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## ITC to acquire Hyderabad-based 24 Mantra Organic for Rs 472.50 crore

New Delhi: Multi-conglomerate ITC will acquire Sresta Natural Bioproducts, which owns the '24 Mantra Organic' brand, in an all-cash deal valued at Rs 472.50 crore, to expand its play in the fast-growing organic food products. ITC has signed a share purchase agreement with Sresta Natural Bioproducts Private Limited (SNBPL) to acquire a 100 per cent stake in the company, ITC informed in a regulatory filing.

Besides, ITC also announced the acquisition of the remaining 73.5 per cent stake of Mother Sparsh Baby Care, an associate company. ITC had acquired a 26.5 per cent stake in D2C company Mother Sparsh in 2022.

## Hyderabad braces for more t hundershowers amid lingering heat

Hyderabad: The sequence of scattered thunderstorms coupled with high temperatures and humid conditions during this year's summer has continued to prevail in Hyderabad and parts of Telangana. On Friday, people in several parts of Hyderabad enjoyed moments of reprieve from intense heat when the sun played hide and seek with the dark clouds. However, certain parts of the city were not as fortunate, with local temperatures hovering between 38 degree Celsius and 39 degree Celsius along and humidity at 40 percent, making conditions difficult for people of Hyderabad. Meanwhile, in some more good news, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)-Hyderabad, has extended its thunderstorm warning for three more days till Monday.

## PM Modi speaks to Elon Musk about future potential collaboration in technology



GNS News Agency, April 18

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday (April 18, 2025) that he spoke to Elon Musk and talked about "various issues, including the topics we covered during our meeting in Washington DC earlier this year." Without mentioning when the conversation took place, Mr. Modi said in his post on X (formerly Twitter), that they discussed the immense potential for collaboration in the areas of technology and innovation. Spoke to @elonmusk and talked about various issues, including the topics we covered during our meeting in Washington DC earlier this year. We discussed the immense potential for collaboration in the areas of technology and innovation. IMr. Musk, one of the most influential persons in the Donald Trump administration, is spearheading the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) aimed at cutting government expenditure and reducing federal workforce. During his visit to the United States in February, Mr. Modi had met Mr. Musk in Washington DC.

## Telangana High Court issues interim order directing TGPSC to halt issuance of appointment letters

GNS News Agency, April 18

Hyderabad: Justice Namavarapu Rajeshwar Rao of the Telangana High Court on Thursday issued a significant interim order regarding the Group-I recruitment process in Telangana, directing the Telangana State Public Service Commission (TGPSC) to halt the issuance of appointment letters to provisionally selected candidates.

However, the court clarified that the process of certificate verification for these candidates can continue as scheduled. This directive came as the court heard petitions filed by a number of Group-I aspirants who have raised serious concerns about alleged irregularities in the evaluation of their mains examination answer scripts.

The petitioners have pleaded for either a re-evaluation of their answer sheets or a complete re-conduct of the mains examination, arguing that the valuation process was flawed and violated the established rules and regulations set forth by the TGPSC. While the TGPSC, represented by its standing counsel PS Rajasekhara, strongly opposed any stay on the recruitment process, Justice Rajeshwar Rao deemed it necessary to intervene, at least temporarily, regarding the issuance of appointment letters. The court observed that this interim measure is essential to ensure the integrity of the selection process and to safeguard the interests of all parties involved, pending a thorough examination of the allegations raised. With the said direction the court adjourned the matter to April 28.

## Ponguleti assures a solution for 7 lakh acres listed in Part-B lands

Hyderabad, April 18 Minister for Revenue and Housing, Pongulati Srinivas Reddy, stated that among the 18 lakh acres that were illicitly included by the previous BRS government in the disputed Part-B list, approximately six to seven lakh acres are agricultural land. He assured that these land disputes would be addressed through the newly implemented Bhu Bharati Act.

The Minister, accompanied by his Cabinet colleagues Konda Surekha and Seetakka, launched the pilot project for the Bhu Bharati Act at Venkatapur mandal headquarters in Mulugu district on Friday. Following this, Pongulati Srinivas Reddy took part in and spoke at an awareness program about the Bhu Bharati Act in Pusai village, located in the Bhoraj mandal of Adilabad district. During the programme, he explained that the purpose of the Bhu Bharati Act is to ease the struggles of the poor, highlighting the government's goal of transforming Telangana into a state free from land-related issues under the Indiramma government. "Services will be offered to farmers in a hassle-free manner. Previously, during the BRS administration, farmers had to travel to revenue offices to address their land issues. However, under the Congress administration, officials will visit farmers to assist them in resolving these problems," stated Ponguleti. The Minister mentioned that the State government will soon provide details about a toll-free number that will connect individuals to the Revenue department and the CCLA office for land issue resolution.

## CM Revanth invites Japanese investors to explore investment opportunities in TG



Tokyo, April 18 "Come to Telangana, find China +1 alternative. Invest, thrive, grow, succeed. Hyderabad will feel like home", Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has exhorted Japan Inc., at India-Japan Economic Partnership roadshow. The Chief Minister enthralled Japanese investors at Tokyo roadshow with warm, personal message of welcome and assurance. The official Telangana Rising delegation hosted a high-level Investment Roadshow at Hotel Imperial, Tokyo on Friday, spotlighting the state's thriving industrial ecosystem and inviting Japanese businesses to partner in its growth. At the event attended by over 150 participants from the Japanese business community, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy exhorted Japanese investors and businesses to come to Telangana and invest. "Konichiwa, Tokyo. Namaskaram. I bring warm greetings from my people in Telangana, India's youngest and fastest developing state in India. Japan is called the Land of the Rising Sun. Our

state's vision is Telangana Rising. Today, I am proud to say—Telangana is Rising in the Land of the Rising Sun," Revanth Reddy said. I am very happy to be in Tokyo. Your city is great, with excellent infrastructure, focus on environment and sustainability, and innovation. People of Japan are very nice, kind, respectful and disciplined. I have learnt many things from Tokyo for developing my city of Hyderabad," the Chief Minister said. The event began with remarks from His Excellency Sibi George,

Ambassador of India to Japan, who emphasized the strong and growing Indo-Japan economic ties. Toshihiro Mizutani, Director General, JETRO, Bangalore, followed with comments encouraging deeper collaboration with Telangana. Promotional videos on two flagship projects of the government namely Future City, India's first planned Net Zero industrial city, and the Musi Riverfront Rejuvenation Project, one of India's largest riverfront development projects, were released at the event. Jayesh Ranjan, Telangana special chief secretary (Industries

and Commerce), delivered a presentation outlining key investment opportunities for Japanese companies in sectors such as electronics, AI, EVs, textiles, and green energy.

