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TGCMFC invites training partners

Hyderabad, March 29 (NSS): Telangana Christian Minorities Finance Corporation, Minorities Welfare Department invites training partners, who were empanelled with NSDC, TASK, EGMM, MEPMA, NI-MSME, Training partners with DDUGKY, PMKY, PMKVY, PMKK and Ministry of Minorities Affairs of Central Government will be considered for selection as training partner.

The selected training partners will enter into MoU with MD, TGCMFC for implementing the training programme for the FY-2023-24. The responsibility of mobilization of students and scrutiny of application of students has to be taken up by training partners and will be certified by the District Minority Welfare office of the concerned district.

The eligible training partners shall submit the hard copies in two sets of the detailed proposals in Managing Director, TGCMFC by April 5 till 5 pm. (NSS)

Jr. Executive posts in HPCL

Hyderabad, March 29 (NSS): Hindustan Petroleum Corporation, a Maharatna central public sector enterprise, has invited applications from diploma engineering candidates for Junior Executive posts in HPCL refinery division—fire and safety, electrical, mechanical, instrumentation and chemical branches. Pay scale (EO): Rs.30,000 - 1,20,000. Vacancies -63. CTC (approx): Rs.10.58 LPA . Last date of online applications is 30th April 2025.

Interested candidates can visit HPCL careers page on <https://hindustanpetroleum.com> for detailed advertisement.(NSS)



CM Revanth asks officials to develop link roads to meet public needs in Hyd



Hyderabad, March 29 (NSS): Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has directed officials to build link roads in Hyderabad to address the increasing public demand for convenient travel within the city. He conducted a review of the ongoing construction and expansion of the link road network being managed by the Hyderabad Road Development Corporation (HRDCL), both in Hyderabad

and within the limits of the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA). During the review, Revanth Reddy provided various recommendations regarding the construction and expansion of the proposed 49 roads. He instructed the authorities to enhance road connectivity between different areas to facilitate smooth travel for residents. The Chief Minister emphasised that public interests should be prioritized in the development of link road networks and highlighted the importance of considering future needs during both the construction of new roads and the expansion of existing ones. He said that the development of connecting roads should not only alleviate difficulties for travelers but also reduce their travel time. The Chief Minister further stated that land acquisition must be finalized, regardless of the elevated costs associated with the land. Chief Minister's Advisor Vem Narender Reddy, State Government Advisor (Infrastructure) Srinivasa Raju, State Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari, Chief Minister's Principal Secretaries V. Seshadri, Chandrasekhar Reddy, CM Special Secretary Ajith Reddy, HMDA Commissioner Sarfaraz Ahmed, Municipal Administrator and Urban Development Department Principal Secretary Dana Kishore and others were present in the meeting. (NSS)

India stands in solidarity with people of Myanmar: PM Modi

GNS News Agency, March 29

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday expressed deep sorrow over the catastrophic earthquake in Myanmar, which has resulted in the loss of over 1,000 lives. In a post on X, PM Modi posted, "Spoke with Senior General H.E. Min Aung Hlaing of Myanmar. Conveyed our deep condolences at the loss of lives in the devastating earthquake." Under its Act East policy, India has launched 'Operation Brahma' to provide urgent relief to Myanmar. On Saturday, more than 15 tonnes of essential aid were dispatched following a series of powerful tremors that wreaked havoc on Friday. <https://www.thehindia.com/news/national/india-stands-in-solidarity-with-people-of-myanmar-pm-modi-958303>



Telangana announces compensation of Rs 6 lakh for families of those killed in lightning strikes



Hyderabad, March 29 (NSS): The State government has announced compensation for the families of individuals who lost their lives in lightning strikes and fire incidents in various districts over the past five years. The Disaster Management department has instructed district collectors to ensure that the affected families receive the necessary government support. In a statement released on Saturday, Minister for Revenue and Housing Ponguleti Srinivasa

Reddy reported that a sum of Rs. 6 lakhs will be granted to each family of victims of lightning strikes, while families of fire incident victims will receive Rs. 4 lakhs. The Minister emphasized the importance of delivering this compensation to the affected families as soon as possible. Compensation has been granted to several individuals across different districts: six individuals in Bhadradi Kothagudem, six in Nagarkurnool, four families in Komaram Bheem, three families in Hanumakonda, and two families each in Narayanpet, Jogulamba, Mehboobabad, and Medak.

Similarly, one person each in Rajanna Sircilla, Janagaon, Yadadri, Peddapalli, Warangal, Adilabad, Jagityal, Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Mulugu, Nalgonda, Kamareddy, Nirmal, and Suryapet districts also received compensation. Moreover, the State government has approved a grant of Rs 40 lakh for the families of ten individuals who lost their lives in a fire caused by an electrical short circuit in Red Hills, Hyderabad, with each family receiving Rs 4 lakh. In addition to this, Rs 32 lakh has been allocated to the families of eight victims from the Rubi Hotel fire incident in Hyderabad. (NSS)

BJP should pressurise Centre for BC Bill approval: MLC Kavitha



Kamareddy, March 29 (NSS): BRS party MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha today said the BJP should put pressure on the Union government to approve the BC Bills of the State. A BC round-table meeting was held in Kamareddy on Saturday under the auspices of Telangana Jagruti and United Phule Front. MLC Kavitha attended the round table meeting as the chief guest. Speaking on the occasion, Kavitha made key comments at the roundtable meeting. She asked the Central government to make an announcement on the status of the BC bills passed by the State legislature. She said the Congress and BJP parties should answer on the approval of these bills by the Centre. MLC Kavitha reminded that the comprehensive family survey conducted by former CM KCR showed that the BC population was 52% in the State.

She was angry that the BC population was reduced

and the OC population increased through the caste survey conducted by the Congress party led State government. She demanded that the State government disclose the population census by caste, village-wise. She questioned as to why the report of the Dedicated Commission was not being disclosed by the State. She said the Congress party had promised to set up a ministry for the MBC castes and questioned as to why the MBC ministry had not been set up so far. She said the Congress party had only promised to increase the political reservations in the Kamareddy Declaration. Kavitha reminded that the government had made laws increasing reservations for BCs in the education and job sectors as well. She said more than Rs 1.55 lakh crore was spent on BCs during the ten-year BRS party's rule. She said some people made fun of the strengthening of the caste professions and added that the fact was that the caste professions had been weakened in the last 15 months' rule of the Congress party. She reminded that to strengthen the BC leadership, five people were given the post of Rajya Sabha MPs, eight people were given the post of the MLC and 58 people were given the post of corporation chairmen in their party's rule. She emphasized that the BRS party had given a big position to the BCs. MLC Kavitha said the post of the VC of Osmania University had never gone to the BCs. She said for the first time, Ravinder Yadav was appointed VC by former CM KCR. She said KCR had the credit of appointing BS Prasad, a BC community person, as Advocate General of the State. (NSS)

Telangana signs MoU with Himachal Pradesh for Hydropower projects



Hyderabad, March 29 (NSS): In a significant step towards strengthening renewable energy capacity, Telangana GENCO, the State government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Himachal Pradesh, for the development of two major hydropower projects for power supply to Telangana. The MoU was signed in the presence of Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukku and Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka. The MoU marks a strategic collaboration between the two states, leveraging Himachal Pradesh's rich hydropower potential and Telangana's commitment to sustainable energy solutions. The proposed projects, Seli (400MW) and Meyar (120MW), will contribute to Telangana's growing demand for clean energy and help in achieving long-term energy security.

Speaking at the signing ceremony in Shimla on Saturday, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka stated, "Our government is committed towards ensuring energy secu-

urity for the states keeping in view its fast growing demand. In line with Telangana's Clean & Green Energy Policy 2025, this MoU reflects our commitment to diversifying our energy portfolio while ensuring environmental sustainability. By partnering with Himachal Pradesh, we are taking a significant step toward securing cleaner, greener, and more reliable power for our future, "Hydel power is the best source of reliable renewable energy power. When compared to Thermal power, the variable cost of Hydel power production is extremely low. Further, the cost for thermal power production increases every year, whereas the cost of Hydel power generation reduces," he said. Himachal Pradesh having blessed with perennial Himalayan rivers have potential to generate Hydel Power for 9-10 months a year as compared to limited period of Hydel power generation on South Indian rivers. By signing this MoU, the Telangana State envisages to use this natural resource of our country in Himachal Pradesh, to provide affordable, reliable and green power to the people of Telangana, Bhatti Vikramarka said. The Deputy Chief Minister stated that these projects have been assigned to Telangana Genco on nomination basis. The State government has been actively working towards increasing its renewable energy share and this agreement highlighting the importance of inter-state cooperation in India's energy sector, he said. The MoU signing ceremony was attended by Principal Secretary, Energy & CMD TGGenco Sandeep Sultania, Musharraf Faruqui of CMD TGSPDCL, Sachidannad of Director Hydel TGGENCO, Prabodh Saxena of Chief Secretary Himachal Pradesh, Rakesh Kanwar of Secretary Power, (Himachal Pradesh) and order senior officials.

16 naxalites killed, two DRG jawans injured in encounter in Chhattisgarh's Sukma

GNS News Agency, March 29

Kothagudem: As many as 16 Maoists were killed in an exchange of fire between security forces and Maoist cadres on the borders of Sukma and Bijapur districts in Chhattisgarh on Saturday. A large quantity of AK-47, SLR, INSAS rifles, .303 rifles, rocket launcher, BGL launcher and explosives have been recovered from the encounter site. A joint team of DRG and CRPF launched search operations under the Kerlapal police station area of district Sukma on Friday. The gun battle broke out at around 8 am and bodies of Naxalites were recovered from the encounter site. There is a possibility of more Maoists having been killed or injured in the encounter. Patrolling and search operations are still going on in the surrounding areas.



Sanjay resents Asaduddin's comments against Constitution

Karimnagar, March 29 (NSS):

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar has lashed out at rival MIM party chief Asaduddin Owaisi for his comments that the Indian Constitution was under threat from the RSS ideology in the future. He expressed his anger against Owaisi for his comments and alleged that the Majlis party was the real anti-national party. He claimed that the Modi government was working with a nationalist ideology. He claimed that the Waqf Board Bill was getting support from all over the country. He made it clear that the Waqf Board Amendment Bill would be passed in Parliament very soon.

"We have taken everyone's opinions on the Waqf Board Amendment Bill. We have collected opinions from all over the country. The Parliament committee has met and submitted a report. The Waqf Board Amendment Bill will be passed very soon. It is not right to think about it from the perspective of religion and block it. There is a risk that

people will turn against such people. I know how much trouble the poor have faced due to the name and style of the Waqf Board," he said. He emphasized that the Modi government would not hesitate to take more tough decisions for the people of the country. Bandi Sanjay sanctioned Rs 15 lakh for the digital library of lawyers in the District Court Complex in Karimnagar.

On this occasion, all the lawyers honoured Bandi Sanjay. Graduate MLC Anji Reddy, former Mayor Sunil Rao, Bar Association president Raj Kumar, secretary Bethi Mahender, Basa Satyanarayana, Komala Anjaneyulu and others attended the program. Speaking on the occasion, Bandi Sanjay said he fought many battles for the people and faced cases. "I have 109 cases against me. I have been to jail many times. Every time I go to jail, the lawyers protect me. I will cooperate in every way for their welfare. I will do my best to provide another Rs 50 lakh from CSR funds for the lawyers' conference hall. (NSS)

Maharashtra Senior IPS officer dies in road accident on Hyderabad-Srisaillam road



Hyderabad: An IPS officer of Maharashtra cadre and another person died in a road accident near Domalapenta of Nagarkurnool district here

on Saturday. Native of Ahmednagar, the IPS officer Sudhakar Pathare, who currently holds a Sr. SP rank, posted as a DSP in Mumbai, was travelling to Srisaillam for darshan along with his cousin Bhagawat Khodake in a private Innova car when the accident occurred. He was likely to be promoted as a DIG shortly. An RTC bus rammmed into the car in the ghat section, leading to the instant death of the two persons. Recruited as Dy SP, the officer was conferred IPS in 2011. A post-mortem is currently in progress at Kalwakurthy. Investigation is on.

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Haryana Assembly

The current session of the Haryana Vidhan Sabha saw significant legislative action, notably the passage of the Haryana Registration and Regulation of Travel Agents Bill, 2025. By mandating registration and imposing strict penalties — up to seven years of imprisonment and Rs 5 lakh in fines — the government has taken a necessary step to protect its citizens from deceit and potential human-trafficking. Given the alarming rise in immigration scams, this law was long overdue. However, its success hinges on effective enforcement and public awareness campaigns to ensure people are not lured by unauthorised agents. While the Bill marks a significant step forward, it should be part of a broader strategy to address unemployment. Simultaneously, it must be complemented by efforts aimed at creating a conducive environment for education.

In this context, the Vidhan Sabha's discussion on the deteriorating state of government school infrastructure was, unfortunately, not encouraging. It received neither the urgency nor the debate it deserved. Reports from across the state paint a distressing picture — schools with leaking roofs, broken walls, and inadequate sanitation. Many lack functional toilets or even basic drinking water facilities. In rural areas, classrooms are overcrowded and there is an acute shortage of teachers. The Opposition attempted to highlight these failures, but discussions were either side-tracked by political sparring or met with vague reassurances from the ruling Benches. The government's standard response — promising budget allocations and future improvements — rings hollow when students continue to study in unsafe conditions even as bureaucratic inefficiencies stall progress. This contrast in priorities raises concerns. While tackling immigration fraud is necessary, ignoring the crumbling education system weakens Haryana's future workforce.

Iftar Feast: A Symbol of Religious Harmony – INTUC State General Secretary & OBC National President Guda Ilaiah Goud



Quthbullapur, March 29 "A grand Iftar feast was organized at Jagadgir Gutta under the leadership of Congress senior leader Syed Rashid. Speaking on the occasion, INTUC Telangana State General Secretary and OBC National President Guda Ilaiah Goud emphasized that the Iftar feast is a true symbol of religious harmony. He highlighted the significance of Ramzan, where Muslim brothers observe a month-long fast and celebrate with devotion. He also praised India's rich diversity of castes, religions, and cultures, stating that India's greatness must be showcased to the world. The event was attended by SHO Narasimhulu, SI Shankar, OBC National Vice President Janardhan, along with various political leaders, social activists, and other dignitaries.

SCR GM inspects upgradation works at Malkajgiri Rly Station

GNS News Agency, March 29
Hyderabad, March 29 (NSS): South Central Railway General Manager Arun Kumar Jain conducted an inspection of Malkajgiri Railway Station on Saturday to review on the status of ongoing upgradation works. He was accompanied by Lokesh Vishnoi, Divisional Railway Manager, Hyderabad Division and other senior Railway officials



throughout the inspection. Under the "Amrit Bharat Station Scheme" (ABSS), Malkajgiri Railway station redevelopment is taken up with an approximate cost of Rs 27.61 crores to provide modern passenger amenities and convert them into growth centers. Overall, 70% of the proposed works have so far been completed. Simultaneously all the works are in fast progress and are targeted to be completed in this year.

The General Manager reviewed various upgradation works and the improvements like station facades, construction of 12 m wide Foot Over Bridge (FOB) along with Provision of Lifts & Escalators and so on. He also visited the One Station One Product stall and interacted with the vendor about the various products being sold. He also reviewed the comprehensive measures undertaken by the Hyderabad Division officials to ensure the smooth movement of passengers and instructed the officials that in view of redevelopment works involving significant infrastructural modifications to provide adequate security enhancements and passenger assistance initiatives. (NSS)

Rana Daggubati and Priya Mani win big at the OTTplay Awards 2025



Hyderabad: The best of the Telugu film industry – Rana Daggubati, Priya Mani and director Pradeep Maddali – were honoured for their stellar work on OTT at the prestigious OTTplay Awards 2025, which was held at JW Marriott, Sahar, Mumbai. The star-studded event honoured outstanding performers and storytellers from across India and Tollywood actors brought home major laurels, with Rana Daggubati, Priya Mani and Pradeep Maddali winning the awards for Best Talk Show Host, Best Actor in a Comedy (Movie) and Best Director (Series), respectively. While Rana, who had won the honour for The Rana Daggubati Show, could not attend the event, wife Miheeka Daggubati, who was also an integral part of the show, collected the award on his behalf. Meanwhile, Priya Mani had won the award for her performance in the Aha show Bhaamakalapam 2, collected the trophy in the presence of her Family Man S1 co-stars Manoj Bajpayee and Neeraj Madhav. Cheering her on were South actors Nimisha Sajayan, Jyotika, Vedhika and Parvathy Thiruvothu, who had also won major categories at the third edition of OTTplay Awards. OTTplay Awards 2025 was co-presented by Real Juice and Kuhl and powered by Stock Gro.

Celebrate Ugadi and Ramadan Peacefully



Rachakonda Commissioner Sudheer Baabu

Hyderabad: Rachakonda Commissioner Sudheer Babu conducted a coordination meeting through video conference with Rachakonda Zonal DCPs, ACPs, and other officials to discuss the security arrangements and precautions to be taken during the Ugadi and Ramadan festivals. He gave several instructions to the officials during this meeting. Speaking on the occasion, the Commissioner stated that there are several sensitive areas within the Rachakonda Commissionerate limits, and strict measures should be taken to ensure that no law and order issues arise during the Ugadi and Ramadan celebrations. He emphasized the need for caution during large gatherings such as mass prayers attended by a large number of Muslims. He also directed that the reserve police, who have already been

allocated to police station duties as required, should be utilized efficiently. He instructed that vehicle number plates and document checks should be conducted at all prominent mosque premises, and bomb disposal teams should carry out advance checks in sensitive areas. Surveillance should be maintained on habitual offenders who may incite disturbances, and steps should be taken to prevent them from engaging in any criminal activities.

He further directed that while arranging security, appropriate responsibilities should be assigned to capable officers, and security arrangements should be coordinated with other government departments. He also emphasized that the performance of CCTV cameras in sensitive areas should be monitored regularly.

My Support Will Always Be There for the Development of the Community: BRS Party Whip, MLA KP Vivekanand



Today, at the camp office in Pate Basheerabad, the newly elected executive members of the "Dalit Associations United Forum - 307," under the leadership of senior advisors Kishan Rao, Gattu Ashok, and Majjala Satyanarayana, paid a courtesy visit to BRS Party Whip

and MLA KP Vivekanand. On this occasion, MLA KP Vivekanand extended his congratulations to the new executive members of the forum. He expressed his gratitude to the Dalit Associations United Forum members for playing a crucial role in his victory and securing a hat-trick win.

He assured them that his support and cooperation would always be there for their development.

"The event was attended by the newly appointed President Mang Ramchander, General Secretary Mekala Ellayya, Treasurer GJ Ratnam, Working President Anjaneyulu, M. Saibaba, Honorary President CH Buchayya, and several others. [5:30 pm, 29/3/2025] Pedamma: Municipal Workers Demand Reduced Working Hou

One held for cheating credit card holder in guise of Jio Fiber technician

Hyderabad: City Cyber Crime Police apprehended one Mudike Balraj, son of Gattu Malliah, of Warangal, who committed Credit Card fraud.

The victim, a 78-year-old retired male from Hyderabad, received a text message through the CRED app stating that an amount of ₹1,11,589/- was due on his credit card. As the victim had not used this amount, he immediately visited Axis Bank and inquired about the transactions. The bank officials informed him that they would send the bill details via email. However, there was no response from the Axis Bank officials. After multiple visits and inquiries within the department, the desk officer for senior citizens advised the victim to make the payment. Accordingly, the victim paid the amount through NEFT. A fresh credit card was issued in the victim's name, but he never used the

new card. Later, the victim received another message through the CRED App, requesting payment for the new credit card. He again visited the bank and informed them that he had never used the card. Upon further inquiry, the bank officials provided him with a statement, through which he discovered that his credit card had been misused by unidentified persons through Paytm. The accused is a technician at Jio Fiber. He specifically targets elderly victims by exploiting issues with their internet connection. Posing as a technical support representative, he convinces them that their connection requires urgent repairs or upgrades. Under this pretence, he persuades them to provide their credit card details, which he then uses for unauthorized transactions. The team headed by Inspector P Pramod Kumar, consisting of team members SI Azeez, PCs M Pansuram and Ashwin have cracked the case. (NSS)

Sri Sharada Peetam chief visits TSCS

Hyderabad, March 27 (NSS): Sri Sharada Peetam Asthana Vedashastra Pandit Brahmasri Dr Puranam Maheshwara Sharma Siddanthi today visited Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Society (TSCS), Shivrampally. Dr Chandrakant Agarwal, president, Naresh Rathi, chief patron, Ratnavali, vice-president, Dr Suman Jain, Secretary & CEO – TSCS, Sri Niwas, executive member, along with the working staff were also present at the society.

Dr Maheshwara Sharma's visit aimed to express his support for the organization's efforts in the field of Thalassemia and Sickle Cell disease and to extend his solidarity with the affected individuals and their families. During his visit, Dr. Maheshwara Sharma toured the facilities at the Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Society, where he witnessed first-hand crucial services provided to patients and their families. He also interacted with the doctors, TSCS staff and other working members at the society. Dr Chandrakant Agarwal, President - Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Society, expressed his gratitude for Dr Maheshwara Sharma visit, saying, "We are honoured to have Siddhanti ji to visit our organization and show his support for the cause. His presence encourages us to continue our efforts in raising awareness about Thalassemia and Sickle Cell disease and continue to provide quality healthcare services, and advocating for the rights of affected individuals." (NSS)

BRS party slams govt over Devadula project Survey

Hyderabad, March 27 (NSS): The BRS party MLAs have written a complaint to the Assembly Speaker by strongly condemning the State ministers Uttam Kumar Reddy and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy and other Congress party MLAs for launching Phase 3 of the Devadula project, contrary to the rules and regulations, without informing the local legislators.

On the occasion, MLA of Janagama constituency Dr Palla Rajeshwar Reddy said the inauguration of the project was meant to increase water supply by 40% in the Janagama constituency through Phase 3 was held without his knowledge. BRS MLAs also met the assembly Speaker and submitted a complaint to the assembly Speaker over the authorities not inviting Janagama MLA Dr Palla Rajeshwar Reddy to the inauguration of the third phase of Devadula today Speaker to order action against the officials who violated the protocol rules Palla Rajeshwar Reddy, who requested in the petition. Palla said not inviting him is a violation of his rights as an MLA even though 40% of the Devadula ayacut is in his constituency. BRS party MLAs requested the Speaker to take appropriate steps to prevent such incidents from recurring in the future. The Speaker assured them that he will definitely work to protect the rights of MLAs. (NSS)

BJLP leader corners govt over its debt

Hyderabad, March 27 (NSS): BJP Legislative Party Leader Aleti Maheshwar Reddy has criticized Telangana State for being mired in debt. He alleged that the government was in a position to borrow again to meet its debts.

