includes a decline in traditional industries and a lack of investment in new sectors. Private universities are seen as a route towards attracting investment, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth.

Moreover, Kerala's population is becoming increasingly aspirational, with a growing demand for quality higher education. This move is aimed at offering specialized courses and better infrastructure. The quality of public education in Kerala has been declining, with many government colleges and universities facing infrastructure and faculty shortages. It may be surmised that the private universities can help fill this gap, offering better facilities and teaching standards.

Questioning true intentions Dr. K.T. Rammohan, a social scientist, argues that the Kerala state government's decision to establish private universities isn't driven by economic necessity or pressure from the central government. State universities are financially sustainable thanks to funding from the University Grants Commission (UGC), state government allocations, and research projects, he says.Mr. Rammohan also questions whether the move is genuinely aimed at improving higher education quality, citing the government's track record. If quality were the concern, the government would have taken steps to regulate faculty appointments in private aided colleges, which often flout reservation norms and are plagued by corruption. Moreover, the ruling party should have avoided making partisan appointments to key academic positions. Mr. Rammohan said that the move to open private universities is not a standalone decision. It is integral to the economic manifesto of the party described in the Nava Kerala document. Against the Kerala

Kerala Opposition leader V. D. Satheeshan has expressed concerns about the Kerala State Private Universities (Establishment and Regulation) Bill, despite agreeing with its purpose in principle. Mr. Satheeshan highlighted several issues, including the lack of clarity on eligibility criteria for private university applicants, which can be any person, company, or society registered under the Companies Act. He emphasized the need to prioritize corporate educational agencies with a proven track record of credibility. However, Mr. Satheeshan criticized the requirement for applicants to deposit ?25 crore, which would inevitably be passed on to students in the form of fees. He argued that private universities are essentially businesses, not charitable endeavors.

Mr. Satheeshan also pointed out the irony of private universities being granted more powers to their chancellors, while public universities face reduced autonomy for their chancellors and vice-chancellors. Ultimately, he believes that private universities will cater exclusively to the upper class, undermining the Kerala model of education, which emphasizes accessibility and inclusivity. Commercialisation of higher educationK.P. Kannan, a senior economist and former Director of the Centre for Development Studies, expressed concerns that the private universities bill will exacerbate the commercialization of higher



education rather than preventing it. He suggested that incorporating reservation principles, similar to those in public universities, could promote social inclusion and reduce opposition to the bill. However, he doubted the Kerala government's willingness to enforce this, given the lack of national-level guidelines.

Mr. Kannan acknowledged the inevitability of private universities in India and globally but emphasized his preference for non-profit institutions focused on academic excellence. He advocated for scholarships to support meritorious students from disadvantaged backgrounds, stressing that private universities should not be treated as commercial ventures. A threat to inclusive education J. Prabhash, a Kerala University, shared his personal experience of benefiting from free education. He emphasized that had he been required to pay fees, he would not have been able to continue his education.Mr. Prabhash views the promotion of private universities as a move that would deny education to individuals from humble backgrounds, like himself. He disagrees with the notion that private universities will enhance education quality, instead advocating for the strengthening of the existing public education system.R. S. Sasikumar, Chairman of the Save University Campaign Committee (SUCC) told The Hindu that the provision in the prposed bill for starting triple campuses is intended to help the existing private colleges in the state. "The existing private medical colleges will make use of the triple campuses provision to open affiliated colleges under the main University campus. Moreover, if the private colleges comes up the fees structure of the private colleges are decided by the management and the government has no control over it. The triple campuses are thus a facility made by the government for the private universities to make profit. It is also a violation of the UGC regulations regarding the establishment of the private universities in the state. The UGC regulations says that if one private university is to be started it should be in a single campus", Sasikumar added. Dilip M Menon, the Mellon Chair of Indian Studies and the Director of the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa at the University of Witwatersrand, says that the arrival of private universities may help improve the quality of humanities discipline. Dilip, a renowned academic, notes that Kerala's public education system excels at primary and secondary levels but falls short in social sciences and humanities at the tertiary level. Exceptions like MG University are largely due to individual faculty members' excellence.

Menon suggests that Kerala's culture emphasizes public intellectuals over academics, differing from Bengal's elite institutions. This has both positive and negative consequences. Regarding private universities, Menon believes they could address the shortcomings in liberal arts education. A private liberal arts university, similar to Ashoka or Azim Premji Universities, could provide a solution. This would also involve recruiting faculty from across India, broadening perspectives and helping Kerala's younger generation think beyond parochial visions.

Fazal Gafoor of the Muslim Education Society expressed concerns that the private universities bill lacks clarity. He pointed out inconsistencies regarding the establishment of off-campus centers, which may require additional sanctions. Dr. Gafoor warned that these stipulations might deter corporate bodies, such as SNDP, NSS, and MES, from participating in the venture. He highlighted the financial burden of depositing large amounts and paying staff salaries. However, Dr. Gafoor noted that MES is better positioned, as they already have existing infrastructure that can be converted for university use. Rakesh SP, under secretary, higher education department who was contacted for getting the government version said that the final decision regarding the (KSPU) bill can be fully understood only after the procedures of the discussions was happened at the

Reliance to buy Russian oil from Rosneft in roubles: Report



India's Reliance Industries, operator of the world's biggest refining complex, has signed a one-year deal with Russia's Rosneft to buy at least 3 million barrels of oil a month in roubles, four sources aware of the matter told Reuters. The shift to rouble payments follows Russian President Vladimir Putin's push for Moscow and its trading partners to find alternatives to the Western financial system to facilitate trade despite U.S. and European sanctions.

A term deal with Rosneft also helps privately run Reliance to secure oil at discounted rates at a time when the OPEC+ group of oil producers is expected to extend voluntary supply cuts beyond June. The OPEC+ group comprising the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies including Russia is due to discuss the output cuts in an online meeting on June 2. India, the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer, has become the biggest buyer of seaborne Russian crude since the West

halted purchases and imposed sanctions against Moscow in the aftermath of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. India has also paid for Russian crude in rupees, dirhams and Chinese yuan. State-owned Indian refiners, meanwhile, have been tapping spot markets for Russian oil because they were unable to finalise term supplies for this year, Reuters has reported previously.

"India is a strategic partner for Rosneft oil company," the Russian company said in an emailed response to questions from Reuters, adding that it does not comment on confidential agreements with partners. "Cooperation with Indian companies includes projects in the field of production, oil refining and trading of oil and petroleum products." Rosneft also said that commercial approaches to determining the value of sold crude are the same for all companies, regardless of whether they are private or state-controlled. Reliance did not respond to a request for comment.

Under the terms of the deal, which took effect at the beginning of the Indian financial year from April 1, Reliance will buy two cargoes of about one million barrels of Urals crude with an option to buy four more each month at a discount of \$3 a barrel to the Middle East Dubai benchmark, the sources said. The refiner will also purchase one to two cargoes a month of low-sulphur crude oil, mainly ESPO Blend exported from Russia's Pacific port of Kozmino, at a premium of \$1 a barrel to Dubai quotes, the sources added. Reliance has agreed to make payment for the oil using Russia's rouble through India's HDFC Bank and Russia's Gazprombank, the sources said. Further details on the payment mechanism were not immediately available.

Bhumi amla: Know what makes it a 'powerful liver toner'

You probably consume amla — known to be good for the digestive system — as part of your diet. But have you ever heard of or seen bhumi amalaki, the tinier version of amla that is considered to be excellent for liver health?Introducing us to this powerful fruit was Ayurveda practitioner Salila Sukumaran, founder, Ayurveda Wellness Concierge who took to Instagram to share, "This amla is something else; you will find it growing close to the earth. The tiny fruits are juicy and taste like nothing but are powerful liver toners. Bhumi amalaki along with Punarnava and Neem makes an effective combo for gastric, liver, and kidney health. Take these herbs only under the care of an experienced elder, a qualified practitioner, or an Ayurveda physician."

Bhumi amalaki, also known as Phyllanthus Niruri, is a potent herbal remedy highly esteemed in Ayurveda for its remarkable medicinal properties, said Dr Yamuna BS, chief doctor, Guduchi Ayurveda. "Revered as the best liver tonic, Bhumi or Bhumyamalaki is a go-to remedy for enhancing liver health and function. Its hepatoprotective properties make it an exceptional treatment for conditions like jaundice, a personal favourite in my clinical practice, where I have extensively used it with remarkable results," noted Dr Yamuna.

One of the distinguishing features of Bhumi amalaki compared to the regular amla (Indian gooseberry) is its broader spectrum of benefits. "While amla is renowned for its high vitamin C content and overall health-boosting properties, Bhumi amalaki stands out with its specific efficacy in treating liver disorders, fever, and jaundice. Furthermore, it possesses powerful properties that help in addressing various skin issues, providing relief and promoting skin health," said Dr Yamuna. Bhumi amalaki also acts as a natu-



ral appetite enhancer, making it beneficial for individuals experiencing loss of appetite. According to Dr Yamuna, this herb is versatile in its therapeutic applications, extending its benefits to managing conditions like diabetes, menorrhagia (heavy menstrual bleeding), and urinary tract infections (UTIs). "Its multifaceted action makes it a valuable addition to holistic health regimens," mentioned Dr Yamuna. It also contains powerful anti-inflammatory, antibiotic, and antiasthmatic properties. Dr Yamuna elucidated that it is commonly used to relieve symptoms of the common cold, sore throat, cough, and flu. "It also thins and loosens the rheum particles in the chest and nasal cavities, making breathing easier and helping the body eliminate mucus. It also alleviates bronchitis and asthmatic symptoms," said Dr Yamuna. However, while Bhumyamalaki is generally safe for most people, it is crucial to consider a few aspects before incorporating it into your health routine. "Individuals with underlying health conditions or those on medication should consult a healthcare provider to ensure it does not interact with their current treatments. Pregnant and breastfeeding women should also seek medical advice prior to use," cautioned Dr Yamuna.