Delivering the keynote address, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, extended a warm invitation to Japanese businesses to invest in the state and be part of Telangana Rising. "We offer world-class infrastructure, skilled talent, and clear and consistent policies to support your investment in several priority sectors like life sciences, GCCs, electronics, EV and Energy storage, Textiles, Food processing, AI data centres, and logistics. Let us build something extraordinary—for India, Japan, and the world."

The roadshow reaffirmed Telangana's commitment to building sustainable, innovation-driven partnerships with Japan. The roadshow was followed by several one-on-one meetings with the Telangana delegation and the top business conglomerates of Japan.

## KTR demands PM Modi to cause inquiry into 10,000 crore massive scam in Kanche Gachibowli



Hyderabad, April 18 BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao has called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to demonstrate his environmental commitment by ordering a swift investigation into the alleged destruction of Kanche Gachibowli forest and a ₹10,000 crore financial scam in Telangana. In a public appeal shared on X, KTR accused the Congress-led State government under Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy of perpetrating a massive fraud and challenged Modi to refute claims of BJP-Congress collusion in the State. The controversy surrounds the devastation of over 400 acres of ecologically critical forest land in Kanche Gachibowli, adjacent to the University of Hyderabad, which KTR described as an "environmental catastrophe" and a "grave financial fraud." The forest, home to peacocks, deer, and endangered species, is

vital for Hyderabad's groundwater levels but was allegedly cleared for an IT park and infrastructure projects, despite protests from students, environmentalists, and a Supreme Court order halting auction activities. KTR alleged that the Telangana government mortgaged 400 acres of Kanche Gachibowli land lacking legal title to secure a ₹10,000 crore loan through intermediaries, without environmental clearances or forest department approvals. "This isn't just about biodiversity loss; it's a ₹10,000 crore scam by the Congress government," he stated. The Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has confirmed financial irregularities and recommended probes by Central agencies, including the CBI, RBI, SEBI, SFIO, and CVC, to which BRS has submitted evidence. Referencing Modi's April 14 remarks in Haryana condemning Telangana's deforestation, KTR questioned if they were "mere lip service." He urged Modi to expedite investigations to prove his environmental resolve and counter allegations of BJP-Congress collusion. "It's time to show Telangana that BJP and Congress aren't colluding and that you truly care about environmental protection," KTR said. KTR accused Revanth Reddy of orchestrating the scam and deflecting blame, dismissing Reddy's claim that no wildlife exists in Kanche Gachibowli. A Telangana High Court Registrar's report confirmed the presence of diverse fauna, contradicting Reddy. KTR also criticized the mortgaging of a water body within the land as reckless, demanding Reddy's accountability. "Leaders like Revanth Reddy, who shamelessly exploit systems, must be exposed," he said.

## T.N. CM Stalin hits back at PM Modi over 'crying for funds' remark, reminds his statements as Gujarat CM

GNS News Agency, April 18

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Friday (April 18, 2025) reminded Prime Minister Narendra Modi about his statements as Gujarat Chief Minister over seeking funds from the Union government. He also asked if Union Home Minister Amit Shah could guarantee that delimitation would not reduce Tamil Nadu's representation, exempt the State from the ambit of NEET, and assure that Hindi would not be imposed. During a government function at Ponneri in Tiruvallur district, Mr. Stalin recalled Mr. Modi's comments made during his recent visit to Rameswaram that those in Tamil Nadu were "crying" for funds, Mr. Stalin: "What did he say? How much ever is given, those here are crying. He is saying we were crying irrespective of how much ever they give us." Mr. Stalin said: "With complete humility and respect, I want to remind the Prime Minister, it was you [Mr. Modi] who said that the States were not beggars to extend hands to the Union government for funds. I am only reminding you." Recalling more statements, Mr. Stalin said: "What did you speak while being the Gujarat Chief Minister? That they were running a parallel government through the Governors? Who said it then? Modi said it when he was the Gujarat Chief Minister. He said the Union government was partisan in allocating funds to States run by parties [that were in opposition to the Union government]."

To get today's top stories from the State in your inbox, subscribe to our Tamil Nadu Today newsletter. Pointing out Tamil Nadu's demands to the Union government for funds,

Mr. Stalin said: "When we ask the same, how is it justified to say we are crying for funds? My asking is not crying but the right of Tamil Nadu. I am neither the one for crying nor the one who crawls and falls at someone's feet. Let us extend our hands to our relations and voice out for our rights. Who taught us this? It was our leader Kalaigarnar [Karunanidhi]. I am following in his footsteps." During his recent visit to Chennai, Union Home Minister Amit Shah claimed that we were raising certain issues only as a diversionary tactic, Mr. Stalin recalled and further contended: "Who has said this? Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Tamil Nadu is fighting for all the States in India. Is it wrong to ask for the rights of the State? Only because you did not do anything, we moved the Supreme Court against the Governor and obtained a historic judgment." Not only the people of Tamil Nadu but those in the rest of the country too were aware of the struggle led by the DMK, Mr. Stalin said. "When this is the truth, those who are digressing from their path, need not lament that we are diverting. Honourable Union Home Minister Amit Shah! Can you say that Tamil Nadu would be exempted from the ambit of NEET? Can you guarantee that you would not impose Hindi? Can you list out how much funds you have sanctioned for Tamil Nadu so far?" "Can you assure that the representation of Tamil Nadu would not go down after the delimitation process? If what we ask for is diversion, why have not you given a clear explanation to the people of Tamil Nadu over these?" Mr. Stalin questioned.

## Good Friday observed in Hyderabad; Special services held across city



GNS News Agency, April 18

Hyderabad: Christians across Hyderabad solemnly observed Good Friday, commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Several churches in the city held special services with the day marked by reflective sessions, prayers and community gatherings.

St. Mary's Basilica commenced the day with a passion play at 7am, followed by a mass commemorating the Jesus Christ's passion at 6pm. Other churches including the CSI Wesley Church at Clock Tower, St. Joseph's Cathedral in Gunfoundry, St. George's Church in Abids Road organised day-long prayer sessions and reflections. All the services were conducted in multiple languages including in English, Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam, catering to the diverse congregation. At various churches, volunteers organised stalls offering cool water, butter milk and juices to the devotees, who spent fasting throughout the day. Earlier in the day, many churches organised passion plays and the way of the cross, which were enacted by the church youth. The events saw people irrespective of their age, attending in large numbers.