Speaking in the Assembly, he demanded that the promise of Rs 12,000 be fulfilled to auto drivers. The State government's situation is like a debt-ridden, rotating emperor. If the first culprit for the State's plight is BRS party, the second culprit is the Congress party. Rahul Gandhi's stance on delimitation should be stated. In 15 months, the Congress government has incurred a debt of Rs 1.63 lakh crore. Telangana is rising only in taking on debt. The State has become a pile of debt due to the lakh crores of destruction done by the previous government. It is said this government is following the path of the previous government. Don't talk nonsense saying that the Centre has not given funds to Telangana. He said the BRS party was trying to join the Congress-party alliance. They have taken up a new tune by saying that delimitation is unfair. Family parties are opposing the BJP. What action is this government taking on the economic destruction done by the Bharatiya Janata Party government," asked. He asked as to what action had been taken against the corruption in the Kaleshwaram, Mission Bhagiratha and Mission Kakatiya projects," Aleti asked. (NSS)

Municipal Workers Demand Reduced Working Hours Amid Rising Heat AITUC State Council Member Palabhindela Srinivas

Quthbullapur, March 29 "Under the aegis of AITUC, a meeting was held today at 5 AM near the Nizampet Ward Office to discuss necessary precautions against rising temperatures, prevention of heat strokes, and health-related guidelines. AITUC State Council Member Palabhindela Srinivas attended the event as the chief guest. Speaking at the gathering, he criticized the authorities for demanding



additional working hours from municipal workers, who are already struggling to sustain their families on meager wages, instead of reducing their workload amid the increasing heat. He urged officials to organize free medical camps for municipal workers regularly during the summer and demanded that they be provided with protective clothing, footwear, brooms, and hats. He further stated that, in the past, garbage collection was handled by tractors under the Gram Panchayat, but after the formation of the Municipal Corporation, it was handed over to private contractors, turning it into a mafia-like business. Similarly, he alleged that morning collections from shops were also privatized, leading to another form of exploitation. Srinivas criticized municipal authorities for turning a blind eye to large-scale illegal apartment and venture constructions while aggressively collecting ₹20-₹30 from small shop owners and street vendors. He called this practice shameful and warned that if municipal officials continued to harass workers, a massive protest would be staged at the municipal office. The event was attended by AITUC municipal leaders including Durgayya, Narsamma, Bhagyamma, Yadamma, Lakshmi, Amrutamma, Supervisor Jeetayya, and Suresh.

Chief Minister's Relief Fund:



A Boon for the Poor—Quthbullapur, March 29 "At the MLA camp office in Chintal, relief fund cheques worth approximately 47 lakh were distributed to 139 beneficiaries from various areas, including GHMC, Nizampet Municipal Corporation, Dundigal Municipality, and Kompally Municipality. The cheques were handed over by public represen-

tatives, presidents, and leaders of the respective divisions. "Speaking on the occasion, the leaders praised BRS Party Whip and MLA KP Vivekanand, describing him as a leader who supports and instills confidence in every poor person facing difficulties. They emphasized that the Chief Minister's Relief Fund is a great boon for those struggling with financial burdens due to medical emergencies. "The event was attended by corporators Jagan, Mohammad Rashid Rafi, Minister Satyanarayana, Suresh Reddy, KM Gaurish, BRS Party Youth President Dudimetla Somesh Yadav, division presidents Vijay Ram Reddy, Rudra Ashok, Erva Shankarayya, Puppala Bhaskar, Pole Srikanth, senior leaders Maqsood Ali, Gubbala Lakshminarayana, Shekhar Rao, Ghouse, Baswaraju, Sampath Madhav Reddy, Sudhakar Goud, Gummadi Madhusudhan Raju, Kishore Chari, Prabhakar Gupta, Mohammad Azam, Omkar Reddy, Nadeem Ray, Bombay Srinu, Eshwar Goud, Prakash Lingayat, Tokala Nagesh Reddy, Sammayya Neta, Ella Goud, Yesu, Vijay Harish, Yadagiri, and several others.

OFFICIAL Must Work with

Dedication: Minister Sri D. Sridhar Babu



P. S. ASHOKAN "INDIAN-CRONICAL "MANTHANI "29-3-2025" Minister for IT, Industries, and Legislative Affairs, Sri D. Sridhar Babu, emphasized that all officials must work with a sense of accountability, strictly adhering to the law. Speaking on Saturday, alongside District Collector Sri Koya Sri Harsha, the minister laid the foundation stone for the construction of a Tehsildar office in Kamanpur Mandal, funded with 50 lakh DMFT (District Mineral Foundation Trust) funds. "During the event, Minister Sridhar Babu expressed that the government is focused on building public-serving offices, underscoring that it is the people's government that is taking the initiative for such projects. He mentioned that new Tehsildar office buildings in Kamanpur and Ramagiri Mandals, along with integrated officer complexes in Manthani Division and new RDO (Revenue Divisional Officer) office construction, are all aimed at improving the efficiency of public service delivery. He emphasized that the government is committed to resolving public issues in accordance with the law and taking steps to ensure accountability among officials. "Minister Sridhar Babu also stated that efforts are being made to rectify the losses caused by the previous government's Dharani system through the implementation of the Bhumi Bharathi Act. He reiterated that all officials must work in compliance with the law. Additionally, the minister advised the Collector to ensure that government offices are located within a single campus at Mandal headquarters, with suitable land being selected for this purpose. "The minister also announced that a central lighting system will be set up in Kamanpur Mandal and urged the public to fully cooperate with this initiative. Proposals for the establishment of a shopping complex are under review, and a library with modern facilities will be built, with land being selected for the purpose. "Highlighting government schemes for women, the minister noted that thousands of women in Kamanpur Mandal are benefiting daily

from the free bus travel facility. He also mentioned that women are being provided with 500 rupee gas cylinders and 200 free electricity units. Furthermore, he reported that farmers have received two lakh rupees in loan waivers and a 500 rupee bonus. "Minister Sridhar Babu affirmed that the state's economy is improving, and the government is steadily fulfilling its promises to the people. He also announced that starting from Ugadi, free fine rice will be supplied to ration cardholders. He assured that the government is purchasing paddy at the support price without cutting a single grain. "In a nod to the area's growth, the minister highlighted the completion of several development works during the agitation period, including the establishment of a junior college, JNTU Engineering College, a Horticulture University, and a 130/32 Sub-Station in Kamanpur Mandal. "District Collector Sri Koya Sri Harsha, speaking at the event, revealed that new Tehsildar office buildings are being constructed not only in Kamanpur but also in Ramagiri and Mutharam Mandals. The construction of integrated government office complexes in Manthani Division, with all relevant offices housed in a single location, is also underway. Additionally, the foundation stone was laid for several other projects, including the construction of a Tehsildar office in Ramagiri Mandal (with an investment of 65 lakhs), the approach road and compound wall for Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya (with 67 lakh funds), and an integrated government office complex near the Manthani RDO office (funded with 4.5 crore DMFT funds). The Minister also inaugurated several other development projects, including the renovation of the District Panchayat Girls School and upgrades to Mutharam Model School. "The event was attended by key officials such as Manthani RDO Suresh, Municipal Commissioner Manohar, Tahsildars, PRSC Chief K. Chakravarthi, EE Pr. Girish Babu, DE Naveen Kumar, and other relevant authorities and public representatives.

The Parakala town center will be made an 'Education Hub'



MLA Revuri Prakash Reddy "Parkal, March 29, Indian Chronicle: "Revuri Prakash Reddy, legislators, said that the Parakala town center would be made as an Education Hub. He visited the Government Polytechnic College in Parakala town on Saturday with Task officials.

The classrooms of the Polytechnic College were examined for setting up the Skill Development Training Center. He said that the college campus would be turned into an Education Hub. He is going to set up a training center to provide employment opportunities in addition to providing higher technical education. After the Congress government came to power, Chief Minister Revant Reddy said that the

state-wide is setting up the Skill Development Center to provide employment opportunities to unemployed youth. The Skill Development Training Center is advised to get employment opportunities for local unemployed youth. Officials have also been instructed to take action to beautify the premises of the Polytechnic College. Already sanctioned the integrated school for the center of Parakala and the government degree college has taken up new building work. The event was attended by Task CEO Srikanth Sinha, Placements and Training Head Pradeep Reddy, Regional Center Head Naveen Reddy, Hanumakonda Industries GM Naveen, RDO Narayana, officials and public representatives participated.

TDP celebrates 43rd foundation day, Chandrababu announces good news to youth

GNS News Agency, March 29

On the occasion of the Telugu Desam Party's (TDP) 43rd foundation day, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu delivered promising news to the youth of Andhra Pradesh. Addressing the crowd, the CM made a significant announcement regarding the highly anticipated Mega District Selection Committee (DSC) notification, stating that it will be released in April. In addition to the DSC updates, Naidu introduced the Thaliki Vandanam scheme, set to be implemented in May. The Chief Minister expressed his commitment to creating a society free from poverty, and it is essential



introduction of new initiatives like P4 and Margadarshi - Bangaru Kutumbat.

"My goal is to create wealth, and it is essential

that this wealth reaches the underprivileged," Naidu stated, urging the public to unite in the fight against poverty. He also highlighted the

necessity of population growth, advocating that families should aspire to have no fewer than two children. As TDP marks this milestone,

Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTU) Cyberabad.



Under the supervision of DCP W&CSW, Cyberabad "Madhapur areas on the night of "In an operation conducted at Bhagyanagar Bus Stop under the KPHB Metro Station, Kukatpally and Madhapur areas on the night

of 28-03-2025. It was conducted by Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTU), Cyberabad, under the supervision of DCP, W&CSW, Cyberabad. As a result of the operation, 12 Sex workers were apprehended. Cases were registered at Kukatpally, KPHB, Gachibowli Police Stations, under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956. "The apprehended individuals were binded-over by DCP, W&CSW, Cyberabad to ensure good behavior. Earlier, a similar operation was conducted by the same special teams, leading to the arrest of 16 individuals. Cases were registered at the concerned police stations. These individuals were also bound over by DCP, W&CSW, Cyberabad for good behavior and subsequently released with notices issued under Section 35 of the BNSS Act. "PUBLIC NOTICE "The Cyberabad Police strictly enforcing laws against prostitution and related activities. No form of prostitution is encouraged or tolerated within our jurisdiction. Regular operations are conducted to prevent and eliminate such illegal activities, ensuring the safety and security of all citizens.

TODAY MARKS THE " SWEETNESS OF UGADI The BEGINNING OF THE NEW YEAR.

"P. S. ASHOKAN "INDIAN-CRONICAL "30-3-2025" MANTHANI."

"Ugadi, the auspicious day marking the beginning of the new year, will be celebrated this Sunday. On this special day, it is a tradition to prepare a special meal with six different tastes and offer it to the deity as naivedya, which is then accepted. The start of the new year is celebrated according to different calendars in India, such as the lunar, solar, and Barhaspatya calendars, all of which are based on Vedic astrology. Scholars agree that the "Surya Siddhanta," the solar theory discovered in Vedic knowledge, serves as the basis for all time calculations. "Telugus observe the new year according to the lunar calendar. This festival, referred to as Yugadi or Ugadi, is also called Srishtyadi by Panchangas and certain Dharma Shastras. The months of Chaitra and Vaishakha are named Madhu-Madhava in the Vedas, with the first day of the Madhu month being Shukla Padyami. The word 'Madhu' signifies sweetness, and the entire season of spring is characterized by sweetness. The blooming, flowering, and fruit-bearing plants, the mild breeze, and the sweet sounds of the cuckoo—these are all visual and auditory expressions of sweetness. "The Vedas have mentioned that "the wind should carry sweetness, the waters should flow with sweetness, and the earth, sunlight, and sky should all be filled with sweetness. Our thoughts and words should also be sweet." The year beginning with the word 'Madhu' aims to spread this sweetness throughout the world, as declared by the Vedic Rishis. What greater blessing can there be than wishing for a year filled with sweetness? "This Chaitra month holds significance not only in the lunar calendar but in all systems of time reckoning. The Vedas describe various rituals and yajnas (sacrifices) performed throughout the year in different seasons and months. The purpose of these yajnas is to invoke the divine qualities of nature in accordance with the changing seasons, bringing about prosperity and well-being. These rituals have evolved into festivals, and the associated customs reflect the changing seasons and their effects on life. "The full moon day of Chaitra, when the Chitta Nakshatra aligns, is considered the most important day for performing yajnas. The renowned poet Kalidasa beautifully captured this in his epic Raghuvamasa, where he describes King Dilipa and Sudakshina Devi embarking on a journey to the ashram of Sage Vasistha, their chariot shining like the moon in the Chitta Nakshatra. This highlights the importance of the Chaitra Purnima. "Despite the diversity of states, time systems, and practices across India, Vedic knowledge remains the unifying factor. Dharma Shastras emphasize that the Chaitra month contains the subtle essence of the year's energy. Many texts suggest that following the specific tithis (lunar days), weeks, and



nakshatras (constellations) during this month will yield favorable results. "Yajnas, which are considered manifestations of all deities in the form of fire, play a central role in this period. Therefore, it is customary to wake up at Brahma Muhurta on Padyami, purify oneself through an oil bath, offer prayers to the deities, and observe the auspicious time calculations—tithis, days, nakshatras, yogas, and karanas—as part of a sacred intention. "As we celebrate Ugadi with these divine rituals and auspicious sentiments, let us hope for a year full of positive developments, the preservation of our country's values, and leadership committed to security, progress, and integrity.

Ornaments worth Rs 7 lakh presented to Lord Sundararaja Swamy

"March 29, Indian Chronicle, Tirupati district correspondent "Hyderabad-based Murali Krishna on Saturday presented gold-plated ornaments worth Rs 7 lakh to Sri Sundararaja Swamy, which is affiliated temple of Sri Padmavathi Ammavaru. The temple's AEO Devaraju, Inspectors Prasad, Subhaskar, Chalapathi, Kumar and Ganesh were presented with gold-plated shields, crown, karnabheri, gada, pada, padas and yajnopavitam made of gold plated on top of copper sheet to decorate the idol.



Kunal Kamra received funds from anti-India organisations, claims Shiv Sena leader

GNS News Agency, March 29

Mumbai: Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Nirupam on Saturday alleged that comedian Kunal Kamra has been receiving funds from "anti-India" organisations abroad in violation of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and the party would approach central agencies. Addressing a press conference, Nirupam claimed Kamra received Rs 4 crore from donors based in Canada, Australia, the US, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries.

The 36-year-old comedian is in the eye of a political storm in Maharashtra after he took a jibe at Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena chief Eknath Shinde. Following Kamra's remarks during a show, Shiv Sainiks vandalised the studio where he performed earlier this week. "Kunal Kamra has been receiving funds. He has received Rs 4 crore foreign contribution from (donors in) Canada, Australia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and America," the Shiv Sena leader said. "People who have been sending money are mostly from one community. Have they been issued a fatwa to help him (Kamra)? This is an FCRA violation," he said. Kamra has been getting funds from anti-India people and organisations, Nirupam claimed. "There can be a sedition case against Kamra. We will complain against him to the central agencies for taking money from traitors and anti-India organisations and maligning India. Kunal Kamra cannot escape now," he said. The Shiv Sena leader also alleged that the comedian was funded by Matoshree, the resi-

dence of Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray, and was under their influence.

Greetings on the occasion of Ugadi Festival.

"Congress senior leaders Sheikh Chand Pasha. "Serilingampalli March 29 th, Sheikh Chand Pasha, senior leader of the Congress party who wishes the Ugadi festival to the people, the public, the leaders, the activists, the well-wishers, the journalists and the fans of "Sri Vishwavaasu Namaste" In this new Telugu year, your life aspires to be happy with new hopes, aspirations and ideas.



Colonel Assault Case: HC raps Punjab Police for 8-day delay in FIR, seeks explanation from state govt



GNS News Agency, March 29

Expressing strong reservations about the conduct of Punjab Police officials in an alleged assault case involving a serving Colonel and his son, the Punjab and Haryana High Court Tuesday directed the state government to file a detailed reply by March 28, explaining the eight-day delay in the registration of an FIR. "Who was the police official who refused to take action at the first instance? Such kind of brutality will not be accepted. What is the explanation? And why the court should not contemplate handing over this investigation to the CBI," asked a bench of Justice Sandeep Moudgil directing the Punjab government to file a detailed reply by Friday, the next date of hearing.

The court has also sought explanation on why the FIR was delayed despite medico-legal reports showing injuries to both the petitioners (Colonel Pushpinder Singh Bath and his son Angad Singh Bath) and two police personnel? It further asked why no alcohol test was conducted on the accused, and if conducted, why was the report not submitted? The court also asked why the Punjab Police were willing to register an FIR based on the complaint of a dhaba owner, outside whose eatery the alleged incident took place, but refused to heed the complaint filed by the Army officer's wife. Colonel Bath has moved the high court seeking the transfer of an FIR, dated March 22, 2025, registered at Civil Lines police station in Patiala, to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or any independent agency "to prevent miscarriage of justice, ensure accountability, and restore public confidence in the rule of law." The Army officer, currently posted at the Army headquarters in New Delhi, has alleged that on the night of March 13, twelve Punjab Police personnel, including four Inspector-rank officers, attacked him and his son without any provocation. The Colonel, in his plea has alleged that he and son were assaulted, left to

recover briefly as the police officials drank water, and then assaulted again by the same individuals. The Colonel, he alleged, suffered a dislocated arm while his son's nose was fractured. CCTV evidence from the roadside dhaba reportedly shows the assault. Justice Moudgil, who reviewed the video footage and medical reports related to altercation, rebuked the police's handling of the case. "If your clients (police personnel) were so honest and dedicated, they should have booked them, taken them for medical. Instead, they fled from the spot and spent three days apologising," the court said the counsel representing the respondent

Advocate Vinod Ghai intervened on behalf of Constable Randhir Singh, who, he claimed, had suffered injuries during the altercation. He claimed that a medical report conducted in the wee hours of March 14 showed that he had suffered wounds on his body. A counsel representing Colonel Bath submitted that the Army officer showed the police personnel his service ID while he was being beaten up but one of them snatched it from him and allegedly said, "We have just returned from an encounter, if you survive this, you can collect your ID from the ACP Civil Lines". He further submitted that the police also took away the Colonel's phone. The Colonel, in his petition, urged that he asked police officers to return his phone as he was serving on a very sensitive post in the Cabinet secretariat but to no avail. He further claimed that the IAS officer first appointed to investigate the case lacked the authority to adequately address the criminal aspects of the case under the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Colonel Bath prayed for the court to probe the role of senior Punjab Police officers in the delayed registration of the FIR, alleging that it was aimed at shielding the accused, suppressing the matter, and destroying crucial evidence. Additionally, he sought the preservation of relevant CCTV footage and mobile tower locations linked to the case. Expressing concerns about threats to his life and that of his family and eyewitnesses, the Colonel urged the court to ensure their protection. He also sought an exemption from filing certified or true-typed copies of annexures in the interest of justice. Until the final disposal of the petition, he requested a stay on the ongoing investigation by the Punjab Police. The court took note of the footage presented by the Colonel, which had been retrieved from the dhaba and submitted as part of the case record. The petitioner lamented that the police had failed to seize this footage during the investigation.

Ribbon clue cracks hit-and-run case: Bengaluru police nab man who sped away after injuring constables

GNS News Agency, March 29

A ribbon tied to a brand-new car played a crucial role in helping Bengaluru police trace a hit-and-run case accused, leading to his arrest on charges of attempting to murder two police constables. The accused, M Mahadevaswamy, 34, also known as Ramachari, is a scrap dealer from K P Agrahara. He was arrested and remanded to judicial custody at Bengaluru Central Prison, and his Tata Altroz was also seized. The accident occurred during the night of March 3-4, when Magadi Road police were conducting routine vehicle checks on the West of Chord Road in Rajajinagar VI Block. Around 12.20 am, officers signalled for Mahadevaswamy's car to stop, but he allegedly sped away. While attempting to escape, he allegedly rammed into Head Constable Dhareppa Tonni, fracturing his right leg, and injured Constable Kartik in the back. Both officers were hospitalised, prompting the police to register an attempted murder case against the unidentified driver.



checked with him. He informed me that the vehicle was a basic model Tata Altroz. We then contacted the Tata Motors showroom on Mysuru Road and discovered that only two basic model Tata Altroz cars had been sold. One was purchased on February 8 but registered in a woman's name. Upon reviewing videos from that specific day, the suspect's image matched the man who accompanied the buyer," the police officer said. Mahadevaswamy had provided his contact number to the showroom staff, which made it easier for the police to arrest him. He had hidden the car in a godown on Mysuru Road. When the police recovered it, the ribbon on the bonnet, which was instrumental in solving the case, was still intact. During questioning, Mahadevaswamy admitted that he was driving under the influence of alcohol and panicked, thinking the traffic police were stopping him for a breathalyser test.

A police officer investigating the case told The Indian Express that they had no leads for almost 10 days despite checking more than 50 cameras from the incident location to Kengeri, where the car ended its journey. "The pressure was mounting, but we had no evidence. When we were unable to find the registration number, we suspected the car might be newly purchased, decorated for a wedding, or a second-hand vehicle. Since the car headed toward Kengeri, we checked the NICE Road, Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway, and Tumakuru Road tolls but found no leads," the officer said.

"One of my friends works in a car showroom, and I

Hundreds of PHCs in Himachal didn't buy a single medical equipment in one year: Sukhu



Divulging details, the chief minister replied that PHCs and Civil Hospitals (CHs) in Bilaspur, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kullu, and Shimla districts did not purchase a single piece of medical equipment in the past year.

GNS News Agency, March 29

Over hundreds of Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in Himachal Pradesh did not procure a single medical equipment in the past one year, even as the state health department spent over Rs 153 crore (Rs 153,65,63,902) on the procurement of medicines and medical equipment for medical colleges and health institutions in the given period, Chief Minister Sukhinder Singh Sukhu informed the Assembly. Divulging details, the chief minister replied that PHCs and Civil Hospitals (CHs) in Bilaspur, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kullu, and Shimla districts did not purchase a single piece of medical equipment in the past year. Each district in the state has nearly 45 to 51 health institutes, including PHCs and CHs, which work under CMOs.