Dhaka's tortuous pursuit of constitutional reforms

There are fresh rumbles in Bangladesh's political sphere — a student-led party that emerged from the revolution that ousted the Sheikh Hasina government has become a bold voice for democratic reform, although it is quite unruly yet. As calls for elections grow louder, the tension between this urgency and the reforms needed continues to define this critical moment. Not long ago, Muhammad Yunus, the head of the interim government, met with political parties to build consensus regarding reforms. So far, there is no concrete agreement among the political parties on the charter of reforms. The proposed changes to the Constitution aim to replace the core principles of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism with new ideals — equality, human dignity, social justice, pluralism, and democracy. While these changes aim to address the longstanding grievances of the public, they are not without challenges. As Bangladesh transitions from decades of centralised authoritarian rule, it now enters uncharted territory, where outcomes remain unpredictable yet highly con-

Many have argued that the existing Constitution has outlived its utility, becoming a tool for authoritarianism rather than a charter for democracy. The nine-member constitutional reform commission, chaired by Bangladeshi American political scientist and writer Ali Riaz, has proposed significant changes, including restructuring the foundational principles. These principles, particularly secularism, are misaligned with the country's identity given 90% of the population is Muslim, maintains Bangladesh's attorney general, Muhammad Asaduzzaman. Other proposed reforms include the establishment of a bicameral legislature to improve representation and balance of power, limiting the prime minister (PM)'s tenure to two terms, and bringing back public referendums to give citizens a direct say in constitutional changes. The constitutional reform commission itself is not without controversies. When Riaz was appointed as its head, critics questioned why an academic, and a US citizen affiliated with an American think tank, was chosen for this role. Riaz's lack of background in law also has led to concerns about his suitability for the job. The existing 1972 Constitution embodies ideals of the liberation war, which many believe has been diluted and weaponised by successive governments over the years. Principles like nationalism have been used to suppress dissent, while secularism has coexisted uneasily with Islam as the State religion since 1988, in many instances alienating both the Muslim majority as well as the religious minorities. Article 70, which prevents members of parliament from voting against their party, has stifled legislative debate and concentrated power in the PM's hands. This provision reflects deeper issues of disunity and lack of internal democracy within political parties. The absence of term limits has allowed for

prolonged, unchecked rule, exemplified by Sheikh Hasina's

uninterrupted 16-year-long tenure in office. The 1991 transition from a presidential to a parliamentary democracy aimed to prevent the over-centralisation of power. It failed to achieve its purpose due to the uncontested dominance of the PM's office, which both Hasina and Khaleda Zia's regimes have illustrated. The political ecosystem remains entrenched in dynastic rule, with power often restricted to members of prominent political families. This reflects failure of political parties to embrace internal democracy or foster diverse leadership. Without genuine intent, which has to come from within the parties, cosmetic changes will not resolve these obstinate issues.

While Hasina's tenure is credited with economic achievements like infrastructure development, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, and poverty reduction, it was marred by increasingly authoritarian governance. Electoral processes were rendered farcical with the 2014, 2018, and 2024 elections characterised by Opposition boycotts, voter intimidation, and allegations of massive fraud. The abolition of caretaker government system in 2011 cemented Hasina's grip on power, leaving the Opposition, particularly Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, open to political persecution and marginalisation.BNP and Jamaat have expressed willingness to cooperate in varying degrees on getting the reforms done. However, while BNP has been stressing the urgency of holding general elections, arguing that reforms and elections are complementary processes, Jamaat has been advocating for holding elections after reforms have been undertaken. Hence, the timeline for the next general election remains uncertain, despite Yunus signalling that they could be held by the end of this year or next year. Moreover, new political forces entering the picture, including the anti-discrimination student's movement, has signalled a break from the Awami League-BNP duopoly.

Amid these shifts, the push to establish multiculturalism as a foundational principle has gained momentum. The BNP has embraced this direction through its Bangladeshi nationalism ideology, advocating for greater inclusivity. Likewise, the Jamaat has exhibited a more noncommunal stance, by protecting temples and churches in vulnerable times. These developments do offer hope toward unity and a break from the divisive politics that characterised the past. However, challenges remain, particularly given Jamaat's Islamist history, which raises questions about its commitment to pluralism and democracy. Constitutional reforms have been proposed also to realign Bangladesh with aspirations of the 1971 liberation war as well as the mass uprising of 2024, emphasising justice, inclusivity, and democratic participation. However, the proposal to rewrite foundational principles has sparked unease. Proponents argue that the existing principles are outdated for today's Bangladesh

As Fahadh Faasil reveals ADHD diagnosis at 41, understanding the symptoms and treatment for adults



Malayalam actor Fahadh Faasil recently opened up about being clinically diagnosed with Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The Aavesham actor opened up about his diagnosis at an event in Kothamangalam, Kerala, where he recalled a conversation with his doctor. "He told me it can be easily cured if diagnosed at a young age. I asked whether it can be cured if it is diagnosed at the age of 41. I am clinically ADHD diagnosed," Fahadh, 41, said. For the unversed, ADHD, a neurodevelopmental condition that affects cognitive processes, has traditionally been associated with childhood diagnoses. As such, let's understand if one can remain undiagnosed till later years and how that changes the course of treatment.

How can a diagnosis be missed?

ADHD is usually seen in children, however, symptoms may persist in some during adulthood too. "This means that ADHD symptoms usually do not start in adulthood. It is most likely that symptoms of ADHD were milder

or were missed when they were younger," noted consultant neurologist Dr Sudhir Kumar, Apollo Hospitals, Hyderabad.

Symptoms of adult ADHD

According to Dr Kumar, common symptoms of adult ADHD include difficulty paying attention, impulsiveness, and restlessness. "Symptoms can range from mild to severe. They are unable to focus on their work and prioritise. They are also poor at multitasking. This results in delays in completing the tasks leading to missed deadlines. Adults with ADHD often report poor performance at work and are unable to fruitfully engage in social gatherings. As a result of impulsiveness, they get frustrated waiting in queue or if they are stuck in traffic," explained Dr Kumar. Most adults with ADHD also have co-existing anxiety, mood swings, or depression, added Dr Kumar. Diagnosis of ADHD in adults requires careful and detailed history. "Since some symptoms of ADHD may overlap that of psychiatric diseases. ADHD may be difficult to diagnose, especially in milder cases," said Dr Kumar.

Is it a cause for concern when diagnosed late?

It is not a cause for concern when diagnosed late. "However, personal and professional life can get adversely affected if ADHD remains undiagnosed and un-addressed. If the person finds significant impairment in social, or professional life, he/she should consult a doctor," said Dr Kumar. Appropriate treatment can result in significant improvement in quality of life. Treatment of ADHD in adults is similar to that of children, and includes medications, counselling, psychotherapy, and treatment of coexisting psychiatric disorders, said Dr Kumar.

Heat waves can be deadly for older adults: An aging global population and rising temperatures mean millions are at risk

A deadly heat wave gripped large regions of Asia for weeks in April and May 2024. As temperatures climbed past 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43.3 Celsius) in India on May 7, campaigning politicians, local news announcers and voters waiting in long lines passed out from the oppressive heat. From as far north as Japan to as far south as the Philippines, the relentless heat wreaked havoc on everyday life. Students and teachers in Cambodia were sent home from school, as their hand-held fans provided little protection against the stifling heat and humidity in their poorly ventilated classrooms. Farmers in Thailand saw their crops wither and mourned the loss of livestock that perished under the punishing sun. Hundreds of people died from the heat. Most of the planet has suffered the dire effects of extreme heat in recent years. A weekslong heat wave in the southwestern United States in 2023 was described as "hell on earth" in Phoenix, where temperatures hit 110 F (43.3 C) or higher for 31 straight days. At the same time, Europe saw unprecedented high temperatures that killed hundreds and contributed to devastating wildfires in Greece. Regardless of where or when a heat wave strikes, one pattern is a constant: Older adults are the most likely to die from extreme heat, and this crisis will worsen in the coming years. We study climate change and population aging. Our research documents two global trends that together portend a dire future.

More older adults will be at risk of heat stressFirst, temperatures are hotter than ever. The nine-year period from 2015 and 2023 had the highest average temperatures since alphal records began in 1880 Second, the population is an ing worldwide. By 2050, the number of people ages 60 and older will double to nearly 2.1 billion, making up 21 per cent of the global population. That proportion is 13 per cent today. These combined forces mean that ever-rising numbers of vulnerable older adults will be exposed to intensifying heat. To understand the risks ahead, we developed population projections for different age groups and combined them with climate change scenarios for the coming decades. Our analyses show that by 2050, more than 23 per cent of the world population ages 69 and older will be living in regions where peak temperatures routinely surpass 99.5 degrees F (37.5 degrees C), compared with just 14 per cent today. That means that as many as 250 million additional older adults will be exposed to dangerously high temperatures. Mapping the data shows that most of these older adults live in lower- and middle-income countries with insufficient services and limited access to electricity, cooling appliances and safe water. In historically cooler regions in the Global North, including North America and Europe,



rising temperatures will be the main force driving older adults' heat exposure. In historically hotter regions in the Global South such as Asia, Africa and South America, population growth and increases in longevity mean that steeply rising numbers of older adults will be exposed to intensifying heat-related risks.

Policymakers, communities, families and older residents themselves need to understand these risks and be prepared because of older adults' special vulnerabilities to heat.heat wave Analyses show that by 2050, more than 23 per cent of the world population ages 69 and older will be living in regions where peak temperatures routinely surpass 99.5 degrees F (37.5 degrees C), compared with just 14 per cent today (Source: Freepik)Extreme heat is especially harmful to older adults

High temperatures are oppressive for everyone, but for older adults they can be deadly. Extreme heat worsens common age-related health conditions such as heart, lung and kidney disease and can cause delirium. Older people don't sweat as much as younger people, which makes it harder for their bodies to cool down when temperatures spike. These problems are intensified by common prescription medications, such as anticholinergics, which further reduce the capacity to sweat. Spending time outdoors in hot humid weather can cause dehydration, a problem worsened by the side effects of prescription medications such as diuretics and beta-blockers. Dehydration can make older adults weak and dizzy, increasing their risk of falls and injury. These threats are even worse in regions lacking access to safe and affordable drinking water. Poor air quality makes it difficult to breath, especially for those who already have lung problems such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD. For older adults with physical health problems, temperatures as low as 80 F (26.7 C) can pose significant danger. And when humidity is as high as 90 per

Silly season in Maharashtra

Kunal Kamra is a standup comedian who makes a living mostly by making fun of politicians in power. There can surely be a debate about the quality of his jokes, though people do have the right to perform inferior comedy. However, no one can threaten a person or vandalise a venue for bad jokes. This is why the violence by Shiv Sena cadres at the venue (The Habitat in Khar, Mumbai) where Kamra lampooned deputy CM Eknath Shinde on Sunday is unacceptable. That the Shiv Sena is part of the government, responsible for upholding law and order and protecting the constitutional rights of citizens — the right to freedom of speech and expression is protected under Article 19 — makes it worse. Coming soon after the riots in Nagpur over Mughal ruler Aurangzeb's tomb, the events since Sunday in the country's commercial and entertainment capital do not sit well with the

image of a government that



is in office with a clearly articulated development agenda. The police did well to quickly apprehend the men responsible for the vandalism, but the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)'s subsequent action at the studio premises raises questions.