## Telangana Group - I aspirants stage protest in Hyderabad; Demand Mains re-examination



GNS News Agency, April 18

Hyderabad: With a demand of Group-I Mains re-examination, scores of aspirants staged a protest at Dharna Chowk here on Friday. Stating that injustice was meted out to candidates who wrote the exam in Telugu medium, the aspirants demanded justice. Protesters lamented that candidates who wrote the examination in English medium were given good scores but not the ones in Telugu medium. They questioned how the Telangana Public Service Commission completed Group – I Main answer scripts evaluation in just 75 days. Alleging that there were major issues in the evaluation, an aspirant said how could 70 candidates from one centre figure in the general ranking list? The High Court had ordered the State government to hold the prelims examination but not to go in for a fresh notification. She alleged that through new notification several non-locals were given eligibility. Another candidate wondered how none from Telugu medium background figured in the top 800 in the ranking list. Several aspirants also found fault with the answer scripts evaluation, alleging several students either got same or similar marks. Further, they also questioned the TGPSC and State government on giving two different hall tickets Group – I preliminary test and Main examination.





# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Plug the leak

Power theft in Punjab has crossed alarming limits, costing the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) over Rs 2,000 crore in 2024-25 — a staggering Rs 5.5 crore per day. Even more startling is that this haemorrhaging isn't due to system failures or natural calamities but deliberate pilferage. Nearly 77 per cent of the loss-making feeders are concentrated in the border and west zones, including divisions like Patti, Bhikhiwind, Ajnala and Zira — many of which are notorious for organised theft. From underground kundi connections to meter-tampering and disabling of pillar boxes, theft has become a way of life in some areas, often under the protection or patronage of political and religious entities. The irony is hard to ignore — while people benefit from subsidised or even free electricity up to 600 units, the urge to steal more remains undiminished. But the crisis doesn't end there. PSPCL is plagued by severe staff shortages, with just 1,313 regular linemen for over 4,900 sanctioned posts. In Ludhiana alone, half the posts for junior engineer lie vacant. Field response is crippled, leading to long outages, delays in rectification and rising public resentment. The overreliance on underpaid, over-worked and protest-prone contractual workers only adds to the chaos. The regulatory commission has flagged this mess, but that alone won't suffice. What is needed is political will. Targeted crackdowns on high-loss feeders, incentives for honest usage, installation of tamper-proof smart meters and a strong recruitment drive are long overdue. There must also be real deterrents. Identified power thieves should not just be penalised but permanently barred from availing themselves of free electricity schemes. Only strict, transparent punishment will shake off this culture of impunity. PSPCL cannot continue to bleed, especially given that Punjab's debt burden is the second highest in the country, with liabilities of Rs 3.78 lakh crore in March 2025.

## Sri vari Darshan for 16th finance commission chairman



“April 18, Indian Chronicle, Rayalaseema co-ordinator” “The 16th Finance Commission Chairman Dr Arvind Panagariya and other members along with AP Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav had darshan of Lord Venkateswara on Friday morning.” “After the darshan the Vedic pundits rendered Ashirvachanam and the Additional EO Venkaiah Chowdary presented them Srivari prasadam and thirthams at the Ranganayakula mandapam.” “The Finance commission secretary Ritwik Pandey, Joint Secretary KK Mishra, members Ajay Narayan Jha, Dr Manoj Panda and Dr Soumya Kanti Ghosh was also with him.

## AIIMS-Fellowship Programme

Hyderabad, April 18 All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, has invited online applications for Entrance Examination through online (CBT) mode for admission in Fellowship Programme, July, 2025 session. Online Registration of applications closes on 23.04.2025 (upto 5.00 pm). Date of Entrance Examination May 10 from 10 to 11 AM. For prospectus, detailed information etc., candidates are advised to visit the website [www.aiimsexams.ac.in](http://www.aiimsexams.ac.in). All applicants are advised to visit the website regularly since all subsequent corrigendum/attendum/ updates will be uploaded on the website only, says a notification

## Exhibition match marks return of polo to Hyderabad

GNS News Agency, April 18

Hyderabad: An exhibition polo match between the Hyderabad Polo & Riding Club and the 61st Cavalry Regiment of the Indian Army marked a landmark event at the Bison Polo Ground, Secunderabad, here. The match, organised by Telangana & Andhra Sub Area (TASA) and Secunderabad Cantonment Board (SCB), showcased the Indian Army's commitment to equestrian sports.

TASA played a pivotal role in organising the event, which drew a significant audience comprising polo enthusiasts, dignitaries, and armed forces personnel.

Lieutenant General Karandeep Singh Brar, General Officer Commanding (GOC), Dakshin Bharat Area, launched the match. The match has once again brought forth the city's position as a premier Polo destination in India.

## TTD Chairman Conducts Surprise Inspections at Kalyanakatta



“April 18, Indian Chronicle, Rayalaseema co-ordinator” “TTD Chairman B.R. Naidu conducted surprise inspections on Friday evening at the main Kalyanakatta and Nandakam Mini Kalyanakatta, where devotees offer their hair to Sri Venkateswara Swamy.” “The Chairman in person observed the process of hair offerings and interacted with devotees and received their feedback on the conduct of barbers.” “He later instructed the officials to regulate pilgrim crowd distribution by guiding devotees to less crowded Kalyanakattas during peak times to avoid accumulation and long waiting hours.”



“The Chairman emphasized the need to maintain cleanliness at all times and directed the staff to perform their duties with a spirit of service, ensuring there is no room for complaints.” “TTD Board Members Shanta Ram, Naresh Kumar, and other officials also participated in the inspection.

## 'BJP's partisan actions against the Gandhi family' ““Forest Corporation Chairman Podem Veeraiah” “



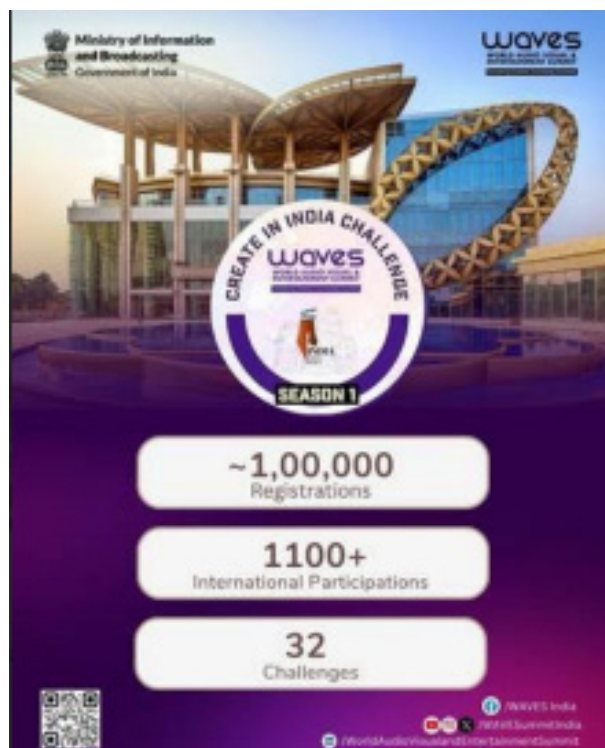
April 18, Indian Chronicle, Bhadrachalam: Congress Party Bhadradi Kothagudem President and Forest Corporation Chairman Podem Veeraiah said that the BJP government at the Center is taking partisan actions against the Gandhi family, who sacrificed their lives for the country. Speaking at a meeting organized at the camp office on Friday, he said that he strongly condemns the harassment of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the name of ED cases. He suggested a change in the central government's approach. He said that Modi and Amit Shah, who cannot tolerate the Congress party's fight against the BJP's anti-people policies, are harassing and causing trouble for top Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the