"Of the Rs 153 crore, over Rs 80.37 crore (Rs

80,37,81,593) was spent on eight medical colleges functioning under the Department of Medical Education and Research, and over Rs 73.27 crore (Rs 73,27,82,309) on 25 health institutions under Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) in all 12 districts and Senior Medical Officers," Sukhu informed the House through a written reply to a question of Congress MLA Kewal Singh Pathania. On March 11, Pathania asked, "Can the chief minister clarify how much expenditure was incurred by the department on the procurement of medicines and medical equipment for state medical colleges and health institutions till February 20, 2025, and divulge the names of medical colleges and health institutions provided with these medicines and medical equipment." "Rs 10.58 crore was spent on medicines and Rs 5.57 crore on medical equipment in eight medical colleges, including Indira Gandhi Medical College (IGMC), Shimla. Rs 47,01,428 was spent on medicines and Rs 3.33 crore on medical equipment by AIMSS Chamiana in Shimla. Rs 27 lakh was spent on medical equipment by Government Dental College, Shimla. Rs 4.59 crore was spent on medicines and Rs 1.72 crore on equipment by Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Government Medical College, Mandi," the CM replied. "Besides the above four medical colleges, around Rs 4 crore was spent on medicines and medical equipment by Dr Radhakrishnan Government Medical College, Hamirpur. Rs 3.50 crore was spent on medicines and equipment by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru Government Medical College, Chamba. Rs 3.99 crore spent by Dr Yashwant Singh Parmar Government Medical College, Nahan. Around Rs 44 crore was spent by Dr Rajendra Prasad Government Medical College, Tanda (Kangra)," the CM replied. According to the chief minister's reply, 33 medical institutes, including eight medical colleges, 12 CMOs, three Senior Medical Officers (SMOs) in Dharamshala, Mandi Shimla and 10 Medical Superintendents (MSs) — Bilaspur, Kullu, Solan, Una, Palampur, Nurpur, Rampur in Shimla, Dharampur in Solan, Rohru in Shimla — and Psychiatric Health and Rehabilitation Centres procured medicines worth Rs 130 crore (Rs 130,22,89,424) and equipment worth Rs 23.42 crore (Rs 23,42,74,478) in the past one year.

Mohali Municipal Corporation to spend Rs 2.25 crore to upgrade RMCs



GNS News Agency, March 29: Mohali waste management upgrade, RMC shed construction proposal, Mohali Municipal Corporation sanitation plan, Rs 2.25 crore waste disposal project, Jagatpura RMC processing capacity, Shahi Majra waste processing machinery, Phase 3A garbage disposal upgrade. The municipal corporation (MC) has already set up machinery and sheds at the Jagatpura RMC, which has a processing capacity of 150 tonnes of waste. (Express Archive/Kamleshwar Singh)

The Mohali Municipal Corporation is set to present a proposal in its upcoming General House Meeting on March 27 to construct and upgrade sheds at RMCs (refuse management centres) for better waste disposal. The project is expected to cost approximately Rs 2.25 crore. Notably, the municipal corporation (MC) has already set up machinery and sheds at the Jagatpura RMC, which has a processing capacity of 150 tonnes of waste. A transformer has also been installed, and the site is now awaiting an electricity connection. Once operational, this facility is expected to significantly improve waste management in Mohali. In addition, RMCs in Shahi Majra and Phase 3A have been equipped with waste processing machinery to enhance garbage disposal efficiency. Plans are also underway to establish more RMCs in various sectors of the city. With Mohali's rapid urban expansion, effective waste management has become a priority. The upcoming proposal aims to modernise waste disposal infrastructure, ensuring a cleaner and more sustainable city. If approved, this initiative will mark a significant step toward improving Mohali's sanitation and environmental standards.

'Man visited my home twice with women': Rajanna files 'honey trap' bid probe plea

GNS News Agency, March 29

Karnataka Cooperation Minister K N Rajanna, who had last week alleged in the Assembly that 48 MLAs have been honey trapped, submitted a petition with Home Minister G Parameshwara Tuesday alleging honey trap attempt on him, and sought an investigation. Responding to media queries ahead of his meeting with Parameshwara, he said he spoke about submitting evidence to support his allegations believing that CCTV footage of those visiting his official residence in Bengaluru was available. "When I talked about evidence, I was thinking that CCTV footage (of those trying to honey trap) would be available. But CCTVs are not installed. It is not installed at the residence of any minister," Rajanna told reporters.

Earlier in the day, Rajanna said a man had visited his Bengaluru residence twice, each time with a different woman. "During the second visit, he introduced a woman as a high court lawyer," he said. Rajanna said that in his letter to Parameshwara he has detailed the entire incident and explained the reasons for delay in filing the complaint. "(Investigators) have to find out whether the two were doing it on their own or whether someone was behind them," he said, adding that he would be able to recognise the person who allegedly tried to honey trap him if that person was produced before him.

Last week, the minister's allegation that 48 legislators from both the ruling and Opposition parties in Karnataka were honey-trapped fomented a political firestorm. In the Assembly, Parameshwara had assured that a high-level probe would be ordered. On Tuesday, Rajanna said that Parameshwara had collected information about alleged



honey trap attempts from the police. He said that the home minister, after consulting Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, "will decide whether to institute a probe by a SIT or it will be conducted by a DG-IGP level official".

The minister, however, refused to comment on evidence against those involved in alleged honey trapping and said that before the investigation concludes, saying anything amounts to speculation. "I expect such activities to stop. It should not be done against anyone," he said. Confirming that he has received a complaint from his Cabinet colleague, Parameshwara told reporters that the next steps will be discussed with legal experts but refused to divulge the contents of the complaint. He said Rajanna had filed a petition with the Home Department as the honey trap allegation was raised in the Assembly. Asked why the Home Department did not file a suo motu complaint after Rajanna raised the issue in the Assembly, Parameshwara said it could not be done unless the Speaker directed the government to take up the issue.

Hawa hawai, deceptive: AAP, Congress slam BJP govt's maiden Delhi Budget

GNS News Agency, March 29

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party government's maiden Delhi Budget, with Leader of Opposition Atishi calling it a "hawa hawai Budget" and Delhi Congress Chief Devender Yadav saying it is "deceptive". On Tuesday, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta presented a Rs 1 lakh crore Budget for 2025-26, saying it was a visionary Budget for the development of the national capital.

Criticising the BJP, Atishi said: "Today, the BJP has placed its Budget on the floor of the House. If it can be described in one word, it is a 'Hawa Hawai' Budget of Rs 1 lakh crore that has no basis. The Delhi government is not going to get this revenue from anywhere." She further accused the government of deliberately withholding the Economic Survey from the Assembly, asserting that the data would have exposed the "hollowness" of the Budget's claims.

She further pointed to key Budgetary allocations and claimed that for the first time, the Education Budget has fallen below 20% while the Health sector's share has dropped to 13%. "Till now, every citizen in Delhi was receiving free treatment at government hospitals and mohalla clinics, but this government seems intent on dismantling that system. Moreover, the Budget for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has been slashed by Rs 1,500 crore. This Budget reflects the BJP's intentions clearly," she said. Responding to the ruling party on their continuing critique of the AAP and its Chief Arvind Kejriwal, which was



also seen during the Budget presentation, Atishi added, "The BJP seems to have forgotten that elections are over and they have already won. Yet, they continue to spend 90% of their time attacking AAP and Kejriwal instead of focusing on governance. The people of Delhi expect work, not rhetoric. It's time to stop the 'jumla-baazi' and present a real plan for the city." Echoing similar sentiments, DPCC chief Yadav also questioned the Rs 1 lakh crore revenue generation and termed the Budget as one of "deception". He said, "Out of the Rs 1 lakh crore budget, Rs 9,950 crore will be raised through taxes that will burden the people of Delhi. When the Congress government under Sheila Dikshit developed Delhi 12 years ago, the capital expenditure of the total budget was 34.3%. Today, despite inflation and rising infrastructure costs, the BJP government has allocated only 28% to capital expenditure. How do they plan to develop Delhi with such a low investment?"

How BESCOM's installation of smart meters will lead to extra electricity charges for even those without one in Bengaluru

GNS News Agency, March 29

Electricity consumers in Bengaluru will be required to bear the cost of smart meters starting from the next financial year, regardless of whether they have one installed. Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM) announced Monday that the new and temporary connections will have to be made with smart meters and that the burden of the technical maintenance cost of Rs 75 per month will be distributed among all the utility consumers. BESCOM managing director N Shivashankara said, "On March 6, the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) released guidelines for installing smart meters. As per these guidelines, installing and replacing smart meters will take place in phases. Existing customers will have the option to install smart meters, while new and temporary connections will be required to have them installed." Shivashankara said each smart meter would cost Rs 4,998, which the consumer must pay in full. He added that approximately 3-4 per cent of the consumer pool would receive smart meters. The move came days after electricity distribution companies in the state shifted the burden of pension and gratuity of its employees to consumers through tariff hikes. Smart meters, unlike traditional models, feature a GPS-based communication system for data collection and offer connectivity through servers and the cloud. Utilizing Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) technology, these meters facilitate direct communication between customers and BESCOM

by collecting electricity usage data. Users can monitor their real-time electricity consumption, voltage levels, and power factor through a mobile app, which also provides options for recharging their accounts. Customers can make advance payments and recharge for their preferred duration, enabling them to use electricity according to their needs. In the event of a power outage, electricity can be restored immediately upon bill payment. During a joint press conference with Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL) managing director Pankaj Kumar Pandey, Energy Department Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta said, "In February, the electricity demand reached 18,350 MW during the peak demand period, and it rose to 18,395 MW in March. On March 7, the maximum electricity demand hit 18,395 MW." According to the officials, the demand exceeded 18,000 MW in the past two months and in April, they anticipate it to be 18,500 MW. "Since Covid, there has been a significant rise in electricity demand. The maximum demand was 14,367 MW in 2020-21, 14,818 MW in 2021-22, 15,828 MW in 2022-23, and 17,220 MW in 2023-24. This time, it has reached 18,385 MW. Additionally, the current maximum electricity consumption is 357 million units," Gupta added. "During the peak demand period in April 2024, the electricity demand reached 16,985 MW, and it is projected to rise to 18,294 MW this year, reflecting an 8.1 per cent increase. Similarly, in May 2024, the demand was 16,826 MW and is expected to grow to 17,122 MW.

Delhi inks pact with Bharat Innovation Global to offer free NEET, CUET crash coaching for govt school students



GNS News Agency, March 29

The Delhi Education Department Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Bharat Innovation Global Private Limited to provide free online coaching classes to Class 12 students of government schools, preparing for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and Common University Entrance Test (CUET UG).

Bharat Innovation Global Private Limited (BIG) is a collaboration between the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) International, the Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and the ed-tech company Physics Wallah Limited. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, who attended the MoU signing at the Legislative

Assembly, said the initiative aims to help over 1.63 lakh students of Delhi government schools to secure admission to medical colleges and Central universities. "With this support, more students will have the opportunity to pursue their dreams of becoming doctors and securing admissions in top universities," said Gupta.

Delhi Education Minister Ashish Sood called the initiative a "landmark" move, and assured it will help aspirants in securing admissions to "top medical colleges and Central universities." The Physics Wallah, the popular coaching institute based in Noida, has been roped in to provide the classes for 30 days from April 2. Students will attend six hours of classes every day, which will run until May 5. The course will cover subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, General Aptitude, and English. PDF notes for revision, regular tests, and a doubt resolution portal will also be made available. Additionally, a subject-wise study plan will guide students through the preparation process. A similar programme was launched by the previous Aam Aadmi Party led-Delhi government under the Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojana (JBMPVY), which provided free coaching to students from Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Class (OBC), and Economically Weaker Section (EWS) categories for entrance and competitive exams but was discontinued in 2022 due to funding disputes. The AAP government had later announced plans to revive the scheme ahead of the elections last year.

Traditional medical shops demand better regulation of online pharmacies



GNS News Agency, March 29

Hyderabad: While people in Hyderabad and elsewhere, in the past three to four years, have developed a degree of comfort with the practice of ordering medicines online, the traditional stand-alone medical shops are now at loggerheads with online pharmacies, for their survival. Raising objections over how online pharmacies are allowed to function without regulation and their possible negative impact, 'brick-and-mortar' medical shops in Hyderabad and throughout the country are holding a nationwide strike in the coming days. Once unchallenged, neighborhood medical shops, owned and run by individuals, are now finding themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. On one side, they compete with chains of pharmacy outlets, which have access to unlimited financial resources. On the other side, they face competition from online pharmacies that have mushroomed post-Covid pandemic.

"There is no denying that standalone medical shops in Hyderabad and even in other parts of the country are under severe financial strain. The major concern is predatory pricing of online pharmacies, heavy discounts and bulk sales. There is also a question of regulation of online pharmacies. Who and how are they being regulated?", asks president, Telangana Chemists and Druggists Association president, R Srinivas. A few days ago, the All India Organization of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD), which represents 10 to 12 lakh pharmacies in the Country, announced its decision to conduct a one-day nationwide strike. The AIOCD has raised questions over lack of proper monitoring of online pharmacies and quality of drugs, patient safety and antimicrobial resistance due to no regulation.

At present, there is no regulatory mechanism over online pharmacies, as the Centre is yet to frame proper guidelines, an argument that is frequently put forward by AIOCD. The chemists and druggists association have also raised the issue of easy availability of antibiotics without proper checks, which is a serious issue. Sector experts familiar with online pharmacies, however, have maintained that online pharmacies have come a long way in strengthening their systems. "Almost all the online pharmacies now have their own panel of doctors/pharmacists who go through the prescriptions that are uploaded by customers on their websites," they said. The chemists and druggists association members have called for better regulation. "Just like individual medical shops are regulated, there is also a need to have regulation over digital online drug stores," the senior official from Telangana Chemists association said.

Women winners in Delhi Bar association elections up from 16% to 28%

GNS News Agency, March 29

In the Delhi High Court, only 24 per cent of the judges are women and the figure is just 6 per cent in the Supreme Court. In the Delhi High Court, only 24 per cent of the judges are women and the figure is just 6 per cent in the Supreme Court. When the Delhi Bar association elections were held on March 21 in line with last month's Delhi High Court order, 17 of the 61 winners (or 28 per cent) across five court complexes—Patiala House, Rohini, Rouse Avenue, Tis Hazari and Dwarka—were women.

This is a jump of 12 per cent from the last elections, when seven (16 per cent) of the 43 winners (excluding Rouse Avenue Court, where elections have been held for the first time) were women. In the Saket and Karkardooma court complexes, elections were postponed due to alleged mismanagement. Repolling is likely after directions from the Delhi High Court. As many as 359 candidates contested the polls for the posts of president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and member executive, among others, across the five court complexes. Close to a fourth of the candidates (86) were women. However, women candidates won only reserved posts—treasurer, lady member executive, senior member executive (woman) and member executive (woman).



In the Delhi High Court Bar Association elections, which were fought for five posts among 17 candidates, one woman won the post of treasurer (20 per cent of the total). Three of the contenders (17 per cent) were women. A similar pattern is observed in the number of women judges. The number of women judges in Delhi's lower courts is 44 per cent—a massive jump of 11 percentage points over the past six years. However, the number plummets as one moves up the hierarchy. In the Delhi High Court, only 24 per cent of the judges are women and the figure is just 6 per cent in the Supreme Court.

Pune police book man who secured interim anticipatory bail from Bombay HC by producing forged court order

GNS News Agency, March 29

PIMPRI Chinchwad police, minibus fire, PUNE minibus fire, PUNE minibus fire deaths, Pune news, Pune, Maharashtra news, Indian express news The High Court has also ordered an inquiry into this matter and vacated the interim anticipatory bail granted to the accused. The Pune city police on Tuesday registered a case against a man who secured an interim anticipatory bail from Bombay High Court by producing a forged order of a magistrate court in connection with a cheating and forgery case of 2022. The High Court has also ordered an inquiry into this matter and vacated the interim anticipatory bail granted to the accused.

According to the police, the man was employed at a Tamil Nadu-based firm that was allegedly involved in stealing the government approved technical drawings and designs of a Pune company to secure a tender for manufacturing fire protection systems to the Airport Authority of India in 2022. The police at Vimantla station registered a case against the man based on the complaint of the Pune firm, CTR Manufacturing Industries Private Limited Company, which is also involved in the manufacture of fire protection systems. The police have launched a probe based on the complaint of Vitthal Jadhav of the Pune firm filed at Vimantla police station on Tuesday. The accused man has been booked under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) sections 337, 339, 340, 246, 318. The police said no arrest has been made yet. The Pune firm alleged that the man, one of the accused in the 2022 case, while seeking an interim anticipatory bail, submitted a fake handwritten order of a Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) in Pune, before the Bombay HC in January this year. As per the forged order dated December 13, 2024, the Pune court had released the accused due to lack



of evidence, as per the provisions of section 169 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). Considering JMFC's order as genuine, the HC had granted interim anticipatory bail to the accused on January 17. But CTR's legal team confirmed that JMFC in Pune had not passed any such order in favour of the accused. CTR then moved applications before the JMFC in Pune and Bombay HC. While deciding an application in this regard, the JMFC court stated on February 25, 2025, that it "did not pass the alleged order dated December 13, 2024 on the final report." JMFC also stated that, "... the alleged forged court order is not produced before this court in this matter. The alleged forged order was produced before the Bombay HC. As such the appropriate authority would be the Bombay HC. The applicant may even independently lodge an FIR in the concerned police station alleging forgery of documents." The High Court has recently directed its registrar to conduct an inquiry into the fabricated handwritten order of JMFC, Pune and lodge an FIR against those found to be involved in the fraud.

Akbaruddin Owaisi raises concern over alarming rise in power cuts

GNS News Agency, March 29

Hyderabad: AIMIM floor leader Akbaruddin Owaisi raised alarm over frequent power cuts in Telangana, particularly Hyderabad, stating that unaccounted shutdowns were disrupting daily life and even forcing IT firms in Hyderabad to allow employees to work from home. He accused power discoms of purchasing excess electricity at inflated rates. Participating in discussion on the budget demands in the Assembly on Wednesday, Owaisi also pointed out about lack of fire safety infrastructure, questioning how authorities permitted 26-floor high-rises while having equipment to handle fires only up to 14 floors. He demanded more fire stations and refilling units in key areas like Hitech City. The AIMIM floor leader also criticised the police for prioritising revenue collections through fines over managing traffic congestion and rising accidents. Citing the annual crime report, he expressed concern over increasing crimes against women and children, corruption trends, and incidents of communal violence. A heated exchange erupted between Owaisi and Minister Danasari Anasuya alias



Seethakka after she interjected, accusing him of unfairly blaming the Congress government. She claimed that the rise in crimes against women is linked to drugs among other issues. In response, Owaisi said that the Minister might not have understood his speech as she was not well-versed in either Urdu or English, while he was not fluent in Telugu.

Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann, minister get HC notice over defamation case filed by Simranjit Singh Mann's son

GNS News Agency, March 29

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann and minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal Punjab and Haryana High Court issues notice to CM Bhagwant Singh Mann and minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal over defamation complaint by Emaan Singh Mann. The Punjab and Haryana High Court has issued a notice to Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann and minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal in response to a criminal revision petition filed by Emaan Singh Mann challenging a Chandigarh court's dismissal of his defamation complaint against the two AAP leaders. The high court has sought a response from the chief minister and the minister by May 3. Justice Tribhuvan Dahiya passed the order after hearing arguments from Emaan Singh Mann's counsel, Abhaypal Singh Gill and Bhagoti Singh. The case stems from a press conference held on July 29, 2022, where the AAP leaders allegedly accused Emaan Singh Mann of illegally encroaching on 125 acres of land.

The chief judicial magistrate had dismissed Emaan Singh Mann's complaint, citing the AAP leaders' reliance on an alleged official report that formed the basis of their statements. The trial court ruled that the remarks were made in public interest and thus fell under exceptions to defamation under section 499 of the Indian Penal Code. In his petition, Emaan Singh Mann has argued that the trial court misapplied the law and failed to consider key aspects of the case. He contends that the court wrongly applied exceptions to defamation, particularly regarding truth and public



interest. He has also claimed that the statements made at the press conference were not merely reporting but direct accusations, which damaged his reputation. According to him, the trial court ignored crucial land records that could have disproved the encroachment allegations. Furthermore, he asserts that the two AAP leaders were not summoned despite a prima facie case being made out and that the court overlooked the political context of the remarks, which he believes were driven by malice, especially after his father Simranjit Singh Mann won a parliamentary bypoll against the AAP in Sangrur, the chief minister's home turf, in June 2022. Emaan Singh Mann has further contended that he never owned the 125 acres of land he was accused of encroaching on and that the alleged report cited by the trial court was not even part of the record.

Atishi says Delhi Assembly Speaker rejected AAP notices over law and order, he responds: 'primary focus seems to be attracting media attention'

GNS News Agency, March 29

Leader of Opposition (LoP) Atishi Thursday alleged that several legislators of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have not been allowed to raise the issue of law and order in the city in the ongoing session of the Delhi Assembly. After Atishi wrote Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta, he hit back, saying the Opposition members have been trying to cause disruptions by not raising real issues affecting the public. "Today, in the Vidhan Sabha session, time has been fixed for special mention under Rule 280. Many AAP MLAs submitted issues of rising crime in their areas to the Vidhan Sabha office for special mention. I got a call from the Vidhan Sabha secretary late last evening. I was told that you have rejected the special mentions of 5 MLAs because they are on issues of rising crime, and 'law and order' does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Delhi Vidhan Sabha," Atishi said in her letter.

On his part, Gupta said the notices submitted by the Opposition, which he did not accept, were an attempt to misuse the procedures of the House and create organised disruptions. "I would like to inform the honourable members that they should raise questions or engage in discussions only on subjects for which the concerned minister can provide answers or take appropriate action. However, considering the nature of the issues raised in the House, the Speaker may allow notices on reserved subjects only if they are deemed extremely urgent and important matters affecting the people of Delhi and requiring the immediate attention of the House," Gupta said. "I will not allow this. Issues raised under Special Mention must be related to matters of urgent public importance. However, I have observed that instead of focusing on real issues affecting the public, Opposition members are more interested in creating disturbances," he said. Gupta said the Opposition can raise matters related to the government's summer preparedness, vector-borne diseases, dengue control measures, pollution reduction steps, waterlogging, sanitation, and garbage disposal — issues directly linked to public welfare. "Instead, their primary focus seems to be attracting media attention and disrupting the proceedings of the House".

Pointing to Rule 280 of the Delhi Assembly's Rules and Procedures, the Speaker said, "I also want to inform you that I learned about the Leader of the Opposition's letter from the media even before receiving it officially. This is not the first time such an incident has occurred. It has become a habit of the Opposition members to approach the media first instead of addressing their concerns directly with me," he said. Gupta also warned Opposition members not to engage in any actions that undermine the dignity of the Speaker's office. "I will always welcome healthy and democratic debates in the House. However, I will not permit any discussions that are solely aimed at gaining political advantage and wasting the time of the House for self-glorification in the media," he said. In her letter, Atishi also took a



dig at the central BJP over the law and order issue. "It seems that you want to stop this discussion because of the inability of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Central government to stop the increasing crime in Delhi. Before the elections, the BJP used to say that with the coming of the double engine government, they will solve the problems of Delhi, and after winning the elections, they are saying that they will not let anyone speak on the problems."

Workshop on antimicrobial stewardship held at Osmania General Hospital in Hyd

Hyderabad: To promote antimicrobial good practices, stewardship and address the growing concern of antimicrobial resistance, an Antimicrobial Stewardship Workshop, featuring over 104 registered doctors, microbiologists and healthcare professionals from various hospitals, was organised by Osmania General Hospital (OGH).