To be sure, this is likely to be the case in any state and under any government. Across India, states ruled by

parties of various hues have targeted journalists as well as satirists. Back in 2012, a Kolkata professor was arrested for merely forwarding a post that had a cartoon of CM Mamata Banerjee (of the TMC). The Congress government in Telangana recently ordered the arrest of two women journalists for an article that was critical of the CM. Maharashtra CM

Devendra Fadnavis has

spoken in support of his

deputy and asked Kamra to apologise even as the police have booked the comic.

When did politicians become so thin-skinned? Ironically, Shiv Sena was founded by Bal Thackeray, a cartoonist-turned-politician with a sharp pen and a biting tongue. Satire, humour, caricature, slapstick, and jokes (highbrow to profane) aimed at people in power have been the staple of Indian performance traditions.

States and the challenge before the Finance Commission



The Government of Tamil Nadu recently hosted the Sixteenth Finance Commission, which was chaired by Arvind Panagariya. With its distinguished experts from various fields, the Commission is uniquely positioned to address the critical fiscal challenges facing India and rectifying the skewness in the relationship between the States and the Union. The decisions taken by this Finance Commission will not only shape the fiscal fate of the nation for the next five years but will also influence India's economic trajectory in the decades to come. The Sixteenth Finance Commission's work coincides with significant shifts in global economic trends. Concepts such as "friendshoring" and "reshoring" are reshaping international trade and investment patterns. These trends present a unique opportunity for India and Tamil Nadu. To seize these opportunities, the critical challenge for the Finance Commission lies in striking a balance between equitable redistribution and incentivising growth in high-performing States such as Tamil Nadu.

Since 1951, when the first Finance Commission was formed, each Finance Commission has adapted its own approach towards the fiscal challenges of its time. Every Commission has sought to achieve an equitable redistribution of resources by increasing the share of States under vertical devolution and channelling funds to less-developed States through horizontal devolution. But there have been clear gaps between their declared objectives and outcomes; therein lies our case for a new and fair system of distribution of resources. For instance, while the Fifteenth Finance Commission awarded the vertical share of the divisible pool to the States as 41%, the effective devolution to States in the first four years of the award period amounted to only 33.16% of the Union's gross tax revenue. The unprecedented levying of cess and surcharges by the Union is the fundamental reason for this effective decline in devolution. Hike States' share, incentivise performers The 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 counterpart 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 consumptionbased 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 fastgrowing 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

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 aftereffects 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 aftereffects 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.

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 breathlessthe 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-yearold 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 Mithilesh 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.

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 Unicure 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 Mandaviya 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.

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 emissionsintensive 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 fastgrowth path as well. High carbon-intensity activities escalate climate risks that, if unattended, will shave off the growth

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

Conversely, green growth contributes to fast growth.

It creates jobs — 50 million new jobs in India by 2070 according to the World Economic Forum's Mission 2070 report. This translates to \$1 trillion in additional economic value by 2030 and up to \$15 trillion by 2070. It promotes opportunities for manufacturing and technology innovations, which have significant spillover effects in productivity and faster growth. It enhances health, which has multiplier effects. Energy security puts India in a stronger position to weather global shocks and to stand more firmly on the geopolitical stage. A holistic strategy could hasten progress: The recently announced 2025 Union Budget prioritised fast growth while advancing several green initiatives, the most notable being a plan to develop 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047. It also included support for manufacturing of solar equipment and grid-scale batteries as well as incentives to boost scrap materials and critical mineral recycling. There is potential to go even further with a holistic growth strategy and commitment of resources for green growth across three important dimensions: First, India must combine a comprehensive renewables capacity-building plan with investments in climate adaptation while ensuring the wider ecosystems — transmission, storage, public-private collaborations, carbon capture and storage, etc. — are in place. Second, a holistic strategy should pay close attention to the demand side. Farmers, comprising 45 per cent of the workforce, need access to affordable climate-resilient infrastructure, drought-resistant crops and farming practices. In parallel, micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which contribute 30 per cent of GDP, generally lack access to sustainable technologies and finances. In addition to education, subsidies and incentives, there are other tools, from carbon pricing to green finance schemes, that could be advanced. Third, where green growth is at odds with fast growth, these disruptions could be anticipated and actively managed. Some sectors may experience slowdowns as capital is reallocated towards less carbon-intensive activities and sectors. States tied up with coal would need help reskilling their workers and re-building their economies, potentially subsidised by states that are economic beneficiaries of the greening of India. A greener, faster-growing India is within reach: Creating the energy infrastructure that keeps pace with the demands of "viksit" proportions while ensuring an effective green transition is not only a tall order, it is a monumental undertaking — even if the 2047 goal is achieved in later years. The most effective way to execute a complex strategy at the scale and pace that India demands would be to pair India's growing expertise with best-in-class international players. These collaborations could span technical areas, skill development, the management of complex projects along with innovative financing.

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

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 national experts 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 Al for reading the X-rays. These innovations have been utilised under the national programme now during the 100day 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 What are breakthroughs?

The use of artificial intelligence to read microscopy slides and X-rays for automated detection of tuberculosis is a huge relief in remote areas where there is a shortage of healthcare workers. The screening net has been widened with different types of tests to detect TB infection in samples other than sputum, such as blood, saliva, or stool. These tests may look for antibodies in blood, or use PCR to detect the pathogen in other samples, or use another inexpensive way of amplifying the genetic material called LAMP. "In many patients, especially children with tuberculosis, it is very difficult to generate a sputum sample. These alternative tests can play a role in detecting TB in persons who are unable to give a sputum sample," said Dr Bahl. The dose-tracking tests are a breakthrough as one of the biggest challenges with TB is that people have to continue taking medicines for months even after they start feeling better — patients may have to take medicines for four months to two years depending on the type of TB they have. This leads to many patients dropping out in the middle of the treatment. "This makes the patients drug-resistant. Also, when health workers ask the patient whether they have taken the medicine, they may say yes even if they have not. These tests are a way to check compliance," said Dr Bahl.

One of the tests selected by the experts was a stripbased test for the commonly used medicine Rifampicin. When a patient's saliva is put on the strip, it can tell whether they have taken the medicine in the last 24-hours. There were tests that could check the levels of the medicines in the blood as well. A programme in Telangana successfully demonstrated the use of drones over a long period of time in delivering medicines and carrying patient samples back to enable last-mile tracking. However, it is the technology for detecting TB as well as drug resistance that would have a huge implication. This next generation sequencing test can tell whether a patient is resistant to any of the 15 antituberculosis medicines at one go. At present, a PCR test is used to check for resistance, and usually to only one of the commonly used medicines called Rifampicin. This next generation sequencing test would be able to detect several medicines, including the recently started BPaL regimen that uses four drugs to cut the treatment time of drug resistant TB to six months. "This test, however, is unlikely to be included in the national programme immediately because it costs around Rs 5,000 to 10,000 per patient, which is a little steep for a programme. However, it is likely to become cheaper in the future. If you look at RT-PCR tests, it used to cost anywhere between Rs 1,200 to 2,000 before the pandemic. Now, it can be done for as little as Rs 200," said

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. Homemade 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 burnout 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 twoyear 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. Neuchatel 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 exerciseMarianne 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 careSo 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 Neuchatel 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 Filliger, a poet and retired teacher, during a visit to the ethnography museum. "There should be prescriptions for all the museums

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 congestionaline Sprays: The safest of the lot, saline sprays help prevent crusting in the nasal cavity without any side effectsCorticosteroid Sprays: Used primarily for conditions like allergic rhinitis, these sprays reduce inflammation and manage allergy symptoms effectively. Risks of overusing nasal spraysWhile nasal sprays offer immediate relief, Dr Kovale said overuse can lead to unintended side effects:

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 advisedChildren Under 6 Years: Use is generally not recommended unless supervised by a medical professionaPeople with Glaucoma or High Blood Pressure: These conditions can worsen with decongestant sprays.

Safe usage tipsTo minimise risks, follow these guidelines:Stick to Recommended Dosages: Most decongestant sprays should not be used for more than 3–5 consecutive daysConsult 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, individuals 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 solitudeCadabam 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 lifFor those unable to commit to a multi-day retreat

From the historic Grand Trunk Road to the nation's longest highway — Country's top 10 toll plazas collect Rs 14,000 crore in 5 years



A toll plaza on the Grand Trunk Road, another on the National Highway (NH) connecting Delhi to Mumbai, one located on the NH running along the east coast of the country and another on India's longest highway — these are among the top-10 toll plazas across the country which have collected the highest user fee or toll in the last five years. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) in Lok Sabha on March 20, Bharthana, which lies on Vadodara-Bharuch portion of NH-48 in Gujarat, is the highest user fee collecting toll plaza in the country. In the last five financial years (2019-20 to 2023-24), it collected a toll of Rs 2,043.81 crore, with the highest collection of Rs 472.65 crore in 2023-24. This is followed by Shahjahanpur toll plaza in Rajasthan, which is located on the Gurgaon-Kotputli-Jaipur stretch of NH-48, connecting Delhi to Mumbai. MoRTH data shows that a toll of Rs 1,884.46 crore was collected at the Shahjahanpur toll plaza in the last five years.

The Jaladhulagori fee plaza in West Bengal is in third position, which collected Rs 1,538.91 crore toll during 2019-20 to 2023-24. It lies on the Dhankuni-Kharagpur stretch of

NH-16, which runs along the east coast of India and is part of the Golden Quadrilateral project to connect major cities. Similarly, the Barajore toll plaza in Uttar Pradesh is the fourth highest toll collecting plaza with a collection of Rs 1,480.75 crore in the last five years. Barajore is located on the Etawah-Chakeri (Kanpur) section of NH-19, which also constitutes the major portion of the Grand Trunk Road. The Gharonda toll plaza, which lies on the Panipat-Jalandhar section of NH-44— India's longest highway from Srinagar to Kanyakumari — is at the fifth position in terms of total revenue. In the last five years it collected a toll of Rs 1,314.37 crore.

Other fee plazas in the top-10 list are Choryasi on Bharuch-Surat stretch of NH-48 in Gujarat, Thikariya/Jaipur Plaza on Jaipur-Kishangarh section of NH-48 in Rajasthan, L&T Krishnagiri Thopur on Krishnagiri-Thumbipadi section of NH-44 in Tamil Nadu, Nawabganj in Kanpur-Ayodhya section of NH-25 in Uttar Pradesh and Sasaram on Varanasi-Aurangabad stretch of NH-2 in Bihar. In all, in the top-10 list, two plazas each are from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and one each is from Harvana. West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Bihar. In total, these 10 fee plazas collected a toll of Rs 13,988.51 crore in the last five years, which is over 7 per cent of the total toll collection across the fee plazas in the country. According to the Ministry, a total of Rs 1.93 lakh crore was collected as user fee or toll between 2019-20 to 2023-24 by all toll plazas, with the highest collection of Rs 55,882 crore in 2023-24.