name of ED cases. He said that the Congress party is growing stronger in the country and that people will teach the BJP a lesson in the coming days if they cause trouble with ED cases. He said that from today, the Jai Babu Jai Bhim Jai Samedhaan program organized by the AICC in the Bhadrachalam constituency will continue at 9 am from the Gandhi statue at the old market intersection in Bhadrachalam to the BR Ambedkar statue at the Ambedkar intersection in Bhadrachalam. Senior Congress party leaders Chithirela Ravikumar, Tummala Venkateswara Rao, Chithirela Sudheer, Sheikh Aleem, Kapula Yesu, Saritha, and Jayamma Seelam Rammohan Reddy, Edari Pradeep, and others participated in this program.

## Create in India Challenge Evolves into a Global Movement with Nearly 1 Lakh Registrations from Over 60 Countries

The Create in India Challenge (CIC) Season 1, launched as a flagship initiative under the World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES), is gearing up for a spectacular finale at the Jio World Centre, Mumbai, from 1st to 4th May 2025. With registrations now officially closed for all 32 challenges, CIC has achieved a significant milestone, receiving nearly 1 lakh registrations, including over 1,100 international participants. The challenges have attracted entries from over 60 countries, reflecting the global appeal and reach of this pioneering initiative. From this exceptional pool of talent, 750 finalists will be given the opportunity to showcase their creative skills and outcomes at Creatosphere, a specially curated platform featuring innovation across animation, comics, AI, XR, gaming, music, and more, as part of WAVES 2025. The winners of these challenges will be conferred the prestigious 'WAVES Creator Awards' in a grand red carpet ceremony on Day 2 of the event.

The Creatosphere at WAVES will witness remarkable global participation, with 43 international finalists showcasing their talents, adding a truly international dimension to this celebration of creativity. These finalists represent over 20 countries, including Argentina, Nepal, Germany, Bermuda (BOT), the United States, Greece, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Italy, Laos, Thailand, Tajikistan,



Egypt, Sri Lanka, Russia, Maldives, Malaysia, and Japan. Notably, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Tajikistan each contributes 6 finalists, followed by 5 each from Indonesia and Maldives, and 4 from Mauritius. The United States is represented by 2 finalists, while Russia, Canada, Argentina, Laos, Malaysia, Bermuda, Egypt, Thailand, and the United Kingdom each have 1 finalist. This diverse international presence underscores the global appeal and growing reach of the Create in India Challenge.

## Gangula Kamalakar to embark on padayatra for water in Telangana's Karimnagar

KARIMNAGAR: Karimnagar MLA Gangula Kamalakar has decided to embark on a 'padayatra' in the constituency to get water for irrigation in the segment. The 'padayatra' will be organised in the name of 'Chalo Narayanapur', which is the main water source for Karimnagar constituency. Kamalakar announced this while interacting with media persons after inaugurating a paddy purchase centre in Karimnagar rural mandal on Friday. The Narayanapur reservoir was the main water source for Karimnagar constituency. However, there was no water in Narayanapur. Though farmers were facing troubles with regard to irrigation, the State government was least bothered about their issues. To mount pressure on the government, the padayatra would be taken out very soon, he said. Earlier, Kamalakar said officials should purchase paddy that arrived at the centres and shift it immediately to mills since there was a possibility of hailstorms in the coming

days. Farmers, who were already suffering due to lack of Rythu Bandhu, irrigation water and crop loan waiver, would suffer a huge loss if the crop was soaked in the rains. So, the government should immediately start the purchasing of paddy, he demanded. Farmers suffered a huge loss by selling the crop to millers at low prices as the State government failed to start the procurement centres at the right time, he said, recalling that during the BRS regime, procurement used to start in the second week of March. Even soaked and discolored paddy was also procured providing MSP, he said. Farmers informed the MLA that officials had allocated long distance rice mills instead of the nearest ones for them to shift the crop after procurement. Subsequently, transportation charges would increase. Reacting to this, Kamalakar spoke to the District Collector over phone and asked her to allocate nearest rice mills to avoid increase in transportation charges.

## Govt shelter homes coming up in 10 districts for women in distress

GNS News Agency, April 18

To ensure the safety, empowerment and rehabilitation of women in distress, the Uttar Pradesh government is all set to operationalise shelter homes or "Shakti Sadan" across 10 districts of the state, officials said on Friday. These new centres being established under the "Mission Shakti" initiative are aimed at providing protection and support to women in distress, including victims of domestic violence, natural disasters and other vulnerable situations, the government said on Friday.

"The plan to operationalise these shelters is now in its final phase. The government has approved a fund of Rs 127.72 lakh for the initiative. Each centre will have the capacity to accommodate 50 women and will serve as a secure refuge offering care and rehabilitation services," the government said in a statement. "The shelters will be opened in Aligarh, Azamgarh, Kanpur Nagar, Chitrakoot, Jhansi, Basti, Gonda, Mirzapur, Varanasi and Saharanpur districts." "The scheme is being implemented with support from the Central and state governments in a 60:40 funding ratio. It falls under the government of India's 'Samarthya' sub-scheme of 'Mission Shakti'," the statement said. The purpose of these shelter homes is not just to provide a safe place for women but also to guide them towards becoming self-reliant, it said. Women staying at these centres will receive free accommodation, nutritious meals, clothes, bedding and other essential personal items, the government said in the statement. "What makes this initiative special is that the women will also get mental, physical and legal support, along with vocational and skill-based training based on their interests and abilities." "The training process will include sewing, knitting, embroidery, beauty parlour skills, computer literacy, yoga, and personal counselling. These services will help women become confident and independent, enabling them to live with dignity in the society," the statement said.