The workshop, which was organised by Microbiology department and Infection Control Team of OGH, featured expert talks on various topics, including pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics, global importance of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), antimicrobial resistance mechanisms, antifungal resistance, and upgrading conventional laboratories to antimicrobial stewardship programs (AMSPs). Speakers in the workshop, which was inaugurated by Dr. Nagarjuna Chary, Principal, OMC, and Dr. Rakesh Kumar Sahay, Superintendent, OGH, were Dr. Srinivas, Clinical Pharmacologist, OGH, Dr. Shanta Kumari, Yashoda Hospital, V. Radha, Chief Scientist, Dr. Umabala, NIMS, Dr. Arun Kaushik, Manager, Biomerieux, Dr. Padmaja, Professor of Microbiology, OGH, Dr. Geetha, Associate Professor of Microbiology, OGH and Dr. Kavitha, Associate Professor of Microbiology.

Delhi High Court refuses to stay trial court proceedings against Sharjeel Imam in 'hate speech' case



GNS News Agency, March 29

The Delhi High Court Thursday refused to stay the trial court proceedings on the framing of charges against student activist Sharjeel Imam in a 2019 case where he is accused of hate speech and criminal conspiracy. Imam approached the Delhi High Court to challenge a March 7 order by a Saket court, which directed the framing of charges against him in the case. The trial court, while issuing the direction, observed that Imam's speech of December 13, 2019, near Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi was a "venomous", "pitted one religion against another" and was "indeed a hate speech".

The trial court directed to frame charges under section 109 (abetment) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) read with sections 120B (criminal conspiracy), 153A (promoting enmity between different groups), along with offences pertaining to unlawful assembly, rioting, assault on public servants, attempt to culpable homicide, as well as for charges under the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act (PDPP). Imam, in his revised petition, has pointed out that the trial court failed to record any prima facie finding on the essential ingredients of IPC Section 153A being satisfied,

and failed to record any piece of evidence connecting Imam's speech on December 13, 2019, to the subsequent violence that broke out on December 15, 2019. He was arrested in this case on February 17, 2021. He is also seeking an ad-interim stay on the trial court's order.

Imam, in his plea, has also highlighted that he was not at the place of occurrence at the alleged time of violence, with call detail records, too, attesting his presence at Shaheen Bagh at the time and not the Jamia university. On Thursday, Justice Sanjeev Narula issued notice on Imam's main revision plea seeking setting aside of the trial court's order on framing of charges, as well as on an application seeking an interim stay of the order, while orally remarking, "I'm not staying any order." In a separate plea filed earlier, Imam also sought setting aside of the supplementary chargesheet against him, stemming from this same FIR, primarily on the ground that there cannot be multiple proceedings for the same incident or offence against the same person. The prosecution is anticipated to submit its response by April 24, when the court will consider both of Imam's pleas together. An FIR was registered at the New Friends Colony (NFC) police station under various provisions of the IPC, the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act (PDPP) and the Arms Act in following an incident of rioting at the Jamia university and Mata Mandir Marg on December 15, 2019. Imam was not named in the FIR and was only implicated in this case in the first supplementary chargesheet that was filed by the police in April 2020. On January 25, 2020, an FIR was registered at the Inter-State Cell, Crime Branch, against Imam for having delivered two speeches during anti-CAA protests, including the one at Jamia on December 13, 2019, under IPC sections 124A (waging war against the state), 153A (promoting communal enmity) and other offences. Despite the Inter-State Cell FIR, Imam was booked for the same offences in a supplementary chargesheet filed in relation to the 2019 NFC police FIR.

Ahead of crucial SGPC general house meeting, Bhunder appeals to Akali rebels: 'let's put aside past grievances and come together'

GNS News Agency, March 29

A day before the general house meeting of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) working president Balwinder Singh Bhunder Thursday appealed to the rebel Akalis, who are recruiting separately through a five-member committee, to join the party's ongoing membership drive. Meanwhile, Damdami Taksal, the former SAD alliance partner, has called for a gathering at the Akali Dal-controlled SGPC's headquarters Friday to oppose the removal of three Jathedars in the last two months. The SGPC general house must approve the appointment of new Jathedar Kuldeep Singh Gargaj as acting Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht Sahib and Tek Singh Dhanaula as Jathedar of Damdama Sahib.

In a statement, Bhunder said, "Although the workers of the Shiromani Akali Dal have completed the recruitment process, and the then Jathedar Sahib of Sri Akal Takht Sahib publicly welcomed this initiative as a positive step, considering the threats faced by Punjab and the broader interests of all Punjabis, our party has repeatedly and humbly requested our dissatisfied brothers to contribute to strengthening the only regional party of Punjab by participating in the regular recruitment process. The party office doors are always open to provide the necessary documents for this recruitment." "Once again, I reiterate this request. Let us put aside past grievances and come together with mutual respect and trust to strengthen the only representative and regional organisation of Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal. Let us fulfil our duty by serving the Panth and Punjab, making ourselves worthy of the Guru's love. This is our moral responsibility towards future generations," he added. The rebel Akali leaders have been running a membership drive under the five-member committee that the Akal Takht formed in December last year, and they seem to benefit from the fresh tussle between the SAD and Damdami Taksal head Dhuma, who is targeting Sukhbir Badal without naming him.

Bhunder said, "Punjab and the entire Khalsa Panth are currently going through an extremely delicate phase. Our religious existence, heritage, and identity are under severe attack. Anti-Sikh forces have taken control of our religious institutions at Takht Sri Hazur Sahib, Takht Sri Patna Sahib, Haryana, and other places. Now, these attacks have reached the threshold of our sacred and historical gurdwaras

Bengaluru airport, STRR, and Mysuru highway toll hiked by up to 5% from April 1

GNS News Agency, March 29

Toll rates on the 119-km Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway will also be revised from April 1, with an increase ranging between Rs 5 to Rs 10 depending on the vehicle type. (Express Photo) Toll rates on the 119-km Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway will also be revised from April 1, with an increase ranging between Rs 5 to Rs 10 depending on the vehicle type. Commuters traveling to Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) via Bellary Road, as well as those using the Satellite Town Ring Road (STRR) and the Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway, will face increased toll fees starting April 1 as the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) Wednesday announced hikes ranging from 3 to 5 per cent. The single-journey toll for cars at the Sadahalli toll plaza near the airport will increase from Rs 115 to Rs 120, while the two-way journey fare will go up from Rs 170 to Rs 180. The revision will affect around private car owners, air travelers using taxis, and passengers commuting via city and AC airport buses as 80,000 to 1 lakh vehicles are estimated to be passing through the route daily.

For light commercial vehicles (LCVs) and mini buses, the one-way toll will rise from Rs 175 to Rs 185, and the two-way fare will increase from Rs 265 to Rs 275. Trucks and full-sized buses will now pay Rs 370 for a single journey (Rs 15 increase) and Rs 550 for a return journey (Rs 15 increase). Monthly passes for cars (50 trips per month) are now priced at Rs 3,970, while the local pass remains at Rs 350. The Sadahalli toll plaza collected a whopping Rs 308 crore in 2023-24, clocking a 10-year high. It collected Rs 1,577 crore in the last 10 years, making it the toll plaza collecting the highest amount in Karnataka. The previous

highest collection at the plaza was recorded in the year 2018-19, with Rs 187 crore. The reason for high user fee collection at the toll plaza is due to its location on NH 44, the primary route connecting Bengaluru to KIA, the third busiest airport in India. Passenger traffic to and from the airport is immense, with millions of travelers relying on this highway annually. The plaza benefits directly from this heavy vehicular movement, particularly from taxis, private vehicles and buses. Motorists using STRR, which connects Dabaspet to Hoskote, will also face increased toll rates at the Nallur-Devanahalli and Hulikunte toll plazas. For cars and LCVs, the hike is Rs 5 for a single journey and Rs 10 for a round trip. Bus fares will see an increase of Rs 10 for a single journey and Rs 20 for a return. At Nallur-Devanahalli, a monthly pass for cars is now priced at Rs 2,815, while at Hulikunte, it stands at Rs 3,615. The local pass for both locations remains unchanged at Rs 350. STRR, built under the Bharatmala Pariyojana, links Bengaluru with the Chennai Expressway at Hoskote. Toll rates on the 119-km Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway will also be revised from April 1, with an increase ranging between Rs 5 to Rs 10 depending on the vehicle type. NHAI officials stated that the notification for revising toll fees on the Bengaluru-Mysuru highway would be issued shortly. "Currently, tolls are collected at two plazas, but there is a proposal to introduce multiple toll booths at entry and exit points, allowing motorists to pay based on the distance traveled," a NHAI official reportedly said. With 70,000 vehicles using the main carriageway daily, the toll revision is set to impact both private and commercial vehicles. NHAI officials stated that the 3-5 per cent hike is part of an annual revision affecting national highways across India. "This is a routine process.

2 children from Lucknow shelter home dead, 25 hospitalised; water contamination suspected



GNS News Agency, March 29

Officials said the children started falling ill last week, and that over the course of the last four days, 25 were admitted to hospital. (Representational Image) Officials said the children started falling ill last week, and that over the course of the last four days, 25 were admitted to hospital. (Representational Image) Two children died this week after at least 25 fell ill at a shelter home in Lucknow due to suspected contamination of water supply. The Nirvan Rajkiya

Bal Grah Visheshkrit, a shelter home for children with special needs, houses about 150 children. Officials said the children started falling ill last week, and that over the course of the last four days, 25 were admitted to hospital. One of the children died on March 24 and another on March 25 at the Lok Bandhu Hospital. All the children who fell ill were suffering from diarrhoea and symptoms of severe dehydration. "Since March 21, 25 children have been admitted with us with symptoms of dehydration, vomiting. After tests, some children were diagnosed with anaemia as well as renal disease. Two children, about 16 years of age, died during treatment," Dr Rajiv Dixit, Chief Medical Superintendent of Lok Bandhu Hospital, said. He also said that two children, who are in critical condition, have been admitted to King George Medical University and Balrampur Hospital. "One with high serum keratin has been referred to KGMU, while another, who was also critical with chronic kidney disease, has been referred to Balrampur Hospital. Seven children have been discharged, 16 are still admitted with us," he told. "All these children need special care as they have co-morbidities and mental disability as well," said Dr Dixit.

Delhi Police arrest rape-murder convict, who jumped parole, after 14 years from Meerut

GNS News Agency, March 29

The Delhi Police's Crime Branch on Monday arrested a man convicted of raping a woman and subsequently murdering her and four other family members, including children, in East Delhi's Bhajanpura area, 14 years after he jumped parole and disappeared, officials said. The accused, identified as Raj Kumar alias Raju, was nabbed in a special operation from Uttar Pradesh's Meerut where he was staying with his wife and children, they said.

Raj Kumar was among the six accused in connection with the murder of a man, two women, and two children that took place in a house during a robbery on July 6, 1996, in Bhajanpura. The other four accused are Rajender alias Raju, Sunil, Jai Kishan, Kawaljeet alias Kawal Singh, and Rajrani. "After interrogating the accused persons, it was revealed that they entered the house to commit robbery, suspecting that a large amount of cash was kept inside. When the occupants resisted, the accused killed all of them, raped one of the women in the house, looted valuables, and fled from the crime scene," Aditya Gautam, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Crime, said. The police said in their statement that during the trial, Karkardooma court convicted four of the accused and sentenced them to 20 years of imprisonment on December 20, 2002. Two of the accused, Sunil and Jai Kishan, died during their sentence and Raj Kumar jumped the parole of 40 days, which was granted to him as his mother was ill. A team comprising sub-inspectors Anuj Kumar and Amit Grewal, under the supervision of Inspector Rakesh Kumar (Crime), was formed to collect details about Raj Kumar, the police said. "The police team posed as an Amazon delivery boy in Hapur. Eventually, a secret



tip-off confirmed that Raj Kumar was indeed residing in Multan Nagar, Meerut. Acting on this intelligence, the raiding party successfully apprehended him from Meerut," the police said in their statement. During interrogation, Raj Kumar disclosed that he was a permanent resident of Hapur in Uttar Pradesh and frequently travelled to Delhi's Sadar Bazar, where he worked in a bag manufacturing unit, from 1990 to 1996. According to the police, in 1996, one of Raj Kumar's friends informed him that his cousin in Bhajanpura, Delhi, had sold a property for Rs 22 lakh and kept the money at home. The accused men planned to rob the house and on reaching the house, they killed the male member of the family but did not find the money inside the house, the police said. "Frustrated, they raped one of the women present in the house (the sister-in-law of the deceased) and then brutally murdered the entire family, including two children," the police said in the statement. While on the run, Raj Kumar got married and had been living on rent in Multan Nagar, Meerut, with his wife and four children, and working as a labourer, said an officer.

Jamia suspends assistant professor booked for rape of colleague: 'justice will be served'

GNS News Agency, March 29

Jamia Millia students suspension stayed. Jamia Millia Islamia responded Wednesday as it terminated the professor's services, stressing its zero-tolerance policy in cases of violence against women. Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) in Delhi suspended an assistant professor Wednesday after he was arrested on the charge of allegedly raping a colleague on the pretext of marrying her. In her complaint with the Delhi Police, the lecturer said that the incident occurred in June last year at Maharani Bagh, two months after they met at the university. The police said that after they met in April last year, the accused reportedly initiated contact through LinkedIn and proposed a relationship within two weeks.

According to police sources, he made physical advances under the pretext of marriage, and their families discussed marriage arrangements. However, in October, the talks fell apart due to the accused citing unmatched horoscopes and the victim's father disapproving of the marriage. The police filed a case under Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and took the accused in custody with the investigations underway. Jamia Millia Islamia responded Wednesday as it terminated his services, stressing its zero-tolerance policy in cases of violence against women. "... it is clarified that the incident of sexual assault happened outside the university and is totally individual and



personal. Therefore, JMI does not have anything to do with the alleged incident as it did not happen on the university campus." The administration also noted that the accused was a contractual employee, and not a permanent faculty. To combat sexual harassment incidents, it reiterated the role of its Internal Complaints Committee and regular gender sensitisation initiatives. "... Nonetheless, the university administration, conveying its severe denunciation of the grave crime placed him under termination, stating that any assault on the honor, dignity and rights of women will not be tolerated by JMI and that the university is sure that justice will be served as law will take its own course," read the statement.

Schools of Eminence get Rs 100 cr but only 14 of the planned 118 completed in 3 years

GNS News Agency, March 29

The Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab government allocated Rs 17,975 crore to the education sector in the 2025-26 budget presented in the Assembly Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said the allocation is 12 per cent of the total expenditure. For the fourth year in a row, the AAP government's flagship school education project Schools of Eminence (SoEs) have been given the highest budgetary allocation of Rs 100 crore among specialised school education projects initiated by AAP government. Under the project, 118 government schools are being upgraded into state-of-the-art schools from Class IX to XII based on the Delhi education model of the previous AAP government. However, despite the AAP government's best efforts since coming to power in Punjab in 2022, only 14 out of the proposed 118 SoEs have thus far been inaugurated. In 2022-23, the Punjab government had allocated Rs 100 crore for SoEs Rs 200 crore in 2023-24 and Rs 100 crore in 2024-25. Replying to a query by Bathinda MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal about the progress of SoEs in Punjab, Union Minister of State for Education Jayant Chaudhary informed the Lok Sabha during the ongoing Budget Session through a written reply: "As informed by the state government of Punjab, 118 Government Senior Secondary schools in the state of Punjab are being transformed into Schools of Eminence (SoEs). The construction and renovation of 14 SoEs have been completed. The construction and renovation of SoEs are being done in phases." A Punjab Education Department official said, "As many as 14 SoEs have been dedicated to the people of Punjab and another 13 are ready

for launch, while the construction/renovation is underway in 15 other schools. The remaining 76 will be covered in a phased manner."

The state government for the first time allocated Rs 220 crore to the Centre's PM-SHRI schools project. A political row had erupted earlier between the Centre and AAP-led Punjab government after the latter refused to implement the PM-SHRI project in the state, prompting the Centre to block the Samagra Shiksha funds to Punjab. The funds were released after Punjab agreed to upgrade more than 300 schools under the central scheme. Rs 10 crore was allocated for upgrading government primary schools as Schools of Happiness and Rs 15 crore have been earmarked for Schools of Brilliance — another project of the AAP government. Announcing Rs 17 crore for the Schools of Applied Learning and Rs 12 crore for the Mission Samarth, Cheema in his speech said "The Schools of Applied Learning Scheme will equip students with technical skills for livelihood opportunities, while the Mission Samarth will instill essential competencies in primary and upper primary students." The minister said, "As many as 425 primary schools are being converted into Schools of Happiness to create nurturing environments with well-ventilated classrooms, play areas, and activity corners." "Besides, to reduce electricity costs and promote clean energy, solar panels have already been installed in 4,098 government schools, with further expansion planned. Infrastructure upgrades, including boundary walls and maintenance grants, will ensure secure and well-maintained schools, especially for girl students," Cheema said.

As Trump cuts funding, Ukrainians wonder who will answer for kids abducted in war



ministry did not respond to detailed questions for this article. According to Sahaidak, four unidentified Russian representatives came to his orphanage one day in June 2022 and removed the children's paperwork. CCTV footage at the centre showed four men - two in civilian clothes and face masks and two in military uniforms and balaclavas - search his office. A Reuters investigation previously found that six children attending a vocational school in Kherson were then taken to Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula occupied by Russia since 2014. JOY TO DISMAY

Sahaidak was jubilant when the ICC, to whose investigator he recounted his story, issued arrest warrants for Putin and Lvova-Belova. That turned to dismay when Trump's administration sanctioned the ICC prosecutor pursuing the case, Karim Khan, over a separate decision involving Israel's prime minister. "It's wrong, and I'm worried that if this continues (Putin) will walk away scot-free," he said. A U.S. statement issued after talks in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday said Washington would seek to return abducted children to Ukraine, but did not give details. "Trump and Putin's friendship should not influence decisions about the illegal actions of Russia," Sahaidak said. For Inna Kholodnyak, chief doctor at Kherson's main children's hospital, the withdrawal of funding for the Yale programme was a bitter pill to swallow. "To stop financing such an important project ... will lead to everyone understanding that whatever crime they commit, nothing will happen to them, and this will cause a chain reaction around the world." The White House did not respond to questions about ending support for the Yale initiative and whether this could damage efforts to hold people accountable.

After the Russians seized Kherson, Kholodnyak said she refused to take orders from them and was replaced as head doctor, but still helped to run the hospital remotely, moving homes as she feared detention by occupying forces. She recalled how children, many of them preschoolers, were brought to the hospital from the Kherson children's home - separate from Sahaidak's centre - and how all but two of them stayed there. "Doctors would exaggerate the severity of illnesses on paperwork so that children could not be taken away," she said. One of the two who were taken away was Illia Vashchenko, who was two at the time, Reuters previously found. Illia was issued with a new Russian birth certificate in 2023 by a Russian state registry office. The registry documents, which a previous Reuters investigation reviewed, do not reveal his precise location or whether he has been adopted. "I feel hatred and disrespect towards the Russians," Kholodnyak said. Asked if they believed abducted children would one day have justice, Kholodnyak and Sahaidak agreed that Trump's interventions had made this less likely. "I have always believed and still believe in the victory of good, justice and common sense," Kholodnyak said.

KHERSON, GNS News Agency, March 29, Ukraine, When he learned that U.S. President Donald Trump had suspended funding for a Yale University research project into Russia's abduction of children from Ukraine, Volodymyr Sahaidak wondered if the perpetrators would ever be brought to justice. Sahaidak was running a rehabilitation centre for more than 50 children in the southern city of Kherson when Russian forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here. He quickly dispersed most of them among relatives and staff to prevent the Russians from taking them away. But not all could be re-homed and a handful who were attending a vocational school in the city were removed to Russian-occupied territory. "I am angry that one person can undo all the work conducted by dozens of people," Sahaidak told Reuters this week in Kherson, back under Ukrainian control since November 2022. It continues to be pounded regularly by Russian shelling and attack drones. "There needs to be criminal responsibility (for this), but America is now showing us otherwise." Many Ukrainians share his anger at the suspension of vital U.S. support for programmes pursuing justice for civilians who say they are the victims of abuses - and for children whose voices have not been heard. Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab had been part of an initiative that under President Joe Biden began to document potential violations of international law and crimes against humanity by Russian authorities in Ukraine. Ukraine says that more than 19,500 children have been taken to Russia or Russian-occupied territory during the war without the consent of family or guardians, calling the abductions a war crime that meets the U.N. treaty definition of genocide. The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his children's rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova over the deportation of the children. Russia says it evacuated vulnerable children from war zones for their own safety. The Kremlin, Lvova-Belova's office and the Russian defence

Turkey detains nearly 1,900 people in protests over jailed mayor, rejects international criticism

ISTANBUL, GNS News Agency, March 29 Turkey said Thursday it rejected "prejudiced" international statements over the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu and the nationwide protests triggered by it, as authorities detained nearly 1,900 people taking part in the demonstrations. Imamoglu, President Tayyip Erdogan's biggest political rival who leads him in some polls, was jailed pending trial for graft on Sunday. His arrest prompted the largest anti-government protests in a decade and led to mass arrests across the country. Imamoglu's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), other opposition parties, rights groups and Western powers have all said the case against the mayor - dismissed from his job due to the case - was a politicised effort to eliminate a potential electoral threat to Erdogan. The government denies any influence over the judiciary and says the courts are independent.

Speaking to international media representatives in Istanbul, Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said Ankara had asked its European partners to act with "common sense", adding the gravity of the allegations against Imamoglu required his arrest. "We don't want the arrest of any politician, but if there is evidence of a violation then it can happen," Tunc said through a translator. "If we look at the gravity of the allegations, and as there is risk that evidence can be concealed, the judiciary has made a reasonable decision," he added. The CHP has called on Turks to continue protesting, saying it would organise rallies and gatherings at different locations in Istanbul and elsewhere. Erdogan has dismissed the protests as a "show" and warned of legal consequences for protesters. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said 1,879 people had been detained since the protests erupted last Wednesday, adding that courts jailed 260 of them pending trial. He added that 489 were released and 662 others were still being processed, while 150 police officers were injured. Rights groups have called on Turkey to investigate what they called the excessive use of force by police while dispersing crowds, and urged the government to allow the demonstrations, which have been largely peaceful. Western leaders have said the case marked democratic



backsliding. Asked about the timing of Imamoglu's arrest, which happened days ahead of his announcement as the CHP's presidential candidate in the next elections - set for 2028 - and following a months-long legal crackdown on the opposition, Tunc said the judiciary only looked at criminal reports. The minister added that being an elected official did not mean impunity. He also said Erdogan was not being informed about the case against Imamoglu due to the confidentiality of the case, though the president has made several comments accusing the CHP and its municipalities of corruption. A day before Imamoglu was detained last week, a university annulled his diploma - an eligibility requirement for candidates in presidential elections. Asked about the arrest and subsequent release of seven local journalists covering the demonstrations in Istanbul, including a photojournalist from Agence France Presse (AFP), Tunc said there was a misperception about Turkey's treatment of journalists and that it did not jail reporters. Reporters Without Borders, a free speech advocate, ranked Turkey 158th of 180 countries in its 2024 press freedom index. It said some 90% of media was under government influence, prompting Turks to turn more to opposition or independent news outlets. Tunc said the index did not reflect the truth. Reporting by Jonathan Spicer in Istanbul, Tuvan Gumrukcu, Ece Toksabay and Huseyin Hayatsever in Ankara; Editing by William Maclean

Detention of South Sudan's VP Machar collapses peace deal, his party says

GNS News Agency, March 29

The detention of South Sudan's First Vice President Riek Machar under house arrest has effectively collapsed the peace deal that ended the 2013-2018 civil war, his party said on Thursday. The U.N. peacekeeping mission in South Sudan meanwhile called for restraint, saying the country stood on the brink of relapsing into widespread conflict. "This will not only devastate South Sudan but also affect the entire region," UNMISS said in a statement.