While the average collection of each toll plaza during the period was Rs 190 crore, the average collection of these top-10 plazas stood at almost Rs 1,400 crore. Currently, there are a total of 1,063 user fee plazas or toll plazas across the country, out of which a total of 457 toll plazas were constructed in the last five years.

US tariffs looming, India looks at easing non-trade barriers, relaxing Chinese FDI

WITH SOME dialling down of tensions between India and China along the border, policy makers are more open to upgrading bilateral economic relationships now. It is being viewed as an opportune time, particularly when US President Donald Trump is pushing India to the corner on reducing tariffs and forcing it to agree to terms set by Washington, especially on tariffs. According to sources aware of developments, discussions are on between departments to dilute or neutralise some of the restrictions on trade and investments that were put in place five years ago after clashes between Chinese and Indian soldiers in Galwan in 2020.

Some of these proposals have gained traction following industry demands, and include low hanging economic outcomes such as easing of visa restrictions for Chinese personnel and lifting some tariff and non-tariff barriers on imports of consignments. Some Chinese apps may be allowed again too, they said. Resumption of flights and issuance of visas to Chinese scholars are proposals already on the cards, the sources said. On the investment front, there are indications the Indian side is now open to allowing inflows from Beijing as a countermeasure to the widening trade deficit between the two countries. Despite the many restrictions as on date, trade flows continue to be remarkably in favour of China. Here, New Delhi may consider relaxing the Centre's 2020 policy which requires approval by the Centre for investment from companies in countries that share land borders with India.

At least two sources who are aware of discussions there is a growing view in India that entering into a visibly closer dialogue with China on normalising business relations could send out a signal to the US and likely act as a potential hedge. A presentation is learnt to have been recently made by the Finance Ministry in favour of opening up some of the restrictions earlier this fiscal. US tariffs looming, India looks at easing non-trade barriers, relaxing Chinese FDIQueries sent to the Ministry of Finance, as well as the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of External Affairs, did not elicit a response. Easing non-tariff barriers on the table could be BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards) certification made mandatory for imports from China, including on electronic and IT products, and other items under the ambit of the increasing number of Quality Control Orders (QCOs) issued by Ministry of Commerce, the sources said. "The rapprochement with China on business ties is inevitable, especially in the post Trump era. It's just a question of time, but the way it'll be done is a subject of internal debate within the government. Removal of trade and non-trade barriers is anyway an industry demand, especially from the small and medium enterprises segment,"

Besides, the government may also ease the visa policy for Chinese workers/ technicians involved in infrastructure projects by virtue of import of heavy infra equipment and their installation and operations. Over the last few years, the Indian government tightened its review process for visa extensions to Chinese individuals working in India.

THERE IS a growing view in India that entering into a visibly closer dialogue with China on normalising business ties could send out a signal to the US and likely act as a potential hedge. Talks are on to consider diluting some of the restrictions on trade and investments put in place after the Galwan clashes in 2020. "Since, we're anyway being forced to bring down tariffs (to accommodate the Trump administration), it only makes eventual sense to ease up tariff and non tariff barriers, especially on inputs and products not manufactured in India at scale. So the view in the government is that while there will not be anything done to actively incentivise trade with Chinese, some of the disincentives can be removed. For this too, Indian industry has been making a pitch. This could include revoking total bans and restrictions on consignment from China at Indian ports," the source said.

It is not just India but China too that is keen on restoring trade ties with India. For the growing trade deficit, Beijing has proposed investment flows from Chinese companies, the sources said. Another source said, "The talks have been on for some time and the relaxations may be announced over the coming weeks. It will in a way also give a signal to Washington that India can start doing business with China again." External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had said in London early March that "Trump's America first policy suits India as it leads to a multipolar world."

Bilateral trade between India and China in FY24 stood at \$118.40 billion. According to the latest data from the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), China has once again become India's top trading partner in FY24, surpassing the



On the investment front, there are indications the Indian side is now open to allowing inflows from Beijing as a countermeasure to the widening trade deficit between the two countries.

United States after a two-year gap. In FY24, China had a 15 per cent share in India's total imports. India imported goods worth \$675.42 billion from the world, including goods worth \$101.74 billion from China. On the other hand, China occupied only the 22nd position in FDI equity inflows into India, with a cumulative FDI of \$2.5 billion from April 2000-September 2024. Growth in bilateral investment has not kept pace with the expansion in trading volumes between the two countries, and there is appetite in Beijing to step up investment flows, sources said. There could be some accommodation on the Indian side, going forward. Though trade volumes have grown sharply since 2020, they have also led to the biggest single trade deficit India is running with any country. India's trade deficit concerns are two pronged: the actual size of the deficit and that the imbalance has continuously been widening year after year to cross \$83 billion in 2023. The widening trade deficit with China could be attributed to two major reasons — the narrow basket of commodities, mostly primary, that India exports to China and a number of market access impediments for most of India's agricultural products and sectors where India has export competitiveness, including pharmaceuticals, IT/ITeS, etc.

A new working paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) had stated that exporters face a range of non-tariff barriers in China, limiting market access for Indian exports, particularly in agricultural and pharmaceutical products. An easing on India's side could give New Delhi leverage in seeking more access for our goods, an official handling trade on the Indian side said. While China is actively seeking to prevent a loss of investment due to its domestic housing crisis, combined with Western multinationals' goal of de-risking their supply chains by seeking alternative destinations under the 'China plus one' policy, economists in the government have also acknowledged that decoupling from China is not easy for India or the rest of the world and India faces a choice between Chinese investment and Chinese imports.

A senior government official said there could be a gradual opening up to China, primarily to make it easier for companies from the mainland to invest in New Delhi along with domestic partners, including joint ventures between Chinese and Indian companies, where the former is a minority shareholder. The Economic Survey 2023-24 had also called for India to encourage investments from China, while discouraging imports of finished goods, where the scope of local value addition is very little. "Where we see China, or any other country, dumping goods in India, causing injury to our domestic industry, then, we raise duties, impose antidumping duties, and introduce safeguard duties to protect our industry. But wherever we need their goods, then we should facilitate that," another official said, when asked what could change in terms of the two nations' trade ties.

A December 2024 NITI Aayog report, the 'Trade Watch', had noted that India had "limited success so far" in capturing the 'China Plus One' strategy adopted by multinational companies looking to de-risk their supply chains. Some of India's recent persuasions have alluded to the middle ground New Delhi would be comfortable in taking to accommodate higher Chinese investments. Earlier this year, Chinese state-owned SAIC Motors, which owned a controlling stake in MG Motors, divested from the company and sold it to an Indian group of investors led by the JSW Group, which now collectively owns 51 per cent of the automaker. Chinese apparel-maker Shein, which was banned by New Delhi in 2020, has made a second entry in the country after licensing its brand to Reliance Retail. Operations of the venture are being managed by Reliance

Local adaption key, planning smaller stores to increase physical touch points: IKEA India Country Commercial Manager



After launching online delivery in Delhi-NCR and other northern cities—and with two large stores under construction in Gurgaon and Noida—IKEA is now eyeing smaller format stores in the region. In a conversation with Aggam Walia, IKEA India's country commercial manager, Adosh Sharma discusses what these stores might look like, the company's growth levers amid a consumption slowdown, and its expanding focus on food.

IKEA India is exploring different store formats, especially in Delhi-NCR. Can you tell us more about what these formats could look like?

We need to have smaller stores that are able to address customer needs better. Our ambition is 'one click, 30 minutes away'. One click, which means we're always available online, and 30 minutes from any physical touch point that is available to a customer. We have different formats that we will look at, like planning order points. If you're planning, buying, or refurbishing a house, you don't need to go to the large store. You can go to your neighborhood planning order point, sit there, plan the entire house and come back. Then, we've got the shops, where we look at smaller concepts roughly starting at 20,000, going up to 40,000 (square feet), where people can come on a more frequent basis to try our accessories and certain furniture catego-

IKEA's expansion into north India comes amid a slow-down in consumption. How do you read the current scenario?

We are still in an expansion phase. This phase allows us to generate the kind of growth we've been searching for. Secondly, our entire pricing bandwidth is quite large. A thousand products for under Rs 200, going right up to the sofas coming for around Rs 50,000, you're able to attend to a much larger diaspora. Thirdly, our products are not limited to a certain product class, whereas in some other places you would get only accessories or a certain type of furniture. We start from a spoon going up to a kitchen, so the choice that people have is far and wide. It helps us as people then experiment and take in the products much more. Lastly, our online business has been doing fairly well. That's really helping us penetrate much better.

Food is at the centre of the IKEA experience. How is this segment performing?

India is one of the few countries in the world where nearly 99 per cent of the food we make and sell is sourced from within India. We continuously update our menu. Last Diwali, we introduced a festive menu that ran through Christmas, featuring distinctly Indian treats like kebabs and rolls. In the summer, we launched coolers and popsicles. There's a lot of innovation we keep trying. Food currently contributes 7-8 per cent in the total business, taking online and offline together. We believe that this could be one big growth area for us.

Like with the food menu, will we also see a furniture range that's specific to India?

While we are looking at the global range because we have 80 years of experience to say it fits well, we also work with local adaptation by presenting the range in a way that keeps some of the local needs in mind. For example, a lot of people in India use the bedroom for eating. So, how do you incorporate some of those concepts to create an eating solution on the bed itself. Then, in the living room, how do you create more spaces in a small space. People visiting stay back, so how can you have an L-seater which is also a sofa bed. Apart from that, there is also an effort on creating an India-specific range where we are very keenly understanding the Indian tastes. We're also trying to create India as a hub for production.

India's Russian oil imports rebound in March as lower prices boost non-sanctioned tanker availability

After the steep decline following the latest US sanctions on Russia's oil trade, India's Russian oil imports have recovered sharply in March, thanks to the plentiful availability of Moscow's oil and it largely trading below the Western price cap of \$60 per barrel. This has ensured enough availability of non-sanctioned tankers to haul Russian crude to India.