## A viewing tower in Bandra to provide a panoramic view of Arabian Sea and city's skyline

GNS News Agency, April 18

Blueprint The project cost of building this tower is being included in the overall cost of Bandra STP, which is being constructed for Rs 4,300 crore. To provide an unhindered view of the Arabian Sea, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is set to construct a viewing deck tower at Bandra in Mumbai. Situated adjoining the Bandra Worli Sea Link (BWSL) bridge, the tower is being built as part of the BMC's Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) project. The visitors will get access to the facility from a road that the BMC will construct. The tower will provide a panoramic view of the sea as well as the city's skyline. At the ground and first floor of the viewing deck, there will be a knowledge centre that showcases the civic body's history and water conservation efforts.

The tower will be 50 metres tall, having an area of 2,500 square meters. The gallery of the tower will have an open-air seating area alongside ramps and elevators for smooth access. The civic authorities are also considering constructing a telescope and binocular points on the lines of Dubai's Burj Khalifa to make the location visitor-friendly. Purpose of building the viewing deck: Considering the proximity to the BWSL bridge, the civic authorities received clearances for building the STP on the condition that it should be built below ground level. As a result, the treatment facilities like the membrane tank are being built underground while the surface area is being reclaimed. The authorities will be constructing green spaces and people's amenities on the reclaimed portions to increase the proportion of open space in Mumbai. The project cost of building this tower is being included in the overall cost of Bandra STP, which is being constructed for Rs 4,300 crore. The tower will be opened to the public in 2027, the same year when the STPs are supposed to become operational. The Bandra STP is situated near the Bandra-Worli Sea Link (BWSL), which imposes a height restriction to preserve the skyline's view. As a result, we designed the facility to be multi-level, with the top portion dedicated to public green spaces. Since the facility will be completely odour-free, visitors will not even be aware that an STP is located beneath the garden," said Abhijit Bangar, Additional Municipal Commissioner (Projects).

## Massive preparations underway for BRS silver jubilee meeting at Warangal on April 27

GNS News Agency, April 18

Hyderabad: The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) has intensified preparations for its grand silver jubilee year public meeting, to be held at Elkathurthy in Hanamkonda district near Warangal on April 27. Known for organising massive public meetings, the party is aiming to recreate its signature scale and energy at this historic gathering, as it marks 25 years since its inception in April 2001. With lakhs of party workers, Telangana supporters, and leaders expected to attend the public meeting, massive logistical arrangements are in progress on about 1,213 acres on the outskirts of Elkathurthy.

Of this, the main venue is being prepared across 154 acres, while the remaining 1,059 acres are designated for parking, dining halls, and other facilities — making it one of the largest political gatherings in the State in recent years. A massive 120x80 feet stage is under construction to host BRS chief and former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao and senior leaders.

Elkathurthy, chosen for its strategic connectivity to Siddipet, Warangal, and Karimnagar via national highways, has undergone a remarkable transformation in the past month. To reach the venue from the main road, temporary roads are being laid. Gravel work has been completed, roads have been widened and relaid. Arrangements have been made for the entire town to be decked up with pink banners, arches, flags, and festoons, ahead of the public meeting. MLC Pochampally Srinivas Reddy, Hanamkonda district president Dasym Vinay Bhaskar, and other senior leaders are supervising preparations under the guidance of the party State leadership.

The party leaders, including MLAs, MLCs, MPs, and other elected representatives, and former Ministers already held party meetings at their constituency and mandal levels to review the preparations to gather the cadre and mobilise them to Elkathurthy. Apart from the party cadre, plans are afoot to invite Telangana agitators and families of martyrs for the event.



# Sibal on Dhankhar’s judiciary remarks: Never seen any RS chairperson make such political comments



GNS News Agency, April 18

Rajya Sabha member Kapil Sibal slammed Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday (April 18, 2025) for questioning the judiciary over the timeline for the President to take decisions, saying this is "unconstitutional" and he had never seen any Rajya Sabha chairman make "political statements" of this nature. A day after the Vice President used strong words against the judiciary, Mr. Sibal asserted that the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha Chairman remain equidistant between the Opposition and the ruling party, and cannot be the "spokesperson of the party". "Everyone knows that the Lok Sabha Speaker's chair is in between. He or she is the Speaker of the House, not the speaker of one party. They also don't vote, they only vote when there is a tie. The same is with the Upper House. You are equidistant between the Opposition and the ruling party," the senior advocate said at a press conference in New Delhi.

"Everything you say must be equidistant. No speaker can be the spokesperson of a party. I don't say that he (Dhankhar) is but no Speaker in principle can be the spokesperson of any party. If it appears so then the dignity of the chair is lowered," Mr. Sibal asserted. Mr. Dhankhar on Thursday questioned the judiciary setting a timeline for the President to take decisions and act as a "super Parliament", saying the Supreme Court cannot fire a "nuclear missile" at democratic forces. Mr. Dhankhar's strong words to the judiciary came during his speech to Rajya Sabha interns, days after the Supreme Court sought to fix a timeline for the President to grant assent to the bills reserved for her consideration by the governor. "So, we have judges who will legislate, who will perform executive functions, who will act as super Parliament and absolutely have no accountability because the law of the land does not apply to them," Mr. Dhankhar said. He also described Article 142, which grants plenary powers to the Supreme Court, as a "nuclear missile against democratic forces available to the judiciary 24x7".

Slamming Mr. Dhankhar for his remarks, Sibal said, "If you give such statements it will look as if judiciary is being taught a lesson. It is not neutral and not constitutional." "The judiciary should not be attacked in this manner by the executive, especially two ministers - Arjun Ram Meghwal and Kiren Rijju - and the chairman of the House, as the judiciary cannot defend itself. Then the polity must defend the judiciary. Independence of the judiciary is fundamental to democracy in the country. What is being

done is unconstitutional," he said. "I have never seen any chairman of the House make political statements of this nature. Even BJP chairman in the past (have not done so)," Mr. Sibal said, hitting out at the Vice President. Mr. Sibal said he was saddened and surprised by the statement of Mr. Dhankhar. "Judicial institutions - high courts or Supreme Courts, if there is faith in any institution, it is the judiciary. I feel that when government people do not like the decisions of the judiciary then they start accusing that it (judiciary) has gone beyond its limit. When they like it and the Opposition says something then they say it is the decision of the Supreme Court," the former Congress leader said. "When someone raises questions about Article 370 or Ramjanam bhoomi judgment, the government people point out that it is a Supreme Court decision," he said.