The five-year civil war, which was fought largely along ethnic lines, left hundreds of thousands of people dead in the country that gained independence from Sudan in 2011. Oyet Nathaniel Pierino, deputy chair of Machar's SPLM-IO party, said Machar's detention meant the agreement had been "abrogated".

It "effectively brings the agreement to a collapse, thus the prospect for peace and stability in South Sudan has now been put into serious jeopardy", he said. The SPLM-IO said South Sudan's defence minister and chief of national security "forcefully entered" Machar's residence in the capital, Juba, on Wednesday evening to deliver an arrest warrant. Machar was being held with his wife at his home, accused of supporting the White Army militia which clashed with the military in Nasir, Upper Nile State, this month, Reath

Muoch Tang, a senior SPLM-IO official said in a statement. Machar's party denies ongoing links with the White Army, which it fought alongside during the war. South Sudan's army and government spokespeople did not immediately respond to requests for comment about Machar or his party's statement on the peace deal. The army was heavily deployed near Machar's house on Thursday, a Reuters journalist said. On Wednesday, the U.N. reported fighting between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and Machar close to Juba. The United States Bureau of African Affairs urged Kiir to release Machar and called on South Sudan's leaders to "demonstrate sincerity of stated commitments to peace". The coalition government, in which Machar shares power with his rival Kiir, has been slow to enact key provisions of the peace agreement, which include national elections and the unification of their two forces in one army. Political analysts say Kiir has been attempting to shore up his position by rounding up some of Machar's most senior allies, inviting Uganda's army to secure the capital and naming adviser Benjamin Bol Mel as second vice president. They say Kiir, 73, is preparing Bol Mel, a businessman designated on the U.S. sanctions list for his links to construction firms accused of money-laundering, to succeed him. South Sudan said at the time the decision to blacklist him was based on misleading information.

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The SPLM-IO said South Sudan's defence minister and chief of national security "forcefully entered" Machar's

Iran ready for indirect talks with US, Khamenei aide says

DUBAI, GNS News Agency, March 29 Kamal Kharrazi, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader, said on Thursday Tehran has not closed all doors to resolve its disputes with the United States and is ready for indirect negotiations with Washington. Tehran has so far rebuffed U.S. President Donald Trump's warning it to make a deal or face military consequences. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called the message deceptive and Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said talks are impossible unless Washington changes its "maximum pressure" policy. "The Islamic Republic has not closed all doors. It is ready for indirect negotiations with the United States in order to evaluate the other party, state its own conditions and make the appropriate decision," Kharrazi said, according to the semi-official Iranian Students News Agency. Iran is meant to soon reply to Trump's letter, with Araqchi saying last week that Tehran would take into consideration both Trump's threat and opportunities in its response.

In his first 2017-21 term, Trump withdrew the U.S. from a 2015 deal between Iran and world powers that placed strict limits on Tehran's disputed nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. After Trump pulled out in 2018 and reimposed sweeping U.S. sanctions, the Islamic Republic

residence in the capital, Juba, on Wednesday evening to deliver an arrest warrant. Machar was being held with his wife at his home, accused of supporting the White Army militia which clashed with the military in Nasir, Upper Nile State, this month, Reath Muoch Tang, a senior SPLM-IO official said in a statement. Machar's party denies ongoing links with the White Army, which it fought alongside during the war

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breached and has since far surpassed those limits in its escalating programme of uranium enrichment. Western powers accuse Iran of having an clandestine agenda to develop nuclear weapons capability by enriching uranium to a high level of fissile purity, above what they say is justifiable for a civilian atomic energy programme. Tehran says its nuclear programme is wholly for civilian energy purposes.

South Korea's truth commission says government responsible for fraud and abuse in foreign adoptions

GNS News Agency, March 29

South Korea's truth commission concluded the government bears responsibility for facilitating a foreign adoption program rife with fraud and abuse, driven by efforts to reduce welfare costs and enabled by private agencies that often manipulated children's backgrounds and origins. The landmark report released Wednesday (March 26, 2025) followed a nearly three-year investigation into complaints from 367 adoptees in Europe, the United States and Australia, representing the most comprehensive examination yet of South Korea's foreign adoptions, which peaked under a succession of military governments in the 1970s and '80s. The government-appointed Truth and Reconciliation Commission said it confirmed human rights violations in 56 of the complaints and aims to review the remaining cases before its mandate expires in late May. However, some adoptees and even a commission investigator criticised the cautiously written report, acknowledging that investigative limitations prevented the commission from more strongly establishing the government's complicity. That investigator, Sang Hoon Lee, also lamented that the panel on Tuesday deferred assessments of 42 other adoptees' cases, citing a lack of documentation to sufficiently prove their adoptions were problematic. Lee and the commission chairperson, Sun Young Park, did not specify which types of documents were central to the discussions.

However, Lee implied that some members of the commission's decision-making committee were reluctant to recognise cases in which adoptees had yet to prove beyond doubt that the biological details in their adoption papers had been falsified - either by meeting their birth parents or confirming information about them. Most Korean adoptees were registered by agencies as abandoned orphans, although they frequently had relatives who could be easily identified or found, a practice that often makes their roots difficult or impossible to trace. Government data obtained by The Associated Press shows less than a fifth of 15,000 adoptees who have asked South Korea for help with family searches since 2012 have managed to reunite with relatives. Lee said the committee's stance reflects a lack of understanding of the systemic problems in adoptions and risks excluding many remaining cases. "Personally, I find yesterday's decision very regrettable and consider it a half-baked decision," Lee said. After reviewing government and adoption records and interviewing adoptees, birth families, public officials and adoption workers, the commission assessed that South Korean officials saw foreign adoptions as a cheaper alternative to building a social welfare system for needy children. Through policies and laws that promoted adoption, South Korea's military governments permitted private adoption agencies to exercise extensive guardianship rights over children in their custody and swiftly transfer custody to foreign adopters, resulting in "large-scale overseas placements of children in need of protection," the commission said. Authorities provided no meaningful oversight as adoption agencies engaged in dubious or illicit practices while competing to send more children abroad. These practices included bypassing proper consent from biological

parents, falsely documenting children with known parents as abandoned orphans, and switching children's identities, according to the commission's report. It cited that the government failed to ensure that agencies properly screened adoptive parents or prevent them from excessively charging foreign adopters, who were often asked to make additional donations beyond the standard fees. South Korea's government has never acknowledged direct responsibility for issues surrounding past adoptions. The Ministry of Health and Welfare said it had not formally received the commission's report as of Thursday morning but planned to "actively review" its recommendations. It said "efforts to improve the adoption system will continue," citing its preparations to enforce a new law taking effect in July that's designed to strengthen the state's responsibility over adoptions. The commission's findings broadly aligned with previous reporting by The AP. The AP investigations, which were also documented by Frontline (PBS), detailed how South Korea's government, Western countries and adoption agencies worked in tandem to supply some 200,000 Korean children to parents overseas, despite years of evidence that many were being procured through questionable or outright unscrupulous means. The military governments implemented special laws aimed at promoting foreign adoptions, removing judicial oversight and granting vast powers to private agencies, which bypassed proper child relinquishment practices while shipping thousands of children to the West every year. Western nations ignored these problems and sometimes pressured South Korea to keep the kids coming as they focused on satisfying their huge domestic demands for babies. "The commission determined that the state violated the human rights of adoptees protected under the constitution and international agreements, by neglecting its duty to ensure basic human rights, including inadequate legislation, poor management and oversight, and failures in implementing proper administrative procedures while sending large numbers of children abroad," the commission said in a statement. It said the government "actively utilized" foreign adoptions, which "required no budget allocation," rather than strengthening a social safety net for needy children. When asked why the commission's report focused on the government's negligence and monitoring failures, rather than highlighting its more direct responsibility for creating a system that put children at risk, Lee acknowledged a need for a deeper investigation into the government's role, citing limitations in the commission's reach. A more extensive review of the systemic problems would require a closer look at adoptions to the United States, which by far was the largest recipient of Korean children, Lee said. U.S. adoptees accounted for a smaller number of complaints received by the commission, most of which were filed by adoptees in Europe. The commission recommended the government issue an official apology over the problems it identified and develop plans to address the grievances of adoptees who discovered that the biological origins in their adoption papers were falsified. It also urged the government to investigate citizenship gaps among adoptees sent to the United States and to implement measures to assist those without citizenship, who may number in the thousands.

By the book



The year 2025 was a remarkable one for writers in the Tricity. From autobiographies and fiction to poetry, research, and social commentary, local authors made their mark across genres, showcasing their creativity and passion for storytelling. Get in(k)spired! Arhana R Singh, a professor at the School of Communication Studies, Panjab University, delves into two landmark moments in India's social media history in her book Beyond the Hashtag: A Decade of Twitter Activism in India. Singh analyses the role of Twitter (now X) in shaping public discourse during the 2012 Nirbhaya case and the farmers' agitation of 2020-21, exploring how social media became a bridge between online and offline activism. The book presents systematically curated communication from individuals, journalists, and news organisations, underscoring the growing importance of research into India's social media activism. It serves as a key academic resource for disciplines such as mass communication, journalism, sociology, political science, and law, offering a nuanced understanding of today's media dynamics.

Anirudh Tewari, a Punjab cadre IAS officer and former Chief Secretary of Punjab, is also an author. Recently, he penned the book "Reflections of Ram Sewak: Reminiscences of a Flowing Spiritual Stream." Named after his father, Ram Sewak, who introduced him to the epic Ramayana during his early childhood, the book is more than a biography. It is a spiritual journey that underscores the relevance of virtues like compassion, integrity, and dedication in contemporary governance and public life. Through personal memories and insights, Tewari bridges the gap between administrative responsibilities and spiritual enlightenment, offering readers a unique perspective on the role of values in leadership and decision-making. K. Siva Prasad, a 1993-batch IAS officer from the Punjab cadre, has had an illustrious career, including serving as Additional Chief Secretary to the Punjab Governor. Beyond his administrative achievements, Prasad is also an author with a deep interest in spirituality and philosophy. His book "Gita Acharan: A Beginner's Perspective," published in nine languages, explores his profound understanding of the Bhagavad Gita and its application in modern life. The work explores the teachings of the Gita and their relevance in personal and professional contexts, offering readers a thoughtful and practical interpretation. Manmohan Lal Sarin, also known as Mac Sarin, released his coffee table pictorial autobiography, "I Did It My Way," this year. Through vivid anecdotes and encounters with Chandigarh's elite, Sarin unveils a narrative that captures the spirit of the city. The book portrays Chandigarh as a dynamic, living entity shaped by the aspirations and achievements of its people. A senior advocate, former advocate general of two states, president of Alliance Française Le Corbusier de Chandigarh since 1990, and founder chairman of the SJOBA Foundation, Sarin's life story is intertwined with the city's cultural and social fabric. R.K. Saboo, also known as Raja Saboo, an industrialist, philanthropist, and past president of Rotary International, released his autobiography "My Life's Journey: A Personal Memoir" on his 90th birthday this August. The memoir traces Saboo's life from Rajasthan and West Bengal to Chandigarh, capturing a personal and professional journey that mirrors India's transformation from a newly independent nation to a confident democracy. The book is both an inspiring personal narrative and a historical account of a changing India.

Mubarak Sandhu, The Mubarak Show Podcast Magazine

Mubarak Sandhu has launched The Mubarak Show Podcast Magazine, an extension of his podcasting journey, which he began in December 2023. The magazine captures highlights from the 50 episodes completed in 50 weeks, featuring interviews with guests and offering a glimpse into his creative process. Alongside this, Sandhu also released a new book, The Best Poetry Book, I Wish It Becomes. A writer of three fiction and two poetry books, Sandhu conceived the idea for the magazine as a record of his podcasting experience. With both print and digital formats, the magazine is an annual, non-commercial publication set to release every December. Dr. Sumita Misra, Palaan Di Shabnam, Sumita Misra's Palaan Di Shabnam is a Punjabi translation of her bestselling Hindi collection Lamhon Ki Shabnam. Comprising 75 poems, the book explores love, relationships, and the human psyche, weaving together themes of despair and hope. An acclaimed poet, Dr. Misra has won several Chandigarh Sahitya Akademi Awards, including the Award of Recognition for her literary contributions. Her earlier work, Waqt Ke Ujale Mein, won the Best Poetry Collection Award in 2017. Besides her literary pursuits, Dr. Misra serves as Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Haryana and is the Founder Chairperson of the Chandigarh Literary Society.

Poonam Khaira Sidhu, Chuckles and Cherished Moments Former IRS officer Poonam Khaira Sidhu shares her reflections in Chuckles and Cherished Moments, an anthology of articles previously published in national newspapers. The book is a product of rediscovery as Sidhu sifted through boxes of clippings, retracing her journey as a writer. Her experience in the tax department, where precision in language was crucial, honed her skills as a wordsmith. Sidhu emphasises that crafting judicially sound orders demanded a command over words as much as numbers. This collection captures her personal and professional insights, offering readers a blend of humour and introspection.

Vikas Verma: Be Future Proof Vikas Verma's Be Future Proof offers a practical guide for professionals, whether just starting or navigating mid-career challenges, to achieve sustainable growth. Drawing on his role as Regional Head of North India for UNDP, Verma presents a framework built on four Sustainable Life Principles (SLPs) and five Sustainable Self-Development Goals (SSDGs). This method helps

individuals unlock their potential, align their careers with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and redefine their professional narrative. The book emphasises cultivating a sustainable mindset and values to stay relevant and impactful in the ever-evolving professional landscape. It guides readers to confidently navigate the sustainability wave, aiming for meaningful, long-term career growth in a world increasingly prioritising sustainable development.

Mandeep Rai: No Friends No Enemies Mandeep Rai's No Friends No Enemies examines the nuanced relationships between Cold War leaders such as Nikita Khrushchev, Charles de Gaulle, and their Western counterparts. Inspired by perspectives like John K. Galbraith's view of Khrushchev as a potential Western ally and de Gaulle's vision of a united Europe built on peace rather than ideology, the book explores the possibility of a world free of rigid alliances. Key moments, including the Cuban Missile Crisis and the disrupted Paris Peace Conference of 1960, highlight missed opportunities for global détente. Through meticulous research, Rai brings to life the strategic decisions that prioritised power dynamics over global harmony, with prophetic warnings from de Gaulle about the broader repercussions of such failures. By drawing on original accounts from figures like Harold Macmillan, Charles de Gaulle, and JFK's aides, Rai delves into the personalities of these iconic leaders. The title No Friends No Enemies underscores the ambivalence of Cold War alliances and how this mindset influenced some of history's most critical decisions. Dinesh Kumar Kapila, The Varied Hues of Life: A Collection of Thoughts and Insights

Dinesh Kumar Kapila, a retired Chief General Manager from NABARD, presents an engaging collection of reflections in The Varied Hues of Life: A Collection of Thoughts and Insights. The book features chapters such as Unofficial History, And the Secretary Came at Noon, Tales Cafés Don't Just Tell You, My Varied Laws, A Vision in Red, and Coriander Really Required. Combining light humour with poignant observations, Kapila explores workplace dynamics in chapters like What a Performance Appraisal and Buttering the Boss - It's an Art. Other pieces, such as Fear and Fearful and An Encounter in My House - Real-Life Action, resonate with everyday experiences, while My Observation - Some Guys Are Kadoos in Love offers a unique perspective on human nature. Currently serving as Senior Vice President and Chairman of the Society for the Care of the Blind in Chandigarh, Kapila weaves professional insights and personal anecdotes into this compelling narrative that balances wit, introspection, and life lessons. Jashandeep Singh Kang and Col. Daljeet Singh Cheema, Military History of the Sikhs: From the Battle of Bhangani to World War II This book chronicles the militarisation of Sikhs over three centuries, beginning with Guru Gobind Singh's pre-Khalsa battles and Banda Singh Bahadur's campaigns. It highlights Sikh war strategies during periods of persecution and their triumphs against formidable adversaries like Ahmad Shah Abdali. The narrative covers lesser-known battles with Marathas and Rohillas, the rise and fall of the Sikh Misls, and the establishment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire. The book also explores the Khalsa's military achievements, including General Zorawar Singh's campaign in Tibet. Jashandeep Singh Kang, an engineer and Punjab Civil Service officer, combines his passion for writing with a deep understanding of history. Col. Daljeet Singh Cheema (Retd), a prolific author with 18 books to his credit, brings decades of academic and military experience to this detailed account of Sikh military history. Shrut Bedi, Artificial Intelligence and Constitutionalism: The Challenges in Law Shrut Bedi, Director of the University Institute of Legal Studies at Panjab University and an accomplished author on legal matters, delves into the profound impact of AI on the legal domain in Artificial Intelligence and Constitutionalism: The Challenges in Law. The book is structured into two sections: Interplay of AI and Constitutionalism, which explores overarching principles, and Critical Legal Concerns, which examines practical themes. Contributions from various authors offer diverse perspectives, keeping readers engaged with the complexities AI introduces to constitutional and legal frameworks.

The analysis highlights current legal systems and proposes innovative strategies rooted in constitutional values to ensure the ethical use of AI technologies. Insights from scholars in the United States and Canada add depth, offering a comparative view of shared and distinct challenges in integrating AI into law. Anil Malhotra and Ankit Malhotra, Practitioner's Guide to International Family Law: An Indian Perspective

This book is a comprehensive resource for navigating the intersection of Indian and international family law. Tailored for legal professionals, academics, and students, it addresses cross-border issues like marriage, divorce, child custody, maintenance, adoption, and the enforcement of foreign judgments. The book bridges Indian personal laws—including Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Parsi frameworks—and international treaties, such as Hague Conventions. It provides detailed guidance on jurisdictional challenges, forum shopping, conflict of laws, and recognition of foreign decrees, incorporating significant judicial decisions and contemporary case law. The text emphasises procedural consistency and includes updated provisions from new legal codes like the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA). Navdeep Singh and Shivani Sharma, In Her Defence: Ten Landmark Judgments on Women in the Armed Forces This anthology features essays and commentaries by jurists, judges, lawyers, and academics on key constitutional court decisions that have advanced the rights of women in uniformed forces in India. Written in accessible language, the book highlights the judiciary's role in promoting equality and justice. Navdeep Singh, a Chandigarh-based army officer turned lawyer and co-author, describes the book as a deeply satisfying endeavour, reflecting the legal journey and societal evolution in this field.

What is Australia's Online Safety Amendment about? | Explained

Australia's House of Representatives recently passed the "Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill, 2024" which imposes obligation on certain social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent children under 16 years of age from having an account. The Bill shall also make an amendment to the Age Discrimination Act, 2024 to facilitate this reform. Once the Bill is passed by the Senate, it will become law on getting the Royal Assent.

What is the new law about?

There is no current legislated minimum age for social media use in Australia. Children are usually unable to create social media accounts under the age of 13 years, a restriction imposed by global platforms in line with the United States' law on children's online privacy. The object of the amendment (a new Part 4A- social media minimum age inserted in Australia's existing Online Safety Act of 2021) is to 'reduce the risk of harm to age-restricted users from certain kinds of social media platforms'. The age-restricted user shall mean 'an Australian child who has not reached 16 years'. The age-restricted social media platforms (ARSMP) affected by the proposed amendment would cover (with some exclusions) an electronic service which enables online social interaction between two or more end-users, and allows end-users to post material on the service. The Australian Minister of Communication clarified that the government expects the ARSMP will, at minimum, include TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, Instagram, X, among others. These services will be required to take 'reasonable steps' to prevent persons under 16 years of age from creating and holding an account. However, the Minister shall also have discretion to keep 'a digital service out of the scope of the definition of ARSMP'.

How will the ban be implemented?

The law proposes that the providers of ARSMPs 'must take reasonable steps to prevent age-restricted users having accounts with the age-restricted social media platforms'. Failing to meet this requirement may result in a maximum civil penalty of \$49.5 millions. However, what is meant by 'reasonable steps' is not defined within the Bill. It shall be the duty of the eSafety Commissioner to formulate, in writing, guidelines for taking reasonable steps to prevent age-restricted users having accounts with age-restricted social media platforms and to promote those guidelines. The eSafety commissioner is Australia's independent regulator for online safety. eSafety supports individuals and promotes online safety for all Australians. The Age Verification Roadmap, released by eSafety in March, 2023, found that 'the age assurance market is immature but developing. Each technology had benefits and trade-offs'. The proposed restriction will not take place earlier than 12 months after the proposed day of enforcement. The affected stakeholders shall be consulted and government's age assurance trial will guide the industry on which age assurance technologies would be considered 'reasonable' and consistent with minimum age obligation. However, it was confirmed that all account holders on ARSMPs will have to verify their age. The law does not otherwise place any obligation on ARSMPs to prohibit people under the age of 16 from accessing content on their platforms. There is no civil penalty for parents who provide access to ARSMPs for children under 16.

What are privacy concerns?

It has been observed that 'age assurance technologies can pose privacy risks due to the type and amount of data they collect, store, use, and share'. With regard to privacy concerns, the proposed law will establish privacy obligations where an 'entity' holds personal information about an individual that was collected for the purpose of taking reasonable steps to establish identity. Penalties may be imposed under the Privacy Act, 1988 if the entity uses or discloses information, without falling within one of the exceptions under the Act. There will also be an obligation on



entities to destroy the collected information 'after using or disclosing it for the purposes for which it was collected. The government also announced its intention to legislate a 'Digital Duty of Care' to 'place the onus on digital platforms to proactively keep Australians safe and better prevent online harms.'

Is social media harmful to children?

Emerging research indicates that social media may impact children's mental health. Despite various benefits, the risks of social media are also well acknowledged. Risks may increase for children who do not have skills, experience, and cognitive capacity to navigate a complex environment. The report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society acknowledged that the undeniable harms include 'the effects of disordered eating, bullying and self-harm'. Despite the above report, a blanket ban to prohibit children from using social media is not considered to be the most advantageous solution. Some researchers and academics expressed concern 'that a ban is too blunt an instrument to address risks effectively'. The Australian Greens criticised saying that the legislation was 'rushed, reckless and goes against the evidence'.

Did any other country try such a ban?