The key reason for the ample availability of Russian oil for exports is the slump in Moscow's domestic oil demand following a fresh wave of Ukrainian drone strikes on various Russian refineries. India's Russian oil imports have averaged 1.85 million barrels per day (bpd) in the first 21 days of March, sharply higher from February's 1.47 million bpd and January's 1.64 million bpd, per provisional data from commodity market analytics firm Kpler. Russian oil's share in India's oil import basket so far in March stands at a little over 35 per cent, up from around 31 per cent in February.India's Russian oil imports have averaged a robust 1.75 million bpd so far in the January-March quarter, only slightly lower than the quarterly peaks of the past two years. India and China have been the top destinations for Russian crude following Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which led to Western buyers shunning

Just before demitting office in January, the US's Joe Biden administration announced sweeping sanctions against Russia's oil trade. It sanctioned as many as 183 tankers—a sizable part of the so-called shadow fleet that had kept Russian oil flowing-apart from sanctioning two Russian oil majors and Russian insurance companies, among others involved in the Russian oil sector and trade. The sanctions initially made it difficult for Indian refiners to secure enough cargoes of Moscow's crude as they were unwilling to deal with sanctioned vessels and insurers. But with the price of Russian oil slipping below \$60 per barrel, tanker and insurance availability is not a concern as the price cap mechanism enforced by G7 countries and their allies allows Western shippers and insurers to participate in Russian oil trade if the price of oil does not breach the price cap. According to Kpler's database, all Russian cargoes that have arrived in or are signaling to land in India this month are being transported by non-sanctioned tank-

"This surge in volumes in March comes as Russia's domestic crude demand plummeted in February and March due to Ukrainian drone attacks on several refineries...The rising availability of Russian crude exports has driven down Urals (Russia's flagship oil grade) prices, with average prices assessed at \$59.9 per barrel in February and \$56 per barrel so far in March. This suggests that Urals crude remains below the G7 price cap, enabling buyers and sellers to utilise Western shipping and insurance services for transporta-



tion," said Sumit Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst, Refining & Modeling at Kpler.Ritolia added that despite the expanded sanctions, India's Russian oil imports show no signs of "a structural retreat" and Indian refiners so far have remained "deeply committed" to buying discounted Russian crude despite the tightening of restrictions on Russia's oil sector. According to him, moderation in imports of Russian oil seen in January and February likely reflected transitional logistical adjustments rather than demand weakness.Russia's flagship Urals crude, also the mainstay of New Delhi's oil imports from Moscow, continues to trade at a discount to rival grades from India's traditional suppliers in West Asia. Although discounts have shrunk considerably over time, they remain lucrative for Indian refiners as India depends on imports to meet over 85 per cent of its crude oil needs.

"Indian refiners are well-configured for medium sour crudes like Urals, which can be blended or processed directly. The economics of running discounted barrels outweigh the operational overhead introduced by sanctions...Indian buyers have adjusted quickly to sanctions by engaging with non-sanctioned intermediaries, leveraging, and using alternative payment systems. These logistics may be more complex, but they remain effective," Ritolia said.

Industry insiders expect Indian refiners and Russian oil suppliers and traders to continue adjusting to the latest sanctions and devise ways to buy Russian oil without any sanctions risk in the near to medium term. Indian refiners have publicly stated that they are ready and willing to buy Russian oil if the transactions, suppliers, traders, shippers, and insurers involved are not under sanctions. Russia is expected to remain India's largest source of crude in the medium term unless there are more sudden disruptions or abrupt shifts in trade flows. A lot will depend on the stance the new Donald Trump administration in Washington takes on Ukraine war-related sanctions on Russia, the discounts available on Russian oil, and how competitively other major suppliers price their crude.

Reciprocal tariffs effect? India proposes to abolish digital tax on online advertisements

New Delhi: The government on Monday proposed to abolish the Equalisation Levy or digital tax on online advertisements as part of the 59 amendments to the Finance Bill 2025, which is being debated in the Lok Sabha. The proposal to remove the Equalisation Levy on online advertisements, according to experts, is aimed at showing an accommodative stance to the US, which has threatened to introduce reciprocal tariffs from April 2. The Equalisation Levy was imposed on online advertisement services on June 1, 2016. The amendments to Finance Bill 2025 were introduced in the Lok Sabha by Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary.

Last year, the government already removed a 2 per cent Equalisation Levy on e-commerce transactions, but the 6 per cent levy on online advertisements continued. "Although the 2 per cent levy garnered more criticism from the US, in anticipation of more tariff retaliation by them, the government is trying to show a more accommodative stance, and the removal of 6 per cent Equalisation Levy on online advertising is a step in that direction. However, it remains to be seen if this step, coupled with already

ongoing diplomatic measures, would lead to any softening of stance by the US," AKM Global Tax Partner Amit Maheshwari said.

Nangia Andersen LLP Partner Vishwas Panjiar said the government's move to propose the abolition of the Equalisation Levy altogether is a step in the right direction, as it not only brings certainty to taxpayers but also addresses the concerns raised by partner nations (like the US) regarding the unilateral nature of the levy. Besides, the removal of the Equalisation Levy, the government has also proposed amendments to make offshore fund investments less onerous and came out with changes relating to tax assessments under search and seizure provisions and reconciliation of income tax returns. Several amendments have been made to provisions related to search and seizure assessment... The government has added the new term Total Undisclosed Income to clarify that the intent of search and seizure proceedings is to bring only undisclosed income to tax," Maheshwari said. Deloitte India Partner Anil Talreja said the proposed amendments to the Finance Bill 2025 are largely clarificatory in nature.

From backwaters to IPL centrestage: In Vignesh Puthur, another success story for Mumbai Indians' scouting team?



GNS News Agency, March 26

Despite the team's defeat, the Mumbai Indians' scouting unit may well have raised a toast on Sunday night. Their punt on another unknown quantity, after all, might just have worked, although it's still early days. When Vignesh Puthur – one of the four debutantes on the night for MI – came on to bowl in the eighth over during his side's IPL opener, Chennai were strolling in their chase of 156. Perhaps it provided the ideal entry for the 24-year-old as in terms of where the game stood, there wasn't any real pressure. He had the space to do what he knows best without worrying about the end result. And with his variations, he picked up the wickets of Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shivam Dube and Deepak Hooda to put Chennai under pressure for the first time in the night.

Unearthing new talents away from the cricketing heartlands may have well become a habit these days for Mumbai. After all, from Jasprit Bumrah to the Pandya brothers and Tilak Varma to Nehal Wadhera, they keep doing it season after season. Yet, it is with Vignesh that they have actually taken the giant leap of faith. When Mumbai Indians bought Vignesh, who is pursuing an MA in literature, at the auction for a base price of Rs 30 lakh, the road to the IPL looked a distant journey.

Son of an auto rickshaw driver, Vignesh is yet to play senior-level cricket for Kerala. In the Kerala Cricket League, through which MI's scouting team handpicked him, the 24year-old didn't even set the stage on fire and had just two wickets to show from three matches. But he was a rare commodity - a left-arm wrist spinner who got the ball to spin both ways as well as bowl orthodox if and when the need arose. "We have to compliment our scouting guys," their bowling coach Paras Mhambrey said. "The idea has always been about seeing the potential more than anything else. And when we saw him in one of our trials, we saw the potential in him. Rather than looking into how much cricket he's played in the past. It's purely the thought that he has the potential. And you saw that today. Never easy, first game against CSK, it's a big game. But purely the way he responded, hats off to him," he added. In the selection trials, despite not having much of a game time at the senior level, MI have seen Vignesh thrive on consistency when it comes to getting constant turn and the ability to land the ball in the right areas consistently. Though Vignesh lacked match experience, what had also caught MI's scouting team was the uniqueness that he brought to the table. If the action and yorkers made them turn to Bumrah, in Vignesh's case it was the variations.

"I think the uniqueness. I think in this format, you need to be a little bit different. And you see all the Chinaman bowlers – Kuldeep prior to this has done well. So I think the idea was kind of how we use him in terms of the potential that he has," Mhambrey said.

This was a moment of triumph for not just MI's scouting system but also their think tank as to how they groomed him in time for the IPL. In the past, they have taken time to mould their players through their academy and play for their clubs. But with Vignesh, with a lack of experience being amply clear, post-auction, MI put him on a plane to South Africa, where he got the opportunity to mix with some of the best, including Rashid Khan, at MI Cape Town in the SA20. That tournament, apart from giving him the opportunity to sharpen his skills, also provided him with exposure and a chance to experience the normalcy of being in the same dressing room and space with superstars, which is common in the MI set-up and the IPL. But from the time he was called for the selection trials to his stint as a net bowler in SA20 and in the pre-season camp before the IPL, MI's bowling coach Paras Mhambrey says his calmness has stood out. "He's a sweet kid, really," Mhambrey, who walked him to the team bus from the hotel and to the stadium with an arm around his shoulders on Sunday, said. "I think he's a lovely kid to have in the team. He's more like a sponge right now, just absorbing everything, looking around, having conversations. You have heroes, you see them playing on the TV, and all of a sudden you are sharing the dressing room with them, sitting next to someone like Rohit. It's a dream come true for a lot of these guys, right? So in that sense he is excited. But the way he responded, never looked like he was under pressure," Mhambrey added. Prior to the IPL, MI tested him at the DY Patil Tournament. Playing for Reliance, he featured in three matches but picked up only two wickets. But still, it is a huge call to unleash him straight away in the middle. What had given MI the confidence was the feedback from their star crew that includes Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Tilak Varma, who all found it hard to pick his variations. "Rohit, Surya, Tilak, all these guys batted against him (in the nets). It wasn't easy to pick him. We felt that we had the confidence of pushing him in this game. And it turned out to be excellent. It was a good decision," Mhambrey said. As far as Vignesh's bowling goes, it is still hard to decipher. There are obviously slight tweaks in his action when he brings out the variations, but facing him for the first time, batsmen are likely to struggle. "I think nothing fancy," Mhambrey gave a bit of clues. "He has got the variations and bowls pretty accurate. In this format, I think having the variations is important. You don't need to be too fancy. If you can exploit your skills properly, I think that's giving you the best opportunity to do well," he added.

Ishan Kishan's century celebration was a statement for selectors, Mumbai Indians, Rohit Sharma: Michael Vaughan

GNS News Agency, March 26

Ishan Kishan of Sunrisers Hyderabad celebrates his after scoring his 100 runs during match 2 of the Indian Premier League season 18 (IPL 2025) between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Rajasthan Royals held at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, Hyderabad. (Photo: Sportzpics for IPL)Ishan Kishan of Sunrisers Hyderabad celebrates his after scoring his 100 runs during match 2 of the Indian Premier League season 18 (IPL 2025) between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Rajasthan Royals held at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, Hyderabad. (Photo: Sportzpics for IPL)Ishan Kishan Iit up the Indian Premier League with the first century of the IPL 2025 season against the Rajasthan Royals at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium.