"When (Justice J.B.) Pardiwala judgment came they say how can the Supreme Court say this. The judgment which you do not like is wrong and which is as per your thinking, it is fine. It is not right for a Constitutional functionary to say such a thing," he said referring to Mr. Dhankhar's remarks. President has no personal powers: Sibal hits back at Dhankhar's judiciary remark "I respect him a lot but you said article 142 is nuclear missile material, how can you say this? Article 142 has given powers to the Supreme Court and it is given by the Constitution, it is not by the government it is the Constitution to do complete justice," Mr. Sibal said. He also pointed out that the President of India is a titular head and acts on the aid and advice of the council of ministers. "The governor acts on the aid and advice of the council of ministers in a State. So when a bill is passed it goes to the governor, the governor can make comments and send it back but if passed again, the governor has to give an assent as stated in the Constitution. The governor can send the bill to the President. The President acts on the aid and advice of the ministers, so the matter goes to the Centre. The President does not have personal powers," he said. Mr. Dhankhar said how can President's power be curtailed, Mr. Sibal noted and wondered who is curtailing the power of the President. "Can the governor sit for two years on a bill that is important for people," Mr. Sibal asked and added that this amounts to an intrusion on the supremacy of the legislature. "If you have a problem with a judgment, call for a review. If there are still problems, take an advisory opinion from Supreme Court," Mr. Sibal said. "He (Dhankhar) talked about 1984 but did not talk about 2002. You talked about an emergency but not undeclared emergency that is going on, you did not talk about capture of institutions," Mr. Sibal said in a scathing criticism of Mr. Dhankhar's comments. He said it seems that he only talks about what happened in Congress governments and not after 2014. "We moved an impeachment motion against judge of a high court in December; it was signed by more than 50 members. We are in April, it took five months to find out whether those signatures are genuine or not. How many more months would it take?" Mr. Sibal said. "If you do not with expedition decide the matter then the argument for us is that we cannot do anything. If the governor doesn't not clear bills, the judiciary cannot do anything," he said. "If the executive doesn't do its job the judiciary has to intervene," Mr. Sibal asserted. Article 142 of the Constitution gives the Supreme Court the power to issue orders that ensure "complete justice" in any matter before it.

## How well do you know Kerala’s native mangoes?

GNS News Agency, April 18

The Mallissery mango, found exclusively in the Nedumbassery region of Ernakulam district is the one that goes into the famous tangy Angamaly mango curry. The aromatic Kotturkonam varikka is Thiruvananthapuram's pride, the Kuttiattoor mango from Kannur is the first native variety to get a GI tag and the Olor mango common in Vadakara region is loved for its size and sweetness. As much as we relish our Alphonso and Banganapallis, this summer, let us get to know Kerala's native varieties better. If one were to navigate through this fascinating mangoscape, one would find a staggering variety — from the favourite bite-sized Chandrakkaran, known for its sweetness (up to 25 Brix), and scent to the ubiquitous Moovandan. Mango collectives in Kerala have been documenting indigenous varieties and creating awareness about them, but there are still a number of unidentified varieties, rich in flavour and unique qualities waiting to be discovered and popularised, says Shyju Machathi, founder of Nattumanchottil, a mango collective based in Kannapuram, Kannur.

The collective will host its ninth native mango festival in May. Unlike a commercial mango festival, this is a closed event, where conservators, scientists, farmers, researchers and mango enthusiasts get together, says Shyju. It would showcase around 100 native varieties from Kerala. "This year, we have participants from the US, China and the UAE," he adds. The collective's conservation efforts led to Kannapuram being declared as an Indigenous Mango Heritage Area. Today, it has evolved into Nattumanchottil Educational and Indigenous Fruit Plants Conservation and Research Trust, winning the Plant Genome Savior Community award instituted by Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Right Authority, New Delhi. Shyju has been working on a comprehensive reference book in two volumes on mango varieties in Kerala. While the first one would feature all named varieties from Kerala, the second would shed light on the unnamed and unique varieties. Notably, the Kerala Police Academy, Thrissur, has tied up with Nattumanchottil to create an indigenous mango conservation and research orchard.

Sakhil Raveendran, founder of the Indigenous Mango Tree Conservation Project (IMCP), a Thrissur-based collective, believes it is important to bring the native mango to the forefront, especially in this age of instant delivery platforms. "Any variety of mango can be ordered online today, but how much do we know of the mangoes we have in our own backyards?" he asks. The idea is to build a larger community that appreciates and understands native mango varieties. The IMCP has been working towards protecting indigenous mango varieties with the help of public participation. Started in 2019, the collective today has over 55,000 members. The nomenclature of a native mango is often whimsical, a take on its taste, colour, shape or even the place where it is found. Some have interesting backstories, too, says Sakhil. For instance, a native variety found in the coastal regions in Ernakulam, the Kalluketty, is a mono-embryonic mango variety. The story goes that the tree was layered and since they were mostly planted in coastal areas, the base of the sapling needed to be reinforced with stones (kallu in Malayalam) and hence the name.

The much-loved Priyur, is another example, he adds.



The mango variety is believed to have been popularised by priest and social reformer Saint Kuriakose Chavara. It was named Prior after him, as he was the 'Prior' or head of the religious congregation. The story goes that at the monastery in Mannanam, Kottayam, there was a mango tree which was planted and taken care of by Kuriakose Chavara, who sent the seedlings to other monasteries and convents and told the members to take care of them. "Many of these stories are not documented formally. But it is interesting to note that people valued these unique varieties and named them lovingly. However, we have lost some good indigenous varieties owing to neglect," he adds. The IMCP is hosting a Manga Mela, which will showcase native varieties. Held in association with the Kerala Agricultural University, Department of Agriculture, District Tourism Promotion Council and the Thrissur Horticulture Society, the two-day event (April 28 and 29) at the Town Hall in Thrissur, will also include sale of saplings and mango products.

## Mother kills six-month-old daughter to get married for third time

Medak: A woman with the support of her father and aunt eliminated her six-month-old baby girl since the child was an obstacle for her third marriage. According to the Medak police, Nunavath Gayathri, a resident of Topya Thanda in Cilpiched mandal, married a man from Adhmapur thanda in Narsapur mandal three years ago. However, she separated from him after a few months. Later, she married another man from Sitaram thanda in Kulcharam mandal. Gayarthi developed differences with her second husband after she gave birth to a baby girl six months ago. However, Gayathri, along with the baby, left her second husband. When her parents decided to get her married to another man, she felt that there was none to take care of her daughter. Gayathri, with the help of her father Rathla Deepla and her aunt Bhuli, an Anganwadi teacher by profession, decided to eliminate the infant. They allegedly threw the infant into the river Manjeera at Sri Chamundeshwari Devi temple at Chitkul in Chilpiched mandal. Meanwhile, the father of the baby filed a missing complaint in Kulcharam mandal after which the police launched the investigation and found that the mother and her kin were the culprits.