Australia is perhaps the first country to have initiated such legislation. The Communication Decency Act of 1996 of the U.S. was the first attempt to make Internet safe for minors. However, it was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court stating that the portion intended to protect minors from indecent speech was too broad and was an unconstitutional abridgement of the first amendment and right to free speech. The second attempt to protect minors from exposure to sexually explicit materials on Internet was also defeated and the Supreme Court struck down the Children's Online Protection Act of 1998. The U.S. Congress then came up with the Children's Internet Protection Act in 2000 which required the schools and libraries to install filters on computers used by minors or lose federal funds. To be compliant with the law, libraries must certify that they have filtering technology in place. Thus, the United States has a law which protects children in schools and libraries from indecent materials.

What is India's position on social media restrictions for children?

India has laws which punish various acts of online 'child pornography' (child abuse and exploitative material), but they do not prohibit children from creating and holding account on social media platforms. Currently, though intermediaries and social media platforms are required to observe 'due diligence' to prevent commission of various online crimes, they are protected under Section 79 of the IT Act for contents posted by third parties. The Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting recently said that social media platforms need to be more responsive in checking indecent materials posted by third parties. But there is no indication whether Government is contemplating to bring any legislation to restrict children of certain age from having an account on social media platforms.

U.S. and China renew bilateral S&T Agreement | Explained

On December 13, China and the U.S. agreed to extend the Agreement between China and USA on Co-operation in Science and Technology for an additional five years, effective from August 27, 2024. They also signed a protocol to amend it. With that the uncertainty over the Agreement's continuation came to an end. Observers have welcomed the development as an affirmation of science and technology cooperation between the two major powers. The incoming Donald Trump administration is also likely to endorse its continuation. The Agreement was first signed on January 31, 1979, by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and U.S. president Jimmy Carter at a time when both countries had established diplomatic relations and agreed to cooperate on agricultural research and technology. Since then the Agreement has been renewed every five years as well as expanding in scope. It was due to be renewed in 2023 but was extended for six months in August 2023 and again in February 2024, paving the way for a fresh renewal. The Agreement is governed by the US-PRC Joint Commission on Scientific and Technological Cooperation; the U.S. and China each appoint co-chairs and an agency from each country is nominated as the 'executive agent'. There are also additional protocols between agencies and 40 sub-agreements in different areas, from agriculture to nuclear fusion.

Bilateral S&T agreements Bilateral science and technology agreements have been key to promote cooperation in these fields. Often there are specific agreements or cooperation pacts as part of a larger engagement framework. While these agreements don't mention specific investments in science and technology, they often pave the way for forms of cooperation that aren't confined to state institutions. They also facilitate joint research, mobility between the countries for students and scientists, and encourage institutional cooperation, and set up bilateral research centers. India has such bilateral agreements with 83 countries. This said, while countries routinely sign such agreements as part of routine engagements, both countries need to have the capacity and the intention to pursue the cooperation earnestly for the instruments to succeed. Token initiatives have never cut it. In this regard, the Agreement between China and the U.S. is probably the most successful of its kind. Conflicts between the U.S. and China, particularly over the export of certain technologies to China and concerns about China overtaking the U.S. in science and technology indicators, have become sticking points of late. To address them, the newly amended Agreement has measures to enhance provisions for researcher safety and data reciprocity.

Also the collaboration will henceforth be confined to the intergovernmental level, to basic research, and to previously identified themes of mutual benefit (including, for example, earthquake studies and basic health). The instrument will also exclude cooperation in critical and emerging technologies to assuage stakeholders that China won't ex-

tract disproportionate benefits—especially (and allegedly) at the U.S.'s expense—from the Agreement. Indeed, the last concern isn't restricted to the fringe: experts who reviewed the Agreement flagged China's ability to make better use of the research ecosystem as well as concerns over intellectual property rights. One report by the Congressional Research Service stated: "In 2017, U.S. patent and trademark officials identified over 400 [Chinese] patents tied to [Agreement] projects that [China] commercialised without U.S. commercial benefit." So before the Agreement was renewed this year, the U.S. was faced with three options: to renew it as usual for five years, to rescind it or to renew it with new measures to restrict the scope and add additional conditions. The U.S.'s decision to opt for the third option implies that while there are deep concerns about the Agreement's continued usefulness to the U.S., the outgoing administration would rather not altogether allow it to expire or rescind it.

China expanded its cooperation on science and technology in the 1970s by signing agreements with the U.S. and the European Union; until then these deals had been restricted to some East European countries and the erstwhile Soviet Union. Between then and now, the country has emerged as a strong contender for the leadership of global science. According to one February 2024 paper written for the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, China's spending on research and development (R&D) increased from \$375 million in 1979 to \$442 billion in 2021, second only to the U.S. In 1985, there were 2,770 Chinese undergraduate students in the U.S. but in 2000 there were 109,525. Concomitantly, both the number of papers coauthored by Chinese and U.S. authors and the variety of fields in which this has happened have increased. On the back of these data, in fact, Deborah Seligsohn of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, has argued that the U.S. wasn't poorly served by the Agreement and has received significant value as well. For the same reasons, the incoming Trump administration isn't likely to rescind the new agreement, although it might tack on more conditions and further limit its scope. Then again it will still be valuable to China because it keeps the door open for nonzero cooperation on science and technology, including to promote the mobility of its researchers. Likewise, the U.S. could maintain a handle on China's rise to strength vis-à-vis science and technology rather than lose all leverage. In sum, the Agreement teaches us that while bilateral science and technology agreements are important, making the best use of them demands capacity-building and sustained investment in R&D. Otherwise the participating countries won't be able to absorb the principal advantages such agreements generate. The Agreement catalysed China's transformation from a 'junior partner' in 1979 to a formidable competitor in 2024. Even if the U.S. deems its success to be 'extreme', .

All you need to know about: Foetal abnormalities



cleft lip, clubfoot, or missing limbs, are visible at birth. Internal organ malformations, such as congenital heart defects or kidney abnormalities, may require medical imaging for diagnosis. Neurological disorders, including spina bifida and microcephaly, can affect brain development and lead to intellectual or motor impairments. Some congenital disorders cause developmental delays, speech difficulties, or growth restrictions, making early intervention crucial for improving outcomes.

Who are at risk?

According to the WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a family history of congenital anomalies and consanguineous marriages significantly increase the likelihood of these conditions. Also, advanced maternal age (35 years and older), environmental and behavioural factors, including maternal infections (such as syphilis, rubella, and Zika virus), poor nutrition (iodine or folate deficiency), and uncontrolled medical conditions (like diabetes), can heighten risks during pregnancy. Additionally, substance use, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, or drug use, has been linked to birth defects, preterm birth, and infant mortality. As recorded by WHO, nine out of 10 children born with serious congenital disorders are in low- and middle-income countries, where access to medical care is often limited.

What are the treatment options?

CDC reports treatment depends on the type and severity of the condition. Some abnormalities, such as cleft lip—a split in the upper lip that occurs when the tissues of the lip don't join completely during pregnancy, congenital heart defects—structural problems with the heart that are present at birth, affecting how blood flows through the heart and body, and spina bifida—a birth defect where the spine and spinal cord don't close completely during pregnancy, leading to a gap in the spine and potentially exposing the spinal cord and nerves, can be corrected through surgery. Medical management, including medications and supportive therapies, helps control symptoms in conditions like Down Syndrome or metabolic disorders. Physical therapy and assistive devices are often used to improve mobility for children with limb deformities or neurological issues. Nutritional and hormonal support may be necessary for conditions affecting growth and metabolism. In severe cases where treatment options are limited, palliative care focuses on improving comfort and quality of life. Early detection through screening and regular check-ups plays a vital role in managing congenital disorders. Ultrasound scans, genetic testing, and maternal blood tests can help identify abnormalities before birth, allowing for timely medical intervention. Preconception screening identifies individuals at risk of specific disorders or passing them to their children. Peri-conception screening assesses maternal characteristics to offer appropriate care based on risk. Neonatal screening detects congenital disorders in newborns, enabling early referral and treatment. Preventive measures include maintaining a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy, avoiding alcohol and harmful medications, and folic acid supplements, under medical guidance to reduce the risk of neural tube defects. Vaccination against infections like rubella is also essential to prevent certain congenital disorders. By prioritising prenatal care and early diagnosis, the impact of foetal abnormalities can be minimised, improving outcomes for affected children and their families.

How do foetal abnormalities occur?

These can result from genetic, environmental, or unknown factors. Some conditions arise due to inherited genetic mutations or chromosomal abnormalities, such as Down Syndrome. Environmental factors, including exposure to alcohol, drugs, radiation, or infections like rubella and Zika virus during pregnancy, can also increase the risk. Maternal health conditions, such as uncontrolled diabetes or nutritional deficiencies (particularly folic acid deficiency), may contribute to the development of neural tube defects—birth defects of the brain, spine, or spinal cord that occur when the neural tube (the precursor to the brain and spinal cord) doesn't close properly during early pregnancy and other abnormalities. In many cases, the exact cause remains unclear, but a combination of genetic and environmental influences is often responsible.

What are the signs and symptoms?

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'Exemplar' — U.N. lauds India's progress in child mortality reduction

India's efforts and progress in reducing preventable child deaths has been lauded as "exemplar" by the United Nations, which cited the example of health initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, and said the country has saved millions of young lives through strategic investments in its health system.

The United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation report, released on Tuesday (March 25, 2025), cited the example of five "exemplar countries" in achieving child mortality reduction — India, Nepal, Senegal, Ghana and Burundi — highlighting diverse strategies that have accelerated progress in reducing preventable child deaths. The report said these countries illustrate that with "political will, evidence-based strategies and sustained investments, even resource-constrained settings facing unique challenges can achieve substantial reductions in mortality, bringing the world closer to an end to preventable child deaths." On India, the report said the country has made gains through health system investment. "Through strategic investments in its health system, India has already saved millions of young lives and paved the way to ensure healthy lives for millions more," it said. The report highlighted that since 2000, India achieved an under-five mortality reduction of 70% and a neonatal mortality reduction of 61%, "driven by overlapping measures to increase health coverage, enhance available interventions and develop health infrastructure and human resources." It cited the example of Ayushman Bharat, the world's largest health insurance scheme which provides annual coverage of nearly \$5,500 per family per year.

It noted that every pregnant woman is entitled to free delivery (including caesarean section), and infant care provides free transport, medications, diagnostics and dietary support in public health institutions. To ensure comprehensive coverage and equitable access to health services, India has strengthened infrastructure via the establishment of maternity waiting homes, maternal and child health wings, newborn stabilisation units, sick newborn care units, mother care units and a dedicated programme for birth defect screening, the report said. Further, it said that interventions like antenatal corticosteroids for preterm labour, use of continuous positive airway pressure and follow-up for vision and hearing help support newborn survival. "This ensures millions of healthy pregnancies and thriving live births each year. India has also prioritised the training and deployment of skilled birth attendants, such as midwives and community health workers, to provide appropriate maternal and child health services," it said.

The report noted that additionally, data systems and digital surveillance of maternal, newborn and child health indicators are continuously improved to support evidence-based decision making. It said that despite differing geographies, economic conditions and health system structures, Nepal, Senegal, India, Ghana and Burundi have all "outpaced" the global and their respective regional declines in child mortality through "strong governance, strategic investments in health and scale-up of evidence-based health interventions." "Common throughout these success stories are strengthened health systems that prioritise universal access and community-based care, data-driven decision making that ensures targeted interventions and ongoing quality improvement, expanded immunisation and maternal and newborn health programmes that prevent childhood



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illness and provide a continuum of care from home to hospitals, and innovative health financing models that provide sustainability and accessibility," the report said. The U.N. agency also said that several low and lower-middle-income countries have surpassed the global decline in under-five mortality since 2000. Angola, Bhutan, Bolivia, Cabo Verde, India, Morocco, Senegal, Tanzania and Zambia have all cut their under-five mortality rate by more than two thirds since 2000. In 2000, the country with the highest burden of under-five measles mortality was India, with only 56% of infants vaccinated for measles and 189,000 deaths from measles.

By 2023, the infant measles vaccination rate had increased to 93%, and under-five deaths due to the disease decreased by 97% to 5,200 measles-related deaths. The report noted that the number of children dying globally before their fifth birthday declined to 4.8 million in 2023, while stillbirths declined modestly, still remaining around 1.9 million. Since 2000, child deaths have dropped by more than half and stillbirths by over a third, fuelled by sustained investments in child survival worldwide. In 2022, the world reached a historic milestone when child deaths dropped slightly below 5 million for the first time. However, the progress has slowed and too many children are still being lost to preventable causes. "Millions of children are alive today because of the global commitment to proven interventions, such as vaccines, nutrition, and access to safe water and basic sanitation," UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said. "Bringing preventable child deaths to a record low is a remarkable achievement. But without the right policy choices and adequate investment, we risk reversing these hard-earned gains, with millions more children dying from preventable causes. We cannot allow that to happen," Ms. Russell added.

28-year-old dies of heart attack, mother blames caffeine in energy drinks and coffee: How much caffeine is a risk factor?



Energy drinks came under the lens for their impact on heart health after Katie Donnell, a 28-year-old teacher from Florida, US, died of a heart attack. According to reports, her mother said that she would drink up to three energy drinks a day along with coffee to fuel up for her gym workouts and blamed that habit for her daughter's death. While a heart attack is multifactorial and depends a lot on underlying conditions, can caffeine shots be a trigger and risk factor? "Caffeine, if taken in frequent intervals, can pace your heart up and that can be a trigger, particularly among people with existing co-morbidities like hypertension and diabetes," says Dr Ranjan Shetty, lead cardiologist at Sparsh Hospitals, Bengaluru.

Why excessive caffeine shots are bad for your heart Caffeine is a stimulant that promotes the release of stress hormones like noradrenaline. These increase heart rate and blood pressure, stress out your heart by making it work harder. This often leads to arrhythmia or irregular heartbeats, which interfere with the normal functioning of the

heart's electrical signals, causing them to slow down, pace up or simply move in an uncoordinated manner. This may result in stoppage of the heart or what is called as sudden cardiac arrest. Some arrhythmias, like atrial fibrillation (AFib), can lead to blood pooling in the heart's chambers, increasing the risk of blood clots. If this clot goes to a heart artery, it can cause a heart attack. Prolonged or severe arrhythmias can weaken the heart muscle, making it less efficient at pumping blood. This can lead to heart failure and increase the risk of heart attack.

Does scientific literature bear out the extra caffeine link?

A study presented at the American College of Cardiology's ACC Asia 2024 conference found that chronic high caffeine consumption (400 mg or more daily) may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease in otherwise healthy individuals. A 1999 study reported that ingesting more than 10 cups of coffee per day was associated with an increased risk of sudden cardiac death in a population with coronary artery disease. A Japanese study in 2022 found that drinking two or more cups of coffee a day was associated with twice the risk of death from cardiovascular disease among people with severe hypertension compared to non-coffee drinkers.

How much caffeine is safe for the heart?

Up to 400 milligrams (mg) of caffeine per day is generally considered safe for most healthy adults. But studies have shown that having half to one cup of coffee a day is safer because of its antioxidant properties that help in lowering blood sugar and cholesterol. Consuming more than 400 mg of caffeine daily can elevate heart rate and blood pressure. Trouble is not so much about drinking coffee per se but energy drinks and sodas which pack higher concentrations of caffeine, sometimes caffeine equivalent to four cups of coffee. Regular consumption makes you tolerant and addicted to these drinks. So over time, your caffeine intake surpasses normal limits.

Folic acid supplements during pregnancy: Do you really need them? Here's busting an online myth

Pregnancy is a time when nutritional needs increase and expectant mothers are often advised to take supplements to support their baby's development. One of the most commonly recommended supplements is folic acid. However, there is often confusion about whether folic acid is truly necessary and how it differs from naturally occurring folate. Fact: Although often used interchangeably, both are different. Folate is the naturally occurring form of vitamin B9, found in leafy greens, beans, lentils and citrus fruits. Folic acid, on the other hand, is the synthetic form of vitamin B9, used in fortified foods and supplements. While both help in DNA synthesis and red blood cell production, folic acid is more stable and better absorbed by the body when taken as a supplement. Fact: While it is possible to get folate from food sources, many women do not consume enough through diet alone. Moreover, natural folate is less stable and can be lost during cooking. Since folic acid is more bioavailable than food-derived folate, supplementation ensures that pregnant women get adequate amounts to support the baby's growth and development.

Fact: While folic acid is critical when the baby's neural tube (it is needed for brain and spinal cord) is forming in the first few weeks, it remains important throughout pregnancy. It supports the rapid growth of the placenta and fetus, prevents anaemia in the mother and aids in the production of DNA and new cells. Doctors often recommend taking folic acid supplements even before conception and continuing



them throughout pregnancy. Every woman must take it regardless of family history. Daily supplementation of at least 400-800 micrograms (mcg) is recommended for all women of childbearing age. Fact: Folic acid is a water-soluble vitamin, meaning the body excretes excess amounts through urine. While extremely high doses (above 1,000 mcg) should only be taken under medical supervision, the recommended daily intake of 400-800 mcg is safe and beneficial. In cases where women have a history of NTDs or specific genetic conditions, higher doses may be prescribed by a doctor. Fact: Most prenatal vitamins include the necessary dose of folic acid but not all are created equal. Some women, especially those with certain genetic mutations, may require a different form of folate for better absorption.

Flu virus surge in cities: Can you get it twice in one season?

viral, multiple viral fever, health and wellness Understanding the causes of repeated viral infections and how to protect your immune system. If you have fallen sick multiple times from what seems like the same virus in a single season, you are not alone. Many people experience repeated bouts of illness even after recovering once. While it may seem like the virus never left your system, several biological and environmental factors contribute to this phenomenon. Here's why this happens and what you can do about it.

Variants and Mutations: Viruses, especially respiratory ones like the flu or COVID-19, evolve quickly. When you catch a virus, your immune system builds antibodies specific to that strain. However, if the virus mutates slightly, your body may not recognize it as the same infection. This means you can fall sick multiple times, even if you have developed immunity to an earlier version. For example, the influenza virus has multiple strains, and each season may bring slightly different versions. COVID-19, which has shown numerous mutations, led to reinfections in people who had been vaccinated or previously infected. Weak or Short-Lived Immunity: Not all immune responses provide long-term protection. Some viruses only trigger temporary immunity, which can wane within weeks or months. If your body doesn't build a strong enough defence, you might become vulnerable to reinfection sooner than expected. Additionally, stress, poor diet, lack of sleep and underlying health conditions can weaken your immune system.

Reactivation of Dormant Viruses: Certain viruses, such as Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) and herpesviruses, can remain dormant in the body and reactivate when immunity is weakened. While most respiratory viruses do not behave this way, lingering symptoms or secondary infections might make it look like you are getting sick repeatedly. For example, after COVID-19, your immune system remains suppressed for a while, increasing the risk of catching another illness or experiencing prolonged symptoms. Overlapping Illnesses: Sometimes, getting sick again does not mean you caught the same virus—it could be a different one altogether. Many viruses circulate simultaneously during peak seasons, and you may get infected by another pathogen while your immune system is still recovering from the first one. For instance, a person recovering from a cold (caused by rhinoviruses) may soon get the flu (caused by influenza), leading to the perception of repeated sickness from the same virus. Environmental Exposure: If you are frequently exposed to sick people—whether at work, school or public places—you increase your chances of reinfection. Viruses can linger on surfaces, in the air and in crowded spaces. Moreover, some viruses, such as norovirus and



adenoviruses, can remain on surfaces for days, making reinfection more likely if proper sanitization isn't practised. Post-Viral Syndrome: Another possibility is that you are not experiencing new infections but rather lingering symptoms from the initial illness. Some people develop post-viral syndromes where fatigue, cough, congestion and weakness persist for weeks. This can give the impression of multiple infections when, in reality, the body is still recovering from the original virus, long Covid being an example. While complete protection against viruses is difficult, you can take several steps to minimise your risk: Eat a balanced diet, stay hydrated, get enough sleep and manage stress. Practise hygiene and mask up in crowded areas. Finally, do not rush back to activities before fully recovering, it can weaken your immune system further.

Elevating audio quality with Bose collaboration

Hyderabad: Noise, the Indian electronics brand, has launched its first Master Series earbuds, the Noise Master Buds, in India. These true wireless earbuds, featuring audio tuning by Bose, are priced at Rs 7,999 and are available in Onyx, Titanium, and Silver color options. They can be purchased through Noise's official website, Amazon India, and select retail outlets such as Reliance Digital, Croma, and Vijay Sales. The Noise Master Buds are equipped with 12.4mm drivers constructed from premium materials like PEEK and Titanium, aiming to deliver high-quality sound. They offer adaptive Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) up to 49dB, enhancing the listening experience by minimizing external noise.

Income Tax Department issues notices to taxpayers over non deduction of TDS on rent of 50,000 or more per month



eral taxpayers across the country, he said.

"Where you are a tenant of a particular house property and you are paying a rent of ₹50,000 or more, the Income Tax Act mandates that as a tenant you need to deduct TDS of 2% (effective from October 2024 earlier it was 5%) on the rent you are paying to the landlord. So the onus to deduct the TDS is on the tenant. The tenant has to deduct the TDS and remit it to the Income Tax Department and pay the balance to the landlord," Mr. Abhishek said. "If the tenant has failed to do so, the person is considered as an assessee in default. Then you are subject to a levy of certain interest, fines and penalties by the Income Tax Department which may vary from 1-1.5% per month depending on the individual cases and time of the default," he said. "There is one exemption to this. If the landlord has filed its Income Tax return and shown the rental income and if has paid the taxes duly calculated on the same and if you are able to furnish the information to the assessing officer, you will not be considered as assessee in default and need not pay any interest or penalty," Mr. Abhishek said. "However, some landlords may not be comfortable sharing certain confidential/private documents. Therefore, it is advisable that all assessee properly deduct and remit the TDS in a timely manner to comply with the law and to avoid being an assessee in default," he said.

Intel report calls China potential threat to US national security

Washington: China presents the most comprehensive and robust military threat to the national security of the United States, a US intelligence report revealed on Tuesday. The report spotlighted that China poses an active and persistent cyber threat to the US government, private sector, and critical infrastructure networks with Beijing's nuclear weapons and advanced delivery systems — capable of delivering catastrophic damage — posing a direct threat to the US and threatening its military forces at home and abroad.

The Annual Threat Assessment done by the intelligence authority cites that a major portion of China's military modernisation efforts is focused on developing counter-intervention capabilities tailored against all aspects of US and allied military operations in the Pacific. "President Xi Jinping and the People's Republic of China (PRC) want to achieve 'the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' by 2049. The PRC will seek to increase its power and influence to shape world events to create an environment favorable to PRC interests, obtain greater US deference to China's interests, and fend off challenges to its reputation, legitimacy, and capabilities at home and abroad," the report highlights. It mentions that China has developed a range of ballistic and cruise missiles with conventional payloads that can be delivered from its mainland as well as by air and sea, including by nuclear-powered submarines.