Former England cricketer Michael Vaughan said that Kishan's celebrations after getting to the triple-figure mark were more than just for completing his half century. "Kishan's celebration for three figures today, that was a celebration maybe (aimed) for Mumbai, maybe to the chairman of selectors, maybe to Rohit Sharma, maybe to the whole of India, maybe to the whole of the world, just to say, 'Look I'm a decent player'. He's a wonderfully balanced player, with the break of the wrist to just flick the ball. He's got that great shot on the onside with anything short. I'd love to be the chairman of selectors for India. I mean, the selection meetings would be long because you've got so many players to talk about and you'd be a naughty step as a selector be-



cause you're saying to someone 'sorry, you're not even in the top five at the minute'. The talent pool in Indian cricket is monstrous and the only way that you can get in, the only way that you can push yourself into that set-up is by doing remarkable things. I think of all the formats to get a century in, T20 cricket is the hardest format to get in," Vaughan said on Cricbuzz.For SRH, Kishan, who was bought for Rs 11.25 crore at the auction, came into bat at No 3. The team was already flying at that stage with a 45-run opening stand in just 3.1 overs. Then, Kishan took over, as SRH almost broke the all-time IPL record which they set last year. The franchise have four of the five top totals in the IPL.Kishan thanked SRH captain Pat Cummins for giving him and the entire team "a lot of freedom" to play a fearless and ultraaggressive brand of cricket.

Paralympics medallist Sheetal Devi sets target for teen rival Payal Nag, who lost limbs at age of 5

GNS News Agency, March 26

Sheetal Devi is only one of two armless athletes to win a medal at the Paralympics. The story of this 18-year-old archer from Jammu, however, is not just about beating the odds and winning medals. She is also inspiring others in similar or more challenging circumstances to take up the bow — and be as good as her. Sheetal edged past 17-year-old Payal Nag in the final to win gold in the 2025 Khelo India Para Games. But then, had it not been for Sheetal's exploits at the 2024 Paris Paralympics, where she won bronze, Payal would not have taken up the sport at all.

Hailing from Balangir, a town in Odisha, Payal lost all four limbs in an electrocution incident at the age of five. Shifted to an orphanage as a young child, she did not know anything about para-sports, or even what a bow and arrow looked like — until a cry for help on social media caught the attention of Sheetal's coach, Kuldeep Vedwan."I had no idea what archery was when I was in Balangir. Kuldeep sir spoke to me on video call for the first time and then showed me videos of Sheetal didi. When I saw those, I thought I could also do something like this. Kuldeep sir gave me further motivation and said that you can also participate in the Paralympics," Payal said. Sheetal was born with phocomelia, a rare congenital disorder, resulting in the absence of arms. Vedwan developed a technique for her to take up archery; she picks the bow using her legs and then uses her mouth to fix the latch attached to her shoulder to aim

and shoot.At the same academy, Payal was taught the basics of the sport using the same technique but with prosthetic legs. "I saw Sheetal didi picking the bow with both her legs and thought how would I do it as I don't have legs. But then the prosthetic legs came in and I practised on them to pick the bow," Payal said. Payal was an instant success on the national circuit. In her first-ever tournament, the Para-Archery National Championships in Jaipur earlier this year, she beat Sheetal to win gold. On Sunday, it was Sheetal's turn to come out on top. "Payal played very well and I am not surprised that she has come so far in just two years," Sheetal said. Kuldeep is bullish about Payal's chances at the international level. "The world has only seen armless archers but now it is time for everyone to witness an archer without any limbs. We want to go ahead and compete in international tournaments as I think Payal is ready for that level," he said, speaking ahead of the final. Asked how it feels to inspire others to take up the sport, Sheetal said, "It feels good. I am glad Payal took up the sport. When I saw her shoot first, I was amazed. I am confident that she will do well at the international level and eventually more people will pick up the sport."The increasing levels of attention ever since she won the Paralympic medal does not seem to have added to the pressure. "I don't consider myself a celebrity. There is no pressure when I play in India but playing outside is different," she said. "I am an athlete. And the people who are saluting me today.

Kagiso Rabada interview: 'You might as well call our sport batting and not cricket, if there isn't a balance between bat and ball'



GNS News Agency, March 26

There has been a lot of chatter around the first 300 total being achieved in this year's IPL, and most of it is due to the way Sunrisers Hyderabad have been going about their business. On Sunday, in their first match of the season, SRH appeared to have it within their sights, needing 44 runs off the last 2 overs – a very doable scenario with Heinrich Klaasen and Ishan Kishan in the middle. The batting approach from Pat Cummins' side in the last two years of IPL has been so explosive that when SRH finished on 286/6 – their & IPL's 2nd highest total – it felt a few short. So what do the bowlers think of such scenarios? South African speedster Kagiso Rabada, who has joined Gujarat Titans ahead of IPL 2025, spoke to The Indian Express about the importance of maintaining a balance between bat and ball. Excerpts from the interview:

What's your view on the chatter around the 300-milestone possibly being achieved in this IPL?

The game has to progress somehow, but I don't think it can just get too flat, like every single game. It would take the fun out of it. You know, then you might as well call our sport Batting, and not Cricket. I have no issues with a few records being broken, that's fine. High-scoring games are good, but so are low-scoring games. But you can't have it tilting either side too dramatically, there needs to be a balance that is maintained between bat and ball.

How do you handle the pressure of high scores as a bowler? Do you have to find methods to handle this onslaught?

Yes, because that's the way the game is headed. You can't sit back and complain about the conditions. You must do something about it as a bowler. However, the game of cricket as a whole would just be boring if you just saw high scores or low scores all the time. The most exciting games are the ones which hang in the balance, requiring batters to apply themselves when wickets fall and play really well to win matches for their teams, or bowlers to step up in the

same manner. It shouldn't be about just survival for either. There have been changes in rules like the ban on saliva being lifted in the IPL. Did you feel the absence of reverse swing in the period it was banned?

I guess so. Using saliva and sweat are two different aspects... they have different textures, though I can't explain scientifically how it affects the ball. Let's see how this IPL goes with saliva being used again. It's definitely interesting.

What are your thoughts about the use of two new balls in ODI cricket, that has come under criticism?

It has made it easier for batters in the death overs. The two new balls were introduced to level the playing field in the Powerplays because of flatter wickets. I do think, especially, in the last phase of the ODIs, the finishing batters back in the day had to be more skilled because of reverse swing on offer. It's now easier for batters with two harder balls, they can just swing through the line. It's much harder to hit a softer ball.

Would you like to see changes there?

It's an interesting topic, I'll have to think a bit more about what changes I'd like to see. I definitely do believe that, with the amount of data and analysis available these days, the playing field has leveled because teams know exactly what other players will do. That takes a bit of mystery out of the game and removes some of the natural talent as well. Sometimes it can get quite robotic, so that does level the playing field a little. You can't run away from it.

The importance of yorkers in white-ball cricket... Do you feel that it's maybe underutilized in T20 cricket? Is there a fear of missing out on execution?

Yeah, yorkers, if you're executing them, are still a very effective ball to have. It's a timeless ball to have up your sleeve. The way the batters can hit these days, with the size of the bats, it becomes a risk-and-reward situation. But, honestly, I still haven't seen too many batters able to put away that perfect yorker, you know? It is still not easy to hit yorkers for sixes. It's extremely important for my game as well. I keep trying to top up on it every day I am at the nets

How's it been like joining Gujarat Titans? A good pace unit assembled this year.

The players have been given the freedom, and everything is well organized and chilled out to be honest, but there's a lot of hard work being done behind the scenes. I'm really enjoying working with Ashish (Nehra). It's a great bunch of lads with a nice bowling attack, with good pace, which will suit the Ahmedabad conditions.

Who is MI's Satyanarayana Raju, Andhra fast bowler who made IPL debut vs CSK?

GNS News Agency, March 26

IPL 2025: Satyanarayana Raju was picked up by Mumbai Indians for INR 30 lakh. (Mumbai Indians)IPL 2025: Satyanarayana Raju was picked up by Mumbai Indians for INR 30 lakh. With Jasprit Bumrah still unavailable due to injury, Mumbai Indians opened their IPL 2025 debut season by handing a debut to uncapped fast bowler Satyanarayana Raju against Chennai Super Kings at the MA Chidambaram Stadium at Chepauk on Sunday.

The 25-year-old medium pacer burst onto the scene last year when he made his Ranji Trophy debut for Andhra in January 2024. Raju has since appeared in seven FC matches, seven List A games and as many T20s. He has picked up seven wickets in as many T20s and was snapped up by MI at the IPL 2025 Mega Auction for INR 30 lakh.

Meet Andhra's PV Satyanarayan Raju. A bustling pacer, who performed exceptionally well in MI & SRH trials. Swings it. Has good variations up his sleeves, with the back-of-the-hand slower one being his best weapon. Bowled at a good pace in APL too. Exciting talent. pic.twitter.com/poHcZ7VzEKRaju also grabbed eyeballs during the Andhra Premier League 2024 T20 tournament, picking eight wick-



ets in eight matches for the Rayalaseema Kings. Raju played seven games for Andhra in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy 2024-25 season, picking up seven wickets at an average of 26.85 and an economy of 8.23. Raju first appeared with the bat at No. 11 for Mumbai, scoring one from the only delivery faced as his side finished on 155 for nine in 20 overs. Raju will form the Mumbai Indians seam attack alongwith seasoned stars Trent Boult and Deepak Chahar in the second innings.

MCA raises pension for ex-players; those above 70 to get Rs 30k per month



GNS News Agency, March 26

The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) has increased the monthly pension of its retired players and umpires by

50 percent. As a result of the Apex Council's decision, those aged 70 or more will now receive Rs 30,000 per month. The decision will benefit 85 former cricketers. Those below 70 will receive Rs 15,000 per month.

"Our former cricketers and umpires have laid the foundation for Mumbai's glorious cricketing legacy. As a token of gratitude, we have decided to increase their monthly pension by 50 percent, ensuring they receive the dignity, care, and financial support they truly deserve," MCA president Ajinkya Naik said in a statement. The MCA has also decided to provide medical cover of up to Rs 10 lakh for representatives of affiliated clubs. "The affiliated clubs are the backbone of Mumbai cricket, and their representatives have worked selflessly for the growth of the game. By introducing a mediclaim reimbursement policy of up to Rs 10 lakh for authorised representatives, we aim to prioritise their health and well-being, recognising their invaluable contribution to our cricketing ecosystem," Naik added.