## The Congress journey in Gujarat



The story so far: "We have not been able to fulfill what the people of Gujarat expected from us for the past 15-30 years," said Rahul Gandhi on March 8, 2025, while addressing party workers in Ahmedabad. He urged the party to weed out workers and leaders who are "cut off from people and in cahoots with BJP," from those "who work for people and have Congress' ideology in their heart." "The Congress seeks to end the BJP's 35-year grip on Gujarat in the 2027 State polls. A month later, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) met in Ahmedabad and passed a resolution for a 'massive organisational reshuffle' and vowed to embark on the 'path of social justice' espoused by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The party has promised to roll out guidelines to empower the party's district unit chiefs with enhanced accountability, responsibility and political strength. It also plans to undertake a mass contact programme through padyatras and door-to-door programmes.

Since 1995, when BJP first snatched a majority of 121 seats in the 182-member Gujarat Assembly, the Congress is yet to win a single State poll. The party had peaked in 1972 when it won 140 of the 168 seats in the Gujarat Assembly. The party fell to its lowest tally of 17 seats in 2022. As India's princely states and British provinces were being reorganised in the 1955-57, a united front of Opposition parties called the Maha Gujarat Janata Parishad sought the creation of a unilingual State, carved out of the bilingual State of Bombay. On May 1, 1960, Bombay State was bifurcated into Maharashtra and Gujarat. The Congress chose Jivraj Mehta as Gujarat's first CM while Maratha strongman Y.B Chavan became Maharashtra's CM. In the 1962 elections, Mr. Mehta was re-elected as Congress won 113 of the 154 Assembly seats. Its prime opposition parties were the Swatantra Party (SWP), which won 26 seats, and the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) which won seven seats. The Congress had amassed 50.84% of the votes polled, while SWP got a 24.44% vote share. The SWP, a breakaway faction of the Congress, was founded by stalwarts K.M. Munshi and C. Rajagopalachari, both conservative leaders of the Congress.

The Congress continued to rule the state till 1995. However, its seat share which grew steadily between 1962 and 1985, began to fall drastically from 1990. With the passing away of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, the Congress saw a split as the 'old guard' expelled his daughter Indira Gandhi in 1969. Renamed as INC (O) - which later merged into the Janata Party, the Morarji Desai-led Congress faction had two consecutive terms in Gujarat between 1976 and 1977. October 2, 1952: Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru driving a tractor at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi. Also present, among others, are K.M. Munshi (behind Nehru) and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. October 2, 1952: Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru driving a tractor at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi. Also present, among others, are K.M. Munshi (behind Nehru) and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. With the resurgence of Indira Gandhi in 1977, the Congress once again gained control of Gujarat in 1980. Wiping out the Janata Party, Congress won 141 seats, while the Janata Party was limited to 21 seats. The newly-formed Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), made its poll debut winning nine seats. BJP's predecessor, Bharatiya Jan Sangh, had merged with the Janata Party to oppose Indira Gandhi's emergency. However, with the fall of the Janata government in the Centre, all its constituent parties broke away.

Between 1980 and 1990, the Congress shifted its focus from the upper class Gujaratis to the lower classes. Led by Madhavsinh Solanki, the Congress sought to fortify an alliance between Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims (KHAM). This alliance paid rich dividends as the Congress won 141 seats and 149 seats in the 182-seat assembly in 1980 and 1985. Its voteshare too increased from 51.04% to 55.55% — its highest till date. However, the alienation of the upper class cost Mr. Solanki his CM chair. Upon taking oath, he was forced to step down as caste riots spread across Gujarat due to his government's prom-

ise to implement a 10% reservation for socially and economically backward classes. OBC leader Jinabhai Darji, who had been instrumental in stitching the KHAM alliance, found himself being sidelined, paving way for Amarsinh Chaudhary to take oath as CM. Failing to deliver on its promise to expand OBC reservation, the Congress was reduced to a minority in 1990 when it won only 33 seats. The rising BJP, which wooed the business communities and upper-caste trader, won 67 seats, while its alliance partner Janata Dal (JD) won 70 seats. Chimanbhai Patel, who led JD's Gujarat faction, successfully engineered a coalition of the Kolis, Kanbis (also called Kunbis or Patidars) and Muslims in Gujarat — which amounted to over 35% of Gujarat's population.

BJP veteran Keshubhai Patel led the party to power in 1995, winning 121 seats, forming the BJP's first majority government in the State. The Congress was reduced to 45 seats and 32.86% of the votes. However, it attempted to cash in on the internal rift between BJP leaders Shankersinh Vaghela and Mr. Patel, supporting the rebellion by Mr. Vaghela, who had 47 MLAs backing him. Meanwhile, BJP's newly-appointed Gujarat secretary, Narendra Modi, backed Mr. Patel's candidacy for the CM post despite many MLAs preferring Mr. Vaghela, leading to internal turmoil. However, the BJP managed to quell the rebellion, banishing Mr. Modi from Gujarat for six years and installing Mr. Vaghela's aide Suresh Mehta as CM. Between 1995 and 2001, the tussle between Mr. Vaghela and Mr. Patel continued, with both holding brief CM terms, while BJP continued to build on its support. The party's seat share continued to remain above 110 seats and it consistently polled above 40% of the votes. After Mr. Patel was made to resign in 2001 following alleged irregularities in relief work for the Bhuj earthquake, the BJP chose Mr. Modi as its CM pick. A disgruntled Keshubhai Patel dissented to Mr. Modi's re-election by backing the Congress CM pick in 2007, breaking away from the BJP in 2012 to form the Gujarat Parivartan Party (GPP), before returning to the BJP's fold in 2014.

During the Modi years (2001-2013), BJP was re-elected thrice in 2002, 2007 and 2012 with an absolute majority — winning 127 seats, 116 seats and 115 seats respectively. Its vote share consistently remained above 48%. During these years, the Congress managed to maintain its own vote share at 38% and its strength oscillated between 50-60 seats. While BJP managed to consolidate the upper caste Hindu votes in its corner, the Congress managed to retain its vote share among Muslims, Adivasis and OBCs. Rahul Gandhi, who took over the mantle of Congress president in 2017, led the party's electoral campaign for the next election cycle. Struck by the Patidar agitation led by Hardik Patel, a counter protest of SC/ST and OBCs led by Alpesh Thakor, and Dalit protests against the Una flogging incident led by Jignesh Mewani, the BJP faced an uphill battle to hold on to the state. Capitalising on the grievances of most communities, Congress managed to win 77 seats, restricting BJP to 99 seats — its lowest since 1995.