"It may also be exploring the development of conventionally-armed intercontinental range missile systems, which, if developed and fielded, would allow China to threaten conventional strikes against targets in the continental United States," the report states. The annual report of worldwide threats to the national security of the United States reflects the collective insights of the Intelligence Community (IC), which is committed to providing the nuanced, independent, and unvarnished intelligence that policymakers, warfighters, and domestic law enforcement personnel need to protect American lives and America's interests anywhere in the world.

The assessment focuses on the most direct, serious threats to the United States primarily during the next year. All these threats require a robust intelligence response, including those where a near-term focus may help head off greater threats in the future. It warned that China is using



complex, whole-of-government campaigns featuring coercive military, economic, and influence operations short of war to assert its positions and strength against others, reserving more destructive tools for full-scale conflict. The report mentions that if Beijing believed that a major conflict with Washington was imminent, it could consider aggressive cyber operations against US critical infrastructure and military assets. Such strikes, it said, would be designed to deter US military action by impeding decision-making, inducing societal panic, and interfering with the deployment of US forces.

Emphasising that China almost certainly has a multifaceted, national-level strategy designed to displace the United States as the world's most influential AI power by 2030, the report further stated that China has stolen hundreds of gigabytes of intellectual property from companies in Asia, Europe, and North America. It was done to leapfrog over technological hurdles, with as much as 80 per cent of US economic espionage cases as of 2021 involving Chinese entities, the report reveals. "Beijing is likely to feel emboldened to use malign influence more regularly in the coming years, particularly as it fields AI to improve its capabilities and avoid detection," the report mentions. Cautioning on Chinese expansion of nuclear posture, the report stated that China most likely possesses capabilities relevant to Chemical and Biological Warfare (CBW) that pose a threat to US, allied, and partner forces as well as the civilian population.

Trump's 25% auto tariffs raise uncertainty for India's \$7 billion component exports; traders fear selective concessions: Here's why

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday decided to expand his trade war to the world's most traded product — automobiles and auto parts — by announcing 25 per cent tariffs on them from April 3. This has raised the uncertainty over Indian exports of auto components worth nearly \$7 billion to the US and their future growth potential in the North American market. Citing national security concerns, the White House said that automobiles would be subject to 25 per cent tariffs starting on April 3 — a day after US reciprocal tariffs are set to come into effect — while auto parts would face similar tariffs "no later than May 3 2025," unless such actions are expressly "reduced, modified, or terminated."

An industry source told The Indian Express that Trump's new tariffs would have a bearing on India's auto component exports to the US, which stood at \$6.79 billion in FY24, since auto components are the only segment where India has a significant presence in the fast-growing US market. The source said that selective relaxations of the tariffs could adversely impact Indian exports.

Indian auto exporters fear selective relaxations. "The White House said the tariff would apply not only to fully assembled cars but also to key automobile parts, including engines, transmissions, powertrain parts, and electrical components. That list could expand over time to encompass additional parts. As of now, engine components, powertrains, and transmissions are India's largest auto component exports. From a competitive position, things remain the same. The problem will be if there are selective relaxations, if US demand slumps as goods become more expensive, or if China undercuts through opaque subsidies," the source said.

The fresh tariffs are significant as North America — primarily the US — and Europe are the largest export markets for Indian auto components, showing significant growth in FY24, according to the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA)'s annual report. Asia remains a key market, although its growth was stable, and Germany is also a notable export destination, according to the report. Notably, India's auto component exports — including drive transmission, steering, and engine components — reached \$21.2 billion in FY24, reflecting 5.5 per cent growth. This was primarily driven by robust demand from markets such as North America and Europe, which con-



tributed nearly 32 per cent each. The other key markets for Indian exports are Asia and West Asia. However, overall growth has remained flat compared to the previous year.

Why reduction of import duty may be counterproductive. Stressing that the Indian auto sector contributes nearly one-third of the country's manufacturing GDP, a Global Trade and Research Institute (GTRI) report cautioned against reducing tariffs on passenger cars to avoid US tariffs, warning that such a move could prove counterproductive. "The Australian experience offers a cautionary tale. When Australia reduced its import tariffs from 45 per cent to 5 per cent in the late 1980s, it paved the way for the eventual collapse of its domestic auto manufacturing industry. With the Indian auto sector contributing nearly one-third of the country's manufacturing GDP, any similar misstep must be avoided. Preserving the stability of the Indian auto sector is vital," the report said. The US imported \$89 billion worth of auto parts globally last year, with Mexico accounting for \$36 billion, China for \$10.1 billion, and India for just \$2.2 billion, the GTRI report noted, adding that the new tariffs could also open up export opportunities for India. Indian auto part manufacturers in the US. Several Indian companies that manufacture auto components also have a presence in the US through their subsidiaries or joint ventures, including Gurugram-based Sona Comstar, Pune-based Bharat Forge, the Matheron group, TVS Holdings, and JK Fenner. The fresh tariffs could incentivise these companies and others to pursue expansion plans in the US; however, making competitive products is likely to be difficult.

India's e-retail market overtakes US with \$60 billion size but growth halves in 2024: Here's why



Even as India has emerged as a key market for e-commerce, with the sector surging to approximately \$60 billion in gross merchandise value (GMV), boasting the world's second-largest online shopper base, growth in this segment last year halved to 10-12 per cent compared to historical growth rates of 20 per cent, according to a report by Flipkart and Bain & Company. However, despite near-term macroeconomic headwinds, the long-term prospects remain strong, the report said. Three key disruptions, quick commerce, trend-first commerce (especially in fashion), and hyper-value commerce, will define the next chapter of growth, it added.

India's consumption and discretionary spending have faced headwinds in recent years, with private consumption growth slowing from 11 per cent in the pre-Covid (2017-19) period to around 8 per cent post-Covid (2022-24), the report said. "This decline is driven by higher inflation and a stagnation of real wages. The stress in consumption is evident in e-retail growth in 2024 being 10-12 per cent, compared to historical growth rates of over 20 per cent," it added. However, the recent fiscal and monetary policy interventions are expected to drive a rebound in e-retail growth, especially from the festive period of 2025, on account of revival in the consumption cycle, the report said. The e-

tail market is expected to scale to \$170-190 billion by 2030, growing at over 18 per cent annually. Nearly 1 in 10 retail dollars is projected to be spent on e-retail by 2030, fueled by an uptick in discretionary spending as India's GDP per capita crosses the crucial \$3,500-4,000 threshold, a key tipping point observed in e-retail spending globally, the report said. High-frequency categories such as grocery, lifestyle, and general merchandise will drive e-retail growth, accounting for two out of every three dollars spent on e-retail by 2030. These categories are set to see a two- to four-fold increase in e-retail penetration over this period, per the report. There has also been a change in the online shopping landscape in India. "User adoption is already spreading from Tier-2 to Tier-3 cities, with three in five new shoppers since 2020 coming from cities designated Tier-3 or smaller. This growth is unlocking access for consumers in remote, brand-starved areas, as evidenced by the 1.2 times higher e-retail shopper penetration in the Northeast compared to the rest of India. The seller base is also diversifying, with 60 per cent of new sellers since 2021 hailing from Tier-2 or smaller cities," the report said. Quick commerce accounted for over two-thirds of all e-grocery orders and a tenth of overall e-retail dollars, and is projected to grow at over 40 per cent annually through 2030, driven by expansion across categories, geographies, and customer segments. Trend-first commerce is also rapidly gaining momentum in India. Trend-first fashion alone is expected to grow four fold, reaching approximately \$8 to \$10 billion by 2028, with more than half of this revenue from online sales, the report said. Hyper-value commerce — ultra-low price assortment — has seen a global surge, exemplified by the success of Temu in the US. In India, hyper-value commerce's contribution to e-retail has scaled from around 5 per cent of e-retail GMV in 2021 to more than 12 per cent in 2024. These platforms have gained strong traction among lower-middle-income consumers, particularly in Tier-2 or smaller cities, by focusing on an affordable product assortment.

Parliamentary panel flags issues faced by MSMEs, exporters under GST; suggests easier compliance, fast tracking refunds

Public Accounts Committee, MSMEs, exporters, issues faced by MSMEs, Micro Small and Medium Enterprises, Goods and Services tax (GST), Indian express news, current affairs The Committee also pointed out that the existing mechanisms for return filing are still inadequate, resulting in prolonged waiting periods for refunds and potential cash flow challenges for businesses.

The parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has flagged the issues being faced by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and exporters under the indirect tax regime of Goods and Services Tax (GST), asking the Ministry of Finance to implement a simplified compliance framework for smaller businesses, to fast track and automate return filing, refund processing that includes reducing the frequency of return filings and a more straightforward online reporting process. In its report presented to Parliament on Wednesday, the Committee also underlined the need for a dedicated fast-track refund processing system for exporters, ensuring that input tax credit (ITC) claims related to exports are prioritised and processed within a specified timeframe. The Committee also pointed out that the existing mechanisms for return filing are still inadequate, resulting in prolonged waiting periods for refunds and potential cash flow challenges for businesses. The Committee has recommended to the Ministry of Finance to implement a more efficient and transparent refund processing system with clear timelines for processing claims and regular updates to taxpayers on the status of their refunds.

Suggesting use of AI tools for data analytics for more accurate revenue projections, the Committee said the share of indirect taxes in total revenue receipts declined to 36.92 per cent in FY20 from 38.76 per cent in FY18, with fluctuations observed in subsequent years. The Ministry of Finance in its response to the Committee attributed the decline to macroeconomic factors such as import volumes, global economic conditions, and changes in tax policy, including reductions in duty rates on imports under free trade agreements. The Committee, however, pointed out that the Ministry has not provided a comprehensive strategy to mitigate these influences for a steady growth in indirect tax rev-



enue. "The Committee observed that the Ministry should develop a proactive strategy that ensures timely assessments of the impact of macroeconomic factors on tax collection and provides an accurate projection of the revenue to be collected, with the help of state of the art data analytics and AI tools," it said. On the issue of multiple registrations required by businesses across states, the Committee raised concerns that the lack of correct procedural validations has led to instances of non-compliance and administrative burdens for businesses. "...these issues not only create confusion for taxpayers but also hinder effective tax administration and the Ministry needs to ensure that taxes due are collected on time. To address this issue, the Committee recommended that the Ministry consider enhancing the functionality of the GST portal to facilitate easier management of multiple registrations by the same users/companies as permissible under GST Act/Rules, allowing taxpayers to view and manage their registrations in a user-friendly manner," it said. The parliamentary panel also suggested that regular consultations should be held with industry stakeholders to gather feedback on the challenges faced in managing multiple registrations to enable the Ministry to make informed adjustments to the system as needed. It recommended creating a unique business ID for enabling simultaneous tracking of multiple registrations by the same business entity in different states.

Not enough medium-sized companies in India, 'an institutional, structural problem': Niti CEO

INDIA DOES NOT have enough medium-sized firms that can scale into large companies, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam said Wednesday. At the launch of a new initiative for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), he said the segment is most affected by regulation, while technology upgradation and skilling remain key challenges. "Sometimes when I think of the Indian economy, I worry. We have a large number of large companies. The number of medium companies is smaller than the number of large companies. Then, where is the growth going to come from? It's an institutional, structural problem," Subrahmanyam said. India has approximately 6.18 crore MSMEs, comprising 6.09 crore micro, 7.44 lakh small, and 70,000 medium enterprises, as per the latest Udyam portal data. Udyam is the only government portal for MSME registration. In 2020, micro enterprises were defined as those with investments up to Rs 1 crore and annual turnover up to Rs 5 crore. The threshold for small enterprises was Rs 10 crore in investment and Rs 50 crore in turnover, while for medium enterprises, it was Rs 50 crore in investment and Rs 250 crore in turnover, respectively. The Union Budget 2025-26 revised these limits, increasing the investment cap by 2.5 times and the turnover cap by two times. "If you don't have enough medium companies, how will you get the large companies? Our country has a problem in converting micro to small, small to medium," he said. In 2023-24, 1,835 micro enterprises expanded into medium enterprises, while 15,918 small enterprises transitioned into medium enterprises, according to the MSME ministry.

"It's not only about laws and regulation, it is actually how you handhold them to become big, and I think Dx-EDGE is a first step in that direction," Subrahmanyam said. Dx-EDGE, a new initiative by the Confederation of Indian

Industry (CII), NITI Frontier Tech Hub, and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), is built on a public-private-academia partnership (PPAP) framework to technologically empower MSMEs for resilience and competitiveness. For instance, if an entrepreneur needs technology to improve production or management, a local university or college will mentor them, providing the necessary upskilling to enhance their business. "We have six crore MSMEs. There is no way the government can reach all of them. Even the CII can't. The only way is with every engineering college, every student in the country reaching out, and in the process, you are actually tackling two problems — helping MSMEs while giving students real-life exposure and experience," Subrahmanyam said. He said compared with large companies, MSMEs are most affected by regulation. "A big company can hire a big consultant or an accounting firm to give solutions. MSMEs will get crushed by the weight of regulation. The Prime Minister has taken a major step in deregulation. There's a massive task force under the Cabinet Secretary and work is going on to rapidly ensure deregulation of land issues, electricity issues, water issues," the NITI Aayog CEO said.

In addition to regulation, Subrahmanyam also identified technology upgradation and skilling as key problems faced by MSMEs, primarily due to limited R&D investment and inability to afford extensive training for employees. Moreover, the process for obtaining quality certifications — essential for exports — also needs to be streamlined, he said. According to the NITI Aayog CEO, growth of MSMEs is critical to the Viksit Bharat goal, alongside education and skilling. "Without investing in the growth of MSMEs, to think that you will become a developed economy is a mirage," he said. "MSMEs are the biggest segment in terms of manufacturing, in terms of exports, in terms of GDP."

Moeen and Varun choke RR's batting rhythm, then De Kock puts on masterclass in KKR's impressive win against RR

GNS News Agency, March 29

Synopsis: Moeen Ali steps in for Sunil Narine as KKR spinners hunt in a pair. Then Quinton De Kock stamps his class during the chase, in the process gives grief to Jofra Archer. If 200-plus scores were getting to be too much of a run fest, the slowish wicket in Guwahati provided a challenge for the batsmen and brought the spinners into play. Rajasthan Royals innings never got going after Varun Chakaravarty and Moeen Ali struck vital blows. Kolkata Knight Riders were always in control of the chase as Quinton De Kock produced a masterclass with a mix of power-hitting and smart batting.



Sanju Samson's early dismissal, trying to charge fast bowler Vaibhav Arora and getting yorked, was a setback for RR, but what followed once the KKR spinners were brought on was a mini disaster. Wanindu Hasaranga at No.5 was Rajasthan's attempt to disturb the rhythm of the Kolkata spinners but his innings lasted just four balls. A young Hasaranga's stronger suit was batting before he made a name as a mystery spinner. Hasaranga in the middle, with Moeen Ali and Varun Chakaravarty operating, was a smart gamble. But the surface at the Barsapara Cricket Stadium was not a batting paradise. The spinners got the ball to grip. Hasaranga stuck to his brief but taking on Varun on a slow wicket is fraught with danger. Hasaranga had failed to clear the ropes once, but unperturbed he had another go. Varun's ball skidded yet Hasaranga had already set his mind on finding the deep mid-wicket fence. He mis-cued to Ajinkya Rahane at mid-off.

On either side of the Hasaranga wicket, off-spinner Ali, in for an ill Sunil Narine, took out the two left-handers when bowling around the wicket. The first wicket, that of Yashasvi Jaiswal, was a touch fortunate because the bat turned in the batsman's hand. But credit to Ali for flighting the ball and getting Jaiswal to come down the track only to be caught at the long-on boundary. Jaiswal did show some intent, but Nitish Rana just played into the off-spinner's hands. Rana first showed his cards early by moving to the leg side to expose the stumps. Ali slowed down the pace and the ball gripped and turned. Rana was too far away from the line as he tried to steer to short third man but the bat got nowhere close to the ball. Kolkata Knight Riders' Varun Chakaravarty celebrates with skipper Ajinkya Rahane during IPL 2025 match against Rajasthan Royals in Guwahati. (Sportspics for IPL) Kolkata Knight Riders' Varun Chakaravarty celebrates with skipper Ajinkya Rahane during the IPL 2025 match against Rajasthan Royals in Guwahati. (Sportspics for IPL)

Ryan Parag, the stand-in skipper, was the first batsman to fall to spin. After Samson's dismissal, Parag, batting at No.3 wanted to be the aggressor. The third ball he faced, he smashed Harshit Rana to the square leg boundary for a six. His best shot of the day was against Vaibhav Arora. The overpitched ball was there to be hit and Parag just half-punched the lofted drive to look elegant. When Varun erred in his length on the shorter side, Parag went onto the backfoot and smashed him over deep midwicket for a six. But two balls later, Varun struck. Parag tried to hit the bowler back over his head for another six but the ball

was turning away a wee bit. The slight change in trajectory was enough for Parag to mis-hit. Parag in the 8th over, Jasiwal in the 9th, Hasaranga in the 10th, Rana in the 11th – four wickets in quick succession to the spinners resulted in the wheels coming off Rajasthan's innings. Tearaway quick Jofra Archer had a forgettable night against Sunrisers Hyderabad, conceding 76 runs in his four overs, the most expensive spell in IPL's history. On Wednesday, Archer seemed to have put that horrible evening behind him. Taking first strike for KKR was his former England teammate Ali and Archer hit the mid-140s right away. Ali played and missed four times in the first over as Archer was on the money. But Quinton De Kock isn't one to get bogged down by reputation or serious pace. He has the shots to inflict serious damage. De Kock pounced on the slightest error from Archer. The first ball of the third over was a wide one from Archer. De Kock cut it with ease for a four. Fifth ball of the over was not short but De Kock had enough time to go back and smash it for a six between long-on and deep mid-wicket. Thirteen runs conceded in his second over and Archer was out of the attack. Archer finished the night conceding at 13.20 runs per over. On the slowish wicket, KKR needed someone to bat sensibly, more so when facing spinners in the middle overs. Hasaranga and Maheesh Theekshana, two spinners with tricks up their sleeve, were the dangermen. But Parag, at best a part-time spinner, was the weak link. Captain Ajinkya Rahane didn't get hold of a wrong 'un from Hasaranga and skied the ball to be caught inside the circle. At 70 for 2 in the 11th over, KKR wasn't in deep trouble but could not afford any silly shots. De Kock took charge. Two sixes, the first one when facing Hasaranga over long on to bring up his fifty and another over mid wicket, Parag the bowler this time, pushed the spinners on the defensive. Soon he showed class to hit Hasaranga back along the ground for a four. There was one bad-looking shot from De Kock — a reverse scoop when facing Sandeep Sharma. The thick edge resulted in the ball landing at short fine leg. But for the rest of the innings, he was untroubled. On nights like this, when almost every ball he hits comes off the middle of the bat, De Kock can be difficult to contain. With the asking rate within reach, De Kock was happy to push the ball around singles for a short phase. Then, when Archer was brought back on in the 18th over, with 17 runs needed, De Kock didn't spare him. A four to mid on, a six to fine leg and another six down the ground. The QdK show was complete.

Emma Raducanu says she felt dizzy during quarterfinal loss at Miami Open

GNS News Agency, March 29

22-year-old Briton Emma Raducanu said she "felt really dizzy" during her narrow quarterfinal loss to World No. 4 Jessica Pegula at the Miami Open on Wednesday. Despite needing medical treatment, Raducanu levelled the match before American Pegula regained control to win 6-4, 6-7 (3-7), 6-2. "I just felt really dizzy," Raducanu told TennisOne.



"I felt faint. It was very humid out there, and we had a long wait, so maybe it was just an accumulation. (There were) just physical points as well, with long rallies and heavy conditions. I don't know how I kind of regrouped in that second set but in the third I definitely struggled a little bit." While she was seemingly feeling the brunt of the conditions, the World No. 60 played some of her best tennis since becoming a teenage Grand Slam champion at the 2021 US Open. She held a 5-2 lead and had four set points in the eighth game, before calling to see the doctor. She had her blood pressure taken and was given ice towels to cool down before resuming. But she could not see the job through as Pegula demonstrated why she is one of the most consistent competitors on the WTA Tour. "It was tough. I played a good first set, a little let down in the second, got it back,

went up 2-0 in the tiebreak, but it kind of flipped. "She started moving the ball really well, serving good... sometimes it just happens, but I just wanted to come out in the third really strong, really quick, and just kind of jump on her and not keep the third set too close." Despite her loss to Pegula, Raducanu showed that she can still compete with the world's best. In Miami, there were eye-catching victories over top-20 opponents Emma Navarro and Amanda Anisimova. She will also take great satisfaction from knowing she will return to the top 50 of the WTA rankings next week.

'Only KKR have no home advantage at Eden Gardens': When Ajinkya Rahane's predecessor as Knight Riders captain complained about pitch

GNS News Agency, March 29

With the Indian Premier League season just two games old for the defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), there is already trouble in the air in Kolkata with Eden Gardens pitch curator Sujan Mukherjee turning down KKR captain Ajinkya Rahane's request to provide him with pitches that aid his bowlers. Mukherjee has reportedly said that the pitch at Eden Gardens won't change as long as he's in charge. This has led to experts like Simon Doull remarking that KKR should move the team to a different venue. But this is not new. Even before Rahane, a different Kolkata Knight Riders captain had gotten into a disagreement with pitch curator Mukherjee. This was two seasons back, when KKR was led by Nitish Rana in 2023, who had expressed his displeasure at the pitch his team was being served.



Rana had gone to the extent of saying that every team in the IPL had home advantage "except KKR" at Eden Gardens. Mukherjee had defended himself by stating that he was not bound by any rule which stated that he provide

itches at the Eden Gardens as per the KKR captain's wishes. "IPL is not played on home advantage, and the captain may say anything he wants," Mukherjee said. "Does IPL have a clause where it is written that pitches have to be produced according to the wishes of the IPL franchise? ... Look at other IPL teams, like RCB and DC; they do not talk or complain about home advantage. They play on what is provided to them," Mukherjee had added.

Iga Swiatek given extra security after harassment from man during practice session

GNS News Agency, March 29

Tennis ace Iga Swiatek had to be provided with additional security protection at the Miami Open tennis tournament after she was verbally attacked during a practice session by a man. Media reports noted that the perpetrator of the verbal attack was the same person who had sent the Polish tennis star harassing messages via social media. The incident came just a month after a stalker had to be removed from a match being played by 2021 US Open champion Emma Raducanu in Dubai.



In a video released online, the man can be heard shouting at Swiatek: "Hey Iga, call your mother. Iga, when are you going to make up with your mother?"

He then made references to Swiatek's psychologist, Daria Abramowicz: "Daria runs with water, like a trained dog." The five-time Grand Slam champion lost 6-2, 7-5 to a 19-year-old wildcard, Alexandra Eala, in the quarter-finals at the Miami Open. "We monitor the network to catch these types of issues. Constructive criticism is one thing, and threats, hate speech or even disturbance during training is another — this cannot be condoned," a statement from Swiatek's team said on Wednesday. "We reported the matter to the tournament organizer, as well as to the WTA ... which reacted immediately and took additional precautions, such as additional security, for which we are very

grateful." Ensuring the safety of the players is crucial — they are the ones at the center of the event — and it is our job to protect them," the statement from Swiatek's team said. Asked at the post-match press conference whether the security situation had disrupted her match preparations, Swiatek replied: "No, I wouldn't say so." The Miami Open issued a statement saying: "We take the safety and security of all players and tournament attendees extremely seriously. We constantly evaluate any potential threats and take every measure to respond appropriately. To ensure the effectiveness of these efforts, we do not disclose the details of our security operations."