Rachin Ravindra says it's an honour to play for CSK

Hyderabad: Rachin Ravindra, who scored a matchwinning, unbeaten 65 for Chennai Super Kings against Mumbai Indians in the IPL league mach in Chennai on Sunday night, says it is an honour to play for CSK. Speaking to the media after the match, Ravindra said they had been guys who've done so well and that he was definitely grateful to be in this role. "We'll take a game by game and we know it's a long tournament. So, we'll just see what happens," Ravindra said. "It's difficult to soak it in when you're in the moment, because you're simply focused on winning the game for the team," Ravindra said after CSK's fourwicket win. "It's hard to ignore, though. You hear Dhoni come

out with the whistles and the noise. It's cool to share the crease with him for the first time. He's a legend of the game, and people love him here. So it's special," he said. "All the crowd would have been hoping that I gave him the strike and he finished it. But it's just about getting the job done. He has finished so many games for CSK, and I'm sure there's plenty more to come," Ravindra said. "A few days ago, I guess, Flem's [head coach Stephen Fleming] was quite good at those calls," Ravindra said about when he got to know that he would open the batting this season. "It's always an honour to open for CSK knowing the history of it. And you look back at the heroes like the [Michael] Husseys,

Emraan Hashmi responds to Pak actor Javed Sheikh calling him rude, duo not talking during Jannat shoot: 'It's a giant comedy of errors that I know nothing about'



Emraan Hashmi has been shooting in Lucknow for a project that is currently under wraps, but the actor flew back to Mumbai on Sunday on a late-night flight to bring in his birthday with family, friends and the fans who drop by his house to wish him on his special day. "I'm coming home for a day, I'll take the 4 am flight on Tuesday and return to a night shoot. Parveen (his wife) and Ayaan (son) are abroad, but my dad is there," he shares, enroute to the airport.

His teenage son is a chess champ whose passion and talent has quickly taken him up in the rankings. Ayaan has been going to quite a few international tournaments and is currently in Europe with his mother. "As parents, Parveen and I support him in this journey not only because he enjoys the sport, but also because, in these formative years, the discipline chess inculcates, the joy of winning and the heartache of losing, is an invaluable experience for him," Emraan asserts. Emraan Hashmi with his son Ayaan Emraan Hashmi's son Ayaan is a chess champ. He admits that when it comes to chess, he's a novice and an amateur in comparison to his son and needs to learn the game properly. "Ayaan has promised to teach me, but

AR Murugadoss made Salman Khan work 14-hour shifts for Sikandar despite rib injury: 'When the going gets tough...'

It seems that Salman Khan broke his usual habit of avoiding early morning shoots too for Sikandar, committing to 14-hour schedules even while grappling with a rib injury. At Sikandar's trailer launch event, Salman Khan reflected on his experience working on the film, highlighting how AR Murugadoss constantly pushed him.

Following the underwhelming performance of director Maneesh Sharma's Tiger 3 (2023), Bollywood star Salman Khan is gearing up for a major comeback with AR Murugadoss' political action thriller Sikandar. Renowned for directing high-octane star vehicles, this marks Murugadoss' first collaboration with Salman, raising expectations significantly

At Sikandar's trailer launch event on Sunday, Salman reflected on his experience working on the film, highlighting how Murugadoss constantly pushed him, especially in action sequences, to bring out his best. It seems that he broke his usual habit of avoiding early morning shoots too for Sikandar, committing to 14-hour schedules even while grappling with a rib injury. Sharing the experience, he recalled shooting from 7 am to 9 pm on some days despite the injury. "Murugadoss kept pushing me even in action sequences," he shared. Addressing his injury, Salman remarked, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

Back in September, Salman Khan had revealed at a Bigg Boss event that he had fractured two ribs. A viral video showed him making his way to a vanity van, surrounded by photographers, as he urged them to be cautious. "Aaram se, do pasliyan tooti hain (Be careful, I have two broken ribs)," he said, as he stepped into the vanity van. Meanwhile, after photos of Salman looking "out of shape" recently went viral, raising concerns about his fitness, the actor clarified that it was merely due to sleep deprivation. "Kabhi 5-6 din se sote nahi toh log photo daal ke bol dete hain. But I wanted to show them ki abhi bhi hai. (Sometimes, when I haven't slept properly for 5–6 days, people post my photos and make assumptions. But I wanted to show them I still have it in me.)"Also starring Rashmika Mandanna and Sathyaraj, Sikandar will hit the screens next Sunday (March 30), coinciding with the festive occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. The film's cinematography is handled by S Thirunavukarasu, with editing by Vivek Harshan. Pritam has composed the soundtrack, with lyrics by Sameer, while acclaimed South Indian composer Santhosh Narayanan has crafted the back-

Sushant Singh Rajput case: Actor Rhea Chakraborty's brother responds as CBI clears them of charges

Rhea Chakraborty and her brother Showik were arrested in 2020 in connection with an alleged drug case that surfaced after Sushant Singh Rajput's death. Actor Rhea Chakraborty with her former boyfriend, late Bollywood star Sushant Singh Rajput.

A day after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) submitted a closure report on its investigation into the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput — clearing his then-girlfriend, actor Rhea Chakraborty, and others of any wrongdoing — her brother has responded, expressing relief at finally receiving justice. In a miscellaneous criminal application filed before the court on Friday, the CBI sought to close the case, absolving all those named in two FIRs, including Rhea, her parents, and her brother; as well as Rajput's sister Priyanka and a doctor mentioned in a counter-FIR filed by the actor. The agency maintained that none of these persons were involved in abetting the suicide.Rhea Showik Chakraborty's brother Showik Chakraborty shared his reaction on his Instagram stories by posting a video of himself walking along a mountain with Rhea, captioning it: "Satyamev Jayate (Truth alone triumphs)." Both siblings were arrested in 2020 in connection with an alleged drug case that surfaced after Sushant's death. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) had accused them of coordinating drug deliveries for the late actor.

I've not had the time to sit with him and learn. So, right now, he's way up there and I don't stand a chance," Emraan laughs, giving full credit to his wife for taking their son to classes, pushing his talent and now travelling with him across the world. Emraan Hashmi with his son Ayaan (1) Emraan Hashmi with his son Ayaan.

The actor himself has played different kinds of sport, including cricket and badminton. While in college, he got hooked on snooker and recalls playing at the club for almost six hours a day. "Then, when pool came to India in the late '90s, it was a cakewalk for snooker players like me. We would go to pool parlours and win a lot of bets. It was fun, but as a '80s kid, I was not as competitive as my son is today, I was just enjoying myself with friends," he acknowledges. One knows him as a undoubtedly talented, but always chilled out guy who as an actor seems far more edgy and driven. He admits as much, saying that while he still doesn't make any New Year resolutions, as a professional there's a desire to do better and get more disciplined every day. "Professionally, I still have the same curiosity that I started out with in 2003. I want to do roles that scare me because the fear that I may not be able to pull them off, pushes me to push the envelope," he reasons.

He points out that in the first decade of the millennium, the Hindi film industry too wasn't very experimental and he might have ended up playing similar kinds of characters. But with the advent of OTT, young filmmakers are coming up with exciting, character-based films. "Now, as an actor, there's a hunger to accomplish because you're doing something you've done in 15 other films before. Our Hindi film industry may not be going through the best of times, but there are a lot more filmmakers today with fresh ideas that make me want to explore different facets of myself as an actor," he says.Emraan will next be seen in Excel Entertainment's Ground Zero which opens on April 25 and, according to its makers, is inspired by the Border Security Force's best operation in 50 years. "I was blown away by the script. It's a chapter from the history of our national

security and encapsulates the adage, truth is stranger than fiction. My first reaction was, 'Did this really happen and if so, how is it that not too many people know about it?" he reminisces.

He is also foraying into South cinema with the Telugu gangster thriller, OG, co-starring Pawan Kalyan, and has also entered Adivi Shesh's action-packed spy franchise with a sequel to the 2018 Telugu blockbuster Goodachari. Talking about what is an eagerly-anticipated cross-pollination of talent with superstars from other film industries, Emraan asserts that cinema is an amalgamation of ideas, of different cultures and creative minds. "The South film industry has its own audience, so do we. It's good when Hindi film actors come into this world to create something new and unique. It results in a melting point of different worlds that makes for a fresh cinematic experience," says the actor, who has never shied away from experimenting himself, be it with films like Murder, Jannat, Awarapan or Shanghai early in his career or Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai. Tigers and Tiger 3 later. Meanwhile, a controversy has broken out, almost out nowhere, with veteran Pakistani actor, Javed Sheikh, alleging that Emraan was coldly dismissive, even rude, when they first met at the Newlands Cricket Stadium in South Africa. Further, he has been quoted as saying in an interview, that through the filming of Jannat in which Sheikh plays an underworld don, Abu Ibrahim, who draws Emraan's character, Arjun Dixit, into his dark world of match-fixing, they did not speak at all. "It's bizarre!" he exclaims, admitting that while he honestly doesn't recall that first meeting because it happened so long ago, he does remember that Sheikh and he were always on cordial terms. "I was 20-something then, and he is not my age, so we were never friends. I didn't hang out with him, but I don't remember anything like what he is saying happening."He muses that maybe there was some miscommunication. "I don't know what Javed sahab took back with him, but it is definitely something he has held on to for 16-17 years. As far as I'm concerned, it's a giant comedy of errors that has snowballed into something I know nothing about," he signs off with a still bewildered laugh.

Sikandar trailer: Salman Khan returns with a bang and this time, no intentional mistake will be forgiven.

Sikandar trailer: And just like that, Bhai has made his comeback to our screens — and that too with a bang, as always — almost making one believe he was never really away. The highly anticipated trailer of director AR Murugadoss' Sikandar, starring Salman Khan and Rashmika Mandanna in the lead roles, is finally here, delivering everything one expects from a Bhai film and more.

The three-minute, 37-second trailer opens with a wanted poster of Sanjay Rajkot (Salman Khan), a man with 49 cases registered against him over the past five years. However, it soon becomes evident that he is not a typical criminal and that every action he has taken has been for a greater cause. "A hundred mistakes made with a good heart can be forgiven, but there is no apology for even a single mistake committed intentionally," he asserts.