How Anahat Singh is focussing on the long-game as she takes up the senior circuit challenge

GNS News Agency, March 29

Trailing the best-of-five match 1-2, and down 1-3 in the fourth, India's squash sensation Anahat Singh pulled off one of the most impressive wins of her career in the quarterfinals of JSW Indian Open at the Bombay Gymkhana on Wednesday. It wasn't that the opponent, 17-year-old Egyptian Nadien Elhamamy, was higher-ranked or a much better player, but having lost to her on two occasions in the junior circuit, Anahat had more than a point to prove. With the World Juniors coming up this July, it was good for the Indian to get a win over her.

however, intensive gym sessions have taken a backseat. "During tournament season, it's tough to train too hard because you risk getting sore or injured. But once the season slows down, I'll spend more time in the gym."

The victory will also give Anahat — who turned 17 this month — the much-needed confidence that she's on the right path as she navigates a tricky juncture in her career, transitioning from juniors to the professional senior circuit. A shift that she says "demands more than just raw talent". While Anahat is in a transition phase, the sport itself is transitioning too, having finally been included in the Olympic Games for LA 2028. It means that Anahat has to focus on rankings too while she is redefining her approach to the game. Having dominated junior squash, she has now largely moved on from the circuit, playing only the biggest junior events such as the British Junior Open and the World Juniors to maintain her ranking. "I don't play the smaller junior tournaments anymore—just the main ones that count," Anahat told this shift has meant she has to make several changes to her game. "The transition from juniors to seniors is completely different. In juniors, I was winning because my basic game was strong, and I loved playing. But in seniors, strength and nutrition matter so much more. It's not just about what happens on court—off-court preparation is just as important." Anahat acknowledges that adapting to the physicality of the senior circuit is a work in progress. "When you're younger, you're not supposed to do too much weight training, but now I'm getting more into it. Everyone says I need to work on my strength more, so that's a big focus." With a packed tournament schedule,

"The problem is that she doesn't really have an off-season. "For seniors, the summer is the off-season, but since I still play some junior tournaments, my junior off-season is my senior on-season and vice versa. I'm constantly traveling," she says. Apart from the physical aspects, Anahat is also embracing the mental demands of senior-level squash. "Mental conditioning is huge. In seniors, matches are not just about skill but also about how well you can handle pressure." Her mentor, Indian squash legend Saurav Ghosal, concurs. "We've seen that in matches, her mental toughness has ups and downs. On the senior circuit, it's imperative that it doesn't happen. But she's still young. We don't want to put too much pressure on her and wear her down. There are a lot of changes she needs to make to her game, too, but we're only making subtle changes. Our aim is to enter the top 10, so we have to take everything slowly," he says. Anahat's rise has made her a strong contender to represent India at the Olympics, though she isn't thinking ahead too much. One thing is certain — she has to maintain her rankings. "You can only start playing PSA when you're 15, so I could only get my membership at 15. But I wasn't really at the level to compete in the bigger tournaments then," Anahat admits. Her early days on the PSA tour were spent playing smaller events, as her ranking wasn't high enough to qualify for the premier competitions. Now, with a PSA ranking of 68, she is gradually breaking into more elite tournaments. "The criteria for the Olympics are a bit confusing, and you never want to be stressing out at the last moment about whether you're in or out. Right now, being in the top is important, just to be confident that you're going to make it." As she continues to bridge the gap between dominating the junior field to finding her footing on the senior circuit, she remains focused on the long game. "

Shooter Joydeep Karmakar's suspension will be discussed, says National Rifle Association of India

GNS News Agency, March 29

The suspension of Arjuna award recipient Joydeep Karmakar from all shooting activities in West Bengal by the state body will be "discussed at the appropriate level", the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) said on Thursday. The West Bengal Rifle Association's (WBRA) move to bar Karmakar, currently, a rifle coach, from activities related to shooting in the state came after the Olympian questioned selections for the 2025 National Games held in Uttarakhand early this year. "That will be discussed at appropriate level. It (Karmakar's letter) came yesterday. It will go to the NRAI president," said NRAI secretary Rajiv Bhatia. Karmakar represented India in rifle prone events in various international tournaments and narrowly missed a medal at the Rio Olympics in 2016. The WBRA said, before going ahead with its decision to suspend him, it had showed caused Karmakar for an objectionable post on social networking site Facebook. Karmakar alleged that some WBRA officials were involved in corrupt practices and the selection of the state team for the National Games was not fair.



WBRA, in an official communication, issued him a show cause notice and suspended him from all shooting activities on February 12. Now, Karmakar has requested the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) to step in the matter in the hope of a resolution. "We have show caused him (on February 12) for the objectionable post on Facebook and based on the showcase he has been barred from any activity in the state till he gives a reply to it." He (Karmakar) has asked for some time and we are waiting for his reply. I cannot comment further on this," said Deb Kumar Samanta, the secretary general at WBRA. "This is a standard legal procedure that's followed so that there is no injustice to anybody," he added. In 2015, the rifleman started an academy named JKSA (Joydeep Karmakar Shooting Academy) in Kolkata, in which hundreds of shooters receive training.

"National Games Shooting Team is rigged! onus goes to West Bengal Rifle Association - WBRA! They are even bogged down to a few!", he had posted on January 18. "Corruption in a different level! West Bengal selecting Shooters who are 250th ranking or more neglecting 20th National Ranked shooter!". "There's no pride in selecting 200+ ranking athlete in National Games by West Bengal Rifle Association - WBRA neglecting a National Rank 20th." The

Tsunoda replaces struggling Lawson in Red Bull ahead of Japanese Grand Prix

GNS News Agency, March 29

Formula One driver Yuki Tsunoda will race for Red Bull (Oracle Red Bull Racing), starting from his home race in the Japanese Grand Prix with the New Zealander Liam Lawson demoted back to sister team Racing Bulls (Visa Cash App Racing Bulls) in a straight-seat swap, the organisation announced on Thursday.

sprint and main race in the China Grand Prix, respectively. "It has been difficult to see Liam struggle with the RB21 at the first two races and as a result we have collectively taken the decision to make an early switch. We came into the 2025 season, with two ambitions, to retain the World Drivers' Championship and to reclaim the World Constructors' title and this is a purely sporting decision," said Christian Horner, Team Principal and CEO of Red Bull racing. "We acknowledge there is a lot of work to be done with the RB21 and Yuki's experience will prove highly beneficial in helping to develop the current car. We welcome him to the Team and are looking forward to seeing him behind the wheel of the RB21. We have a duty of care to protect and develop Liam and together, we see that after such a difficult start, it makes sense to act quickly so Liam can gain experience, as he continues his F1 career with Visa Cash App Racing Bulls, an environment and a Team he knows very well," added Horner. Too early to switch?



Earlier, speaking to Sky Sports F1 Lawson felt that he would have been better off if he did more testing. "We are two races in and we are racing. You would love to have 60 test days. I know a lot of the other guys tested a lot outside of the season," he said. "Unfortunately, it's not something we did but there's nothing we can do. It's just one of those things. It's not an excuse, just something I have to get on top of," added the New Zealander.

The speculation around the second Red Bull seat started after Lawson failed to get a single point in the first two races (three effectively including Sprint in Shanghai). The 23-year-old made a DNF in the inaugural race at the Australian Grand Prix before finishing 14th and 16th in both

Mohanlal and Prithviraj's visual spectacle could have benefitted from better writing

Empuraan Movie Review & Rating: Making a sequel is no simple feat, especially for a movie whose popularity and acclaim have only grown over the years. The challenge becomes even greater if the success of the first installment was largely due to its writing. While crafting a sequel for such a movie, avoiding the trap of "enlarging it to satisfy the hype" is crucial, as is having a clear understanding of what made the original beloved by audiences. In the case of Lucifer (2019), actor Prithviraj Sukumaran's directorial debut, its appeal stemmed from a distinctive visual aesthetic — unlike anything seen before in Malayalam cinema — layered writing with well-balanced characterisations and a measured exploration of all themes and incidents introduced, technical brilliance across various departments, and above all, the commanding (omni)presence of "L". However, for its highly ambitious sequel L2: Empuraan, things aren't entirely in its favour. Yet, it wouldn't be an overstatement to claim that the very person the film positions as the sole savior for God's Own Country has, to a great extent, saved the movie itself, overshadowing its shortcomings; and that is none other than Khureshi Ab'raam alias Stephen Nedumpally (Mohanlal). Set about five years after the events of Lucifer, Empuraan's core conflict is summed up in Stephen's words: "When the son of God himself succumbs to sin, who else is there to rely upon but the Devil?" After Stephen's departure from his homeland, entrusting the leadership of his party IJF and the state of Kerala to his political godfather PK Ramdas' (Sachin Khedekar) son Jathin (Tovino Thomas), everything was stable at first. However, over time, Jathin — now Kerala's CM — becomes intoxicated by power and wealth, leading him down a path of corruption. As allegations mount, he seeks refuge in an alliance with a national party notorious for its far-right ideology and divisive politics, hoping to clear his name. But in doing so, he also opens Kerala's doors to the Hindutva-driven Akhanda Shakti Morcha (ASM) and its ruthless leader Balraj Patel alias Baba Bajrangi (Abhimanyu Singh). Together, they also make a massive move in Stephen's Nedumpally constituency — one that could upend the lives of commoners, particularly the tribals. Though Ramdas' elder daughter Priyadarshini (Manju Warrier) is against this, she finds herself powerless against her domineering brother. As Kerala faces the looming threat of being consumed by a force fuelled by corruption and communal politics — and with God nowhere to be found — there is only one hope: the return of Lucifer. Will the mafia don Khureshi Ab'raam — now living far removed from this chaos — step back into the scene, clad in a dhoti and with his moustache twirled, set to fearlessly challenge his rivals with a single word:

"Vaada (Come)?"

Unlike Lucifer, where the first act was dedicated to establishing characters, their dynamics and their stakes in the battle, Empuraan opens with an extended flashback, shedding light on the past of Khureshi's confidant Zayed Masood (Prithviraj), orphaned during the 2002 Gujarat pogrom — an atrocity directly linked to Balraj. Interestingly, Zayed's backstory unfolds with a focus on drama and emotional depth rather than mere spectacle. In contrast to typical pan-Indian action entertainers that use every moment in the first act to hype up the male lead or showcase their over-the-top stunts, Empuraan remains grounded, with absolute focus on world-building and storytelling.

While the sequence is intensely violent, Prithviraj exercises restraint in depicting brutality, avoiding excessive gore that could feel gratuitous or overly distressing. One particularly harrowing moment features Balraj's men attacking a pregnant Muslim woman — a chilling reminder of the Naroda Patiya massacre, where a similar atrocity was reported. This moment also makes it evident that Abhimanyu Singh's character being named "Baba Bajrangi" was no coincidence. However, rather than depicting the violence against the woman explicitly, Prithviraj relies on powerful visual storytelling, making the audience feel the horror without showing it directly. Through this gut-wrenching sequence, Prithviraj and writer Murali Gopy establish two crucial elements: that Balraj is an even more merciless antagonist than Lucifer's Bobby (Vivek Oberoi) and that the characters' past holds significant weight in Empuraan's conflicts. Murali's script here, however, reduces the entire episode to a mere case of "one (or more) power-hungry politician's greed", unfairly erasing its communal dimension, thus suggesting that religious bigotry is almost non-existent and failing to acknowledge the event as ethnic cleansing. As the narrative moves forward, Murali also struggles to maintain the dramatic tension, and the writing takes a noticeable dip, which only worsens as the film progresses. With the introduction of the present-day dynamics between the Khureshi-Ab'raam nexus and its rival, the Shen Triad, Empuraan expands into the global landscape of organised crime, even bringing intelligence agencies like MI6 into the mix. From this point on, Prithviraj's skill as a director in orchestrating large-scale visuals becomes apparent. The film consistently reinforces his earlier claim that a significant portion of Empuraan's budget was spent on production rather than actor remunerations, setting it apart from most pan-Indian films. Despite the grandeur, nothing feels excessive or out of place either, and

Prithviraj maintains tight control over the movie, ensuring that the scale enhances rather than overwhelms the story. Even then, Khureshi's entry is deliberately (and brilliantly) delayed. By frequently shifting between the escalating turmoil in Kerala and the rising tension in the crime world, the film effectively builds anticipation. This slow burn helps in creating an eagerness in the audience for his return. And then, at long last, Lucifer makes his grand entrance, delivering the adrenaline rush that had been simmering for nearly an hour. However, the emotional depth and dramatic weight that anchored Lucifer are largely absent in Empuraan. While the visuals are undeniably impressive, a closer look at the storytelling raises the question: to what end? Even in the Kerala-set sequences, there is a noticeable lack of honesty in the narrative, with most characters feeling either out of character or robotic, except for the truth-seeker Govardhan (Indrajith Sukumaran) and Stephen's trusted aide Muthu (Murugan Martin). This lack of depth also impacts the film's high points, particularly the nighttime forest fight sequence, which could have benefitted from stronger buildup. That's not to say the scene completely falters — it is ultimately salvaged by Prithviraj's visual craftsmanship and Mohanlal's commanding presence. A striking example is a shot where the flames from a burning tree behind Stephen momentarily form what appears to be fiery horns sprouting from his head, lending him an almost Satanic aura, reminiscent of a similar frame in Mammootty's Vidheyan (1994). While the visuals and Mohanlal's screen presence reach their peak here, the narrative buildup, background score and action choreography fail to match that intensity. The interval block, though well-executed, falls short of being truly iconic again due to a lack of impactful lead-up. As in Lucifer, the women in Empuraan remain mere pawns in a male-dominated narrative, acting only as per the instructions of the men around them. Even when Priyadarshini eventually asserts herself as a political force, the moment lacks the emotional weight it aims for, due to weak character development. Another defining strength of Lucifer was its ability to give every character, no matter how small, a distinct identity. Empuraan, however, struggles in this regard and even Khureshi feels underdeveloped, let alone "main" characters like Sajanachandran (Suraj Venjaramoodu), Boris Oliver (Jerome Flynn), Kabuga (Eriq Ebouaney) and Jhanvi (Saniya Iyappan). Ironically, the only person with a fully realised arc is Zayed, which feels odd, given that the story isn't his to carry. Meanwhile, those with significant stakes in the unfolding events are sidelined, diminishing the narrative further.

Empuraan is certainly not another run-of-the-mill



pan-Indian movie that exists solely to scream "look what our star can do!" It indeed has a well-thought-out core, layered with subtext, comprising political undertones too. Although Prithviraj proves his skill as a master of spectacle, his storytelling (as a director) falls short as he struggles to compensate for the film's lack of a strong narrative. The movie's technical brilliance, bolstered by Sujith Vaassudev's stunning cinematography, is commendable. However, its excessive runtime and unnecessary prolonging of sequences weigh it down, making a tighter trim a missed opportunity. Akhilesh Mohan's editing is decent, but the action sequences suffer from a lack of organic flow, with too many cuts diminishing their impact. The colour grading also appears artificial in places, particularly in scenes set in African locations like Senegal. Stunt Silva's action choreography is underwhelming as well, though not as much as Deepak Dev's uninspired background score, which is one of the film's most glaring weaknesses. The absence of a truly electrifying score has significantly diminished Empuraan's dramatic and massy impact.

Despite these shortcomings, it is Mohanlal's commanding presence that prevents the film from slipping into monotony. Even when he is off-screen, his presence is felt; and when he finally appears, he commands the frame with effortless charisma. While his character is often shrouded in darkness, with minimal light falling on him, even when fully illuminated, a look at him makes one feel as if they are staring into an abyss, a testament to the Malayalam superstar's magnetic screen presence. Apart from the somewhat clichéd mafia boss costumes, Mohanlal fully embodies Empuraan, "the flower of darkness that blossomed between the Father and the Son, the Overlord of the dark spheres". While Team Lucifer has every reason to proceed with the planned third installment,

Salman Khan on Sikandar and doing action over the years: 'Every bone in my body has been broken 2-3 times'

Makers of Vikram-starrer Veera Dheera Sooran clears all decks; film finally hits the big screen. Here's what happened

Unshackled and raring to prove the world wrong, the 'Mega Power Star' knows how to stage a comeback

"Ab dekho uthe-baithe par koi comment nahi," says Salman Khan, laughing, as he sits down to address the media ahead of the release of his Eid release, Sikandar. Directed by AR Murugadoss, the film brings back the superstar in his signature action avatar on his staple festival. He cheekily brought up the comments around his weight in this group interaction, where he also talked about his 'mass' avatar, whether he was considered for Murugadoss' 2008 blockbuster Ghajini, and how he faced rejection in early days because of his legendary screenwriter-father Salim Khan's bratty reputation.

Your films release on Eid, but they cater to all religions. Where does this secularism come from?

It comes from the love and values I've received from my family. When my mom (Salma Khan) and dad got married, they obviously come from two different cultures and religions. There was no Hindu-Muslim contention there. The contention was that he was from the film industry. My nana had a problem with that, not anything else. Five years later, when Sohail (Khan, Salman's youngest brother) was born, he said his life's biggest mistake was not meeting Salim all this while. My mom once came back to her parents' home after a fight with my father, so my nana said, "Dekho tumhari arthi wahin se uthegi. You can come stay here, but can't abandon him. He's your husband. He's a good man. You should stay with him." So I don't know what magic spell my father cast on my grandfather. There's a dialogue in the trailer of Sikandar: "Tum log mujhe bahar dhoondh rahe ho, main tumhara ghar pe intezaar kar raha hu." Is that a hark back to your father's iconic dialogue from Deewaar (1975)?

Salim-Javed. It's not a hark back, I've just twisted that dialogue. There's another dialogue in the film: "Ye Deewar ka Amitabh Bachchan nahi, jo feke hue paise nahi uthata. Iske mooh mein paise maaro." So there's a bit of reminiscence, a bit of keeping those dialogues alive. What else is there to it? It's not a case of copyright infringement. I've put my father's dialogue. There's another dialogue: "Itni popularity to hai, PM-CM ka pata nahi, MLA toh ban hi jaunga." So, any political ambitions in real life?

There's another dialogue after that in the picture, "I'm not interested. Because it's not my field." So that's also there. There's one more dialogue, which you can see in the film. See, as long as someone doesn't know governance and administration, they shouldn't even attempt it. I don't even know how to do this job (acting) too well. I'm content with that.

Iulia Vantur has sung a reshaped version of Lata Mangeshkar's iconic song Lag Ja Gale in the trailer. Was that your input too?

Music is very confusing now. Like we used an old melody in Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan (2023). But everyone started saying it's an old song, old melody. A melody is a melody, sir. The music scene is quite different now. But I follow the same music that I follow. You can listen to the music in the car and also dance with your friends to it.

Do you find it more difficult to do action films as you age? Every bone of my body has been broken twice or thrice. Every ligament has been torn 2-3 times. We didn't even get to rest then. There were no body shots in this film. If there were, I'd have gotten lean in a couple of weeks. That's not a big deal. I have a six-pack even when I'm not lean. My muscle is so huge that even if I get some fat, it starts protruding. People make an issue out of this, but it's not an issue for me. If you get a six-pack but weigh only 55 kg, then what's the point?

National Award-winning actor Vikram has faced significant delays in the release of his highly anticipated films. One of the most notable among them is Gautham Vasudev Menon's Dhruva Natchathiram, which continues to struggle with release issues. So, it is fair to assume that Vikram fans were in for a shock when SU Arun Kumar's Veera Dheera Sooran, which was supposed to be released on March 27, failed to hit the screens on the scheduled time of 9 am. The delay continued with the noon shows also getting cancelled. But the delay wasn't as bad as Dhruva Natchathiram, and the makers of Veera Dheera Sooran has finally cleared all decks, and the evening shows will start as planned.

The issues started with



Mumbai-based production company B4U, which held the rights to sell Veera Dheera Sooran's OTT rights before its release, filing a case against HR Pictures in the Delhi HC for announcing the release of the film before finalizing the OTT deal. The Delhi HC ordered an interim stay of the film's release un-

til 10:30 am IST, and ordered the producers to deposit Rs 7 crore and submit the required documents within 48 hours. In fact, the court also ordered the release to be pushed by four weeks. But with a lot riding on the release, it was expected that the stakeholders of the film would arrive at an amicable solution soon. In fact, noted distributor Tirupur Subramaniam shared, in a statement, that the legal issues would be resolved soon, and the shows would start in the evening. And now, the makers have assured that the shows will resume in the evening. A post by HR Pictures read, "Theatrical Screening begin worldwide! Witness our Chiyaan Vikram as Kaali. Get ready for an action-packed ride, Don't miss out on this epic adventure! An SU Arun Kumar Picture. A GV Prakash musical." Veera Dheera Sooran, directed by Arun Kumar, stars SJ Suryah, Suraj Venjaramoodu, and Dushara Vijayan in pivotal roles. With music by GV Prakash Kumar, the film is backed by Riya Shibu under the HR Pictures banner.

'Jab itni gandi pictures banengi to flop to honghi hi,' says Salman Khan: 'Directors make movies for all the wrong reasons'

Salman Khan is currently busy promoting his upcoming film, Sikandar. During a recent media interaction, Salman openly discussed various topics, including his film, personal life, and the challenges Bollywood faces in the post-pandemic era. Salman unapologetically said, "Jab itni gandi pictures banengi to flop to honghi hi. Jab banti hi gandi films hain (When people will make bad films, it will surely flop. They only make bad films)." He continued, "Including my own film, if it doesn't work, it is a bad film. If it works, it is a very good film."

Salman Khan, who has not really had a hit since his 2018 film Prem Ratan Dhan Payo, shared stars are responsible if a film flops. He said, "The star is the one who is seen on the poster, in the theatre. The blame would be on him too if the films don't work." Salman, who has been in the industry for over three decades, claimed that quality work is not being done. He said directors are competing with directors and producers with producers. "Everyone wants to show the other person how a movie is made. No, you have got to make a film for the audience. You have to write it in such a way that you are sitting in the front row and enjoying it. Don't think 'inko samajh nahi aayega (the audience won't get it)'. How can you say that? Then you start spoon-feeding the audience. But the audience has gone way ahead. With the OTT platforms coming in, the audience has access to any film and all types of cinema from anywhere," said the star. Salman Khan further claimed that people make



films today when they have the actor's date, or funding. "Our directors and producers are making films for the wrong reasons. My father told me this the other day. A film should only be made once you have the best script ever. Nothing else." AR Murugadoss directorial Sikandar, starring Salman Khan and Rashmika Mandanna in the lead roles, is all set to hit the theatres on March 30.