However, things take a turn when he arrives in Mumbai. Though he initially struggles, Sikandar quickly regains control of his muqaddar (fate), paving his way to victory step by step. Touted as a political action thriller, the power-packed trailer also features a dialogue that draws parallels to Salman's real life. "Bahut neta jail gaye hain, abhineta bhi (Many leaders have gone to jail, even actors). Nobody is above the law," he declares, setting the tone for the film. "I have enough popularity that, if not as PM or CM, could at least become an MLA or MP," he adds. While Salman Khan takes on the role of Sanjay Rajkot in the movie, Rashmika Mandanna plays Saisri and Sathyaraj portrays Minister Pradhan. Penned by Murugadoss himself, Sikandar marks Salman's return in a lead role after 16 months, following the release of Maneesh Sharma's Tiger 3 (2023), which fell short of box-office expectations. Though



he appeared in 2024's movies such as Singham Again and Baby John, both were cameo roles. Interestingly, part of the excitement surrounding Sikandar is also due to the presence of Rashmika, who is currently riding high on a wave of success with her last three films — Animal (2023), Pushpa 2: The Rule (2024) and Chhaava (2025) — emerging as national blockbusters. While Sikandar's cinematography is handled by S Thirunavukarasu alias Tirru, with editing by Vivek Harshan, Pritam has composed its songs, with lyrics by Sameer.

Acclaimed South Indian composer Santhosh Narayanan has crafted the movie's background score. Produced by Sajid Nadiadwala under the banner of Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, Sikandar is set to hit theatres next Sunday (March 30), coinciding with the festive occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Khan's Sikandar, which arrives on March 30. However, he

From release delay rumours to record-breaking presales: Industry trackers weigh in on Empuraan's box office prospects and impact of Lyca Productions controversy

Beyond the buzz on social media, actor Prithviraj Sukumaran's third directorial venture, the Mohanlal-starrer L2: Empuraan, has cemented itself as the most anticipated Malayalam film at the moment by shattering advance booking records one after another. After setting a new benchmark on BookMyShow by selling over 6,45,000 tickets within the first 24 hours — the highest ever for an Indian film on the platform, far surpassing the previous record held by Prabhas' Kalki 2898 AD (341.78K) — Empuraan has now secured the highest presales ever at the Kerala box office. As of 3 pm on Sunday, the Mohanlal-starrer had amassed a first-day advance booking gross of Rs 8.42 crore across India, according to industry tracker Sacnilk.

What makes Empuraan's rise more remarkable is that just over a week ago, even its release seemed uncertain due to reports of an internal dispute between co-producers Aashirvad Cinemas and Lyca Productions. This led to a temporary lull, with no promotions or updates, despite the film being just a few days away from the release date. However, the scenario changed dramatically once Sree Gokulam Movies stepped in as a production partner. Since then, the film's ascent has been nothing short of extraordinary and is all set for release on March 27. Empuraan box office collection prediction day 1 | Mohanlal, Prithviraj Sukumaran gear up to deliver Malayalam cinema's first Rs 40 crore opener

Interestingly, even leading industry analysts believe that the production controversy has only boosted the film's momentum. "I think the movie will have an earth-shaking opening," industry tracker Sreedhar Pillai told SCREEN. "The controversy has only helped it secure a stronger opening. There is also remarkable interest in Empuraan in the global market. Overseas, its opening is expected to be on par with other major pan-Indian films," he shared. Pillai further noted that while the film's initial surge looks promising, its long-term success will hinge on audience reactions from the first few shows. "If the film is at least 50 per cent good, it will be a hit. By the evening of March 27, we will have a clearer picture of just how big it will be," he added. Pillai also highlighted the competition Empuraan might face in the markets within the country outside Kerala from Vikram's Veera Dheera Sooran, releasing the same day, and Salman

emphasised that the Mohanlal-starrer has a strong advantage, especially with leading distributors handling its release across key markets. "Its Hindi belt release, in particular, is in safe hands with AA Films, the same distributor behind the Pushpa movies. If the film manages to make an impact in the Hindi market, similar to other pan-India successes like Kalki 2898 AD and Kantara, then the sky's the limit," he remarked.Industry analyst Ramesh Bala also noted that Empuraan's advance bookings have been exceptionally strong so far. However, he too emphasised that the film's ultimate success will depend on its quality and audience reactions from the initial screenings. He also confirmed that the film's presales outside Kerala, particularly in international markets, are progressing well. "The key markets for the film are Kerala and overseas, especially the Gulf countries and the US, where things are moving forward smoothly," he stated.AB George, another industry tracker, noted that while Empuraan's budget exceeds what is typical for a Malayalam film, advance booking trends suggest that Mohanlal's star power and influence among Malayalees are already playing a key role in helping the film recover its massive investment. "Previously, the record for the highest worldwide opening for a Malayalam film was held by Marakkar: Arabikadalinte Simham (2021) at Rs 20.4 crore. Even before advance bookings opened in Kerala, Empuraan had nearly matched this figure through presales in overseas markets alone. That's the level of momentum it has built," he told SCREEN. Since Empuraan is more contentdriven than a typical pan-Indian mass entertainer, George believes it doesn't need excessive promotion in markets where it is unlikely to make a strong impact, "Its primary audience is in Kerala, the Gulf, Europe, Australia, the US, Canada, and among Malayalam cinema enthusiasts worldwide. The current marketing strategies are well-aligned to reach them," he added.

Empuraan, Mohanlal, Prithviraj Sukumaran, Empuraan movie, I2 empuraan, Empuraan release date, Empuraan trailer, Empuraan collection, I2 empuraan collection, Empuraan box office collection, Mohanlal movies, Prithviraj Sukumaran movies, Mohanlal new movie, Prithviraj Sukumaran new movie, lucifer 2, Malayalam movies,

Sushant Singh Rajput case: Pooja Bhatt shares Akshay Kumar's old post; Dia Mirza demands apology for Rhea Chakraborty



CBI clears Rhea Chakraborty of all charges in Sushant Singh Rajput CaseCBI filed closure report in Sushant Singh Rajput case; celebrities come in support of Rhea Chakraborty

It was a sad time for Indian cinema in 2020 when actor Sushant Singh Rajput was found dead at his residence on June 14, 2020. Many were distraught about the untimely demise of one of the most promising talents of Hindi cinema. However, what followed was something that was a complete shambolic turn of events. It was turned into a media circus where his then girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty was named as one of the accused in this case under various charges, including abetment of suicide, cheating, wrongful restraint, theft, criminal breach of trust, criminal intimidation of the Indian Penal Code, and of course, there was a witch hunt on social media. Almost five years since his demise, the CBI has filed a closure report, calling it a "simple case of suicide" and absolved Rhea, her parents, and her brother of all charges

This has lead to a rightful furore about the kind of experiences Rhea and her family were put through by sections of the media and netizens who went on an overdrive to demean her, and added fuel to conspiracy theories that he was 'murdered.' Nevertheless with the closure report being filed, there are voices growing stronger on social media advocating for more restraint, and holding the media responsible for any adverse reactions that can come from a trial by media. Actor Pooja Bhatt was one of the stronger voices that not only supported Rhea quoting Akshay Kumar's old post that read, "SC directs CBI to investigate Sushant Singh Rajput's death. May the truth always prevail. Prayers."Pooja wrote, "The CBI's March 22, 2025, closure report confirms Sushant Singh Rajput's death as suicide with no foul play, clearing Rhea Chakraborty and others. The truth has prevailed. Prayers answered." The jury is still out there if this is a seemingly innocuous post, or it is a dig at him. While the silence of the film fraternity over the hounding of Rhea continues to be questioned by other members, there are direct digs made at the media for allegedly enabling these conspiracies, and making life worse for Rhea. Actor Dia Mirza took to Instagram to share her opinions on the same, and wrote, "Who in the media will have the grace to put out a written apology to Rhea Chakraborty and her family?

Sooraj Barjatya reveals he took anxiety pills while narrating Uunchai to 'scary' Amitabh Bachchan: 'He listens with his eyes, doesn't blink'

Sooraj Barjatya directed Amitabh Bachchan in Uunchai. Sooraj Barjatya directed Amitabh Bachchan in Uunchai. Sooraj Barjatya stepped out of his comfort zone with his last directorial, Uunchai, in 2021. While the director has mostly made films on set, this was the first instance when he shot most of the film on location. There was another adventure — working with megastar Amitabh Bachchan. While Sooraj had worked with his son Abhishek Bachchan earlier, and his production house Rajshri Films had collaborated with his wife Jaya Bachchan in Basu Chatterjee's 1972 gentle romance Piya Ka Ghar, Amitabh had never joined forces with the Barjatyas before.

"I was sifting through subjects and when I came to Uunchai it just hit me that I should be the one doing this.



Nothing was working so make what is challenging. I took it since I had nothing to lose. Upon reading it I realised it wasn't my style but I was not letting it go. In 2-3 months we wrote it. Now my chal-

lenge was to get Amitabh Bachchan," Sooraj recalled recently. He was planning to produce the film, till he decided to take a leap himself and take on the directorial duties. "He listens with his [eyes], he doesn't blink. And he is scary. It's so scary. I sent the story across and he sent a message on a Zoom call. I had two anxiety medicines before opening it up," Sooraj added, in an interview to Mid-Day. That wasn't the first time he narrated in presence of Amitabh Bachchan. The megastar and Jaya Bachchan were also witness to Sooraj Barjatya's narration to Abhishek for his 2003 romantic drama Main Prem Ki Diwani Hoon, which also starred Hrithik Roshan and Kareena Kapoor. However, the film didn't perform well at the box office, and turned out to be his first failure post the mammoth success of Maine Pyar Kiya (1989), Hum Aapke Hain Koun..! (1994), and Hum Saath – Saath Hain (1999). "I had the best cast. I feel so guilty towards Hrithik, Abhishek, and Kareena because they gave me everything, but while making that film, I realised I am not there, it is not me. I was not myself in the film. As a director when you are trying to make something where you are trying to impress others, you try to bring every possible thing that works that succeeds that is succeeding, but it is not you," Sooraj said. Sooraj then went on to take Govinda's advice and went back to doing what he was the best known for. He subsequently directed another blockbuster, Vivah (2006), starring Shahid Kapoor and Amrita Rao.

Printed and Published by V. Srinivas Reddy, on behalf of M/s Sai Krishna Publications, Owned by M/s Sai Krishna Publications, Printed at Sree Seshasai Enterprises, Plot No.98/1, Co-operative Industrial Estate, IDA, Gandhinagar, Quthbullapur Mandal, Medchal-Malkajgiri Dist, Telangana. Published at Plot No. 3, Flat No.13, Surya Saroj Apartments, Huda Complex, Saroor Nagar, Ranga Reddy Dist. T.S. 500 035.

Editor: V Srinivas Reddy RNI No. APENG/2013/49469, Cell No. 9440231967.