However, since then BJP has course-corrected. While all three of these young activists — Hardik Patel, Alpesh Thakor and Jignesh Mewani — joined the Congress during the 2017 elections, Mr. Thakor and Mr. Patel eventually joined BJP and won from Viramgam and Radhanpur in the 2022 State elections. In the build-up to the State polls in December 2022, Mr. Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' was the Congress party's top priority. While he addressed a rally in Ahmedabad in September, Mr. Gandhi remained largely absent from the party's electoral campaign. Moreover, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which had been gradually capturing the Congress vote across States, were aggressively campaigning in Gujarat. Spearheading AAP's campaign, party chief Arvind Kejriwal announced a slew of freebies focusing on different communities. The Congress was also hit by a slew of high-profile exits, including former leader of Opposition Mohansinh Rathwa, senior MLAs Ashwin Kotwal, Bhaga Barad, and Raghavji Patel, ex-State chief Arjun Modhwadia, Ambarish Der, and Dharmesh Patel prior to the polls.

## Congress to go solo in Gujarat bypolls, no alliance with AAP: Gohil

GNS News Agency, April 18

The Opposition Congress on Friday (April 18, 2025) announced that it would not enter into an alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and will go it alone in the upcoming bypolls to two Assembly constituencies in Gujarat. After the party's political affairs committee meeting, Gujarat Congress president Shaktisinh Gohil said the party has decided to stay away from the AAP for the by-elections because the Arvind Kejriwal-led party already declared its candidate for the Visavadar seat without consulting it. He, however, stressed that both parties will remain part of the INDIA bloc at the national level despite Congress' stance in Gujarat. Mr. Gohil hinted that the AAP failed to fulfil the "gathbandhan dharma" by declaring its candidate for the Visavadar seat despite being part of the INDIA bloc.

While the Election Commission is yet to announce dates for the bypolls, the AAP last month declared party leader Gopal Italia as its candidate for the Visavadar seat. Mr. Gohil said, "A detailed discussion was held about the upcoming bypolls in our political affairs committee meeting. Every alliance has some principles. The AAP has already declared its candidate for Visavadar without consulting us. We are part of the INDIA bloc. But, State party units are free to make their own decisions." The Congress leader claimed the party lost the Haryana Assembly polls because the AAP had refused to accept its offer on some seats and decided to field its candidates.

He pointed out that the Congress had vacated the



Bharuch and Bhavnagar seats for the AAP during the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. "Hence, we have unanimously decided to go solo in the upcoming bypolls. It is also a fact that Gujarat voters never accepted a third force. Despite the damage caused by the AAP, the Congress is still the largest opposition party here. In people's interest, Congress will field its candidates on these seats," Mr. Gohil said. The Visavadar seat in Junagadh district has been lying vacant since December 2023 when the then AAP MLA Bhupendra Bhayani resigned and joined the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), while the Kadi seat in Mehsana, a constituency reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates, has been vacant since February 4 after the death of BJP MLA Karsan Solanki.



# A friend of Bengaluru’s trees, how Vijay Thiruvady’s passion brought to life the history of Lalbagh



GNS News Agency, April 18

Vijay Thiruvady was one of those old Bangaloreans who defied easy description. Having penned one of the very few definitive volumes on the history of Lalbagh, he did fit the description of a writer, but that was just a small fraction of who he was. Many grew to know him over the years from the walks he tirelessly conducted over the weekends in Lalbagh. Still others marvelled at his encyclopaedic knowledge of the trees in Bengaluru, made even more impressive by the fact that he was not formally educated as a botanist.From a reader’s perspective, his book Lalbagh: Sultan’s Garden to Public Park is of particular interest to those who wish to know how the garden has changed over time. Apart from Thiruvady’s extensive knowledge of its plants and trees, one finds an exhaustive account of the history of Lalbagh from the perspective of those who supervised it. This history traces a broad path from Tipu Sultan and before to more modern days, with the influence of figures such as German botanist G H Krumbiegel and horticulturist H C Javaraya, who was the first Indian superintendent of Lalbagh.

Lalbagh, Vijay Thiruvady From a reader’s perspective, his book Lalbagh: Sultan’s Garden to Public Park is of particular interest to those who wish to know how the garden has changed over time. (Source: Express Photo)He also assembled a unique array of old photographs and letters from Krumbiegel and Dr M H Marigowda – who is referred to as the father of horticulture in Karnataka – to name a few.

Thiruvady had earlier written a book, Heritage Trees, on 140 of the oldest trees in Bengaluru, although its copies are no longer easily available.

According to Bangalore Walks founder Arun Pai, a longtime friend of Thiruvady who worked with him for 19 years, they made a series of videos on flowering trees in Bengaluru during the Covid-19 pandemic. “Vijay had never been captured on video. I am so glad I took the opportunity as he passed away a year later. He was a very good speaker. I used to call him the David Attenborough of India. His ability to narrate and hold a story was fantastic,” Pai recalled. Thiruvady died on August 1, 2023, when he was 82.Pai said Thiruvady was not basically a writer but a person who loved nature and loved to speak about it. “He was very good at that. He had a particular style and depth of knowledge. He went to inordinate efforts to get the facts right. He would never believe everything without evidence and found a lot of original sources. If you search on Google, you will not find this information even now. He would have found it in some obscure book,” he added. Pai also recalled that Thiruvady, who often dictated his work to be written, tended to get it right the first time around rather than having a more iterative process.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Thiruvady’s wife Meera noted that after retiring from a career in the oil and gas sector, he got more opportunities to indulge in his abiding interest. Collaborating with Pai to launch his guided walks in Lalbagh, Thiruvady would also correspond with botanists around the world. Meera recalled, “He would regularly conduct his walks without fail, even in the rain, on Saturday and Sunday mornings between 7 and 10.30 am. He would cover history, geography, and botany, share anecdotes, along with (facts on) the trees... He would then take everyone to MTR for breakfast.”Speaking in 2023 at a memorial for Vijay Thiruvady, Pai remembered him as a humble man who would insist on being addressed as “Vijay” and not as “Sir” or other formal terms. Pai said at the time, “A lot of us know very smart people, but to be able to bring all that knowledge and convey it to people, whether they are a school-child or a scientist in his 70s, was a special gift that Vijay had.”

# Karnataka HC asks Google India to furnish 50% of FEMA penalties as bank guarantees

The Karnataka High Court directed Google India and three senior executives of the tech firm to furnish 50 per cent of the penalties imposed on them for alleged Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) violations as bank guarantees.

This comes after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) levied a fine of Rs 5 crore on Google India and a combined Rs 45 lakh on the three executives in question over the allegations. The case pertains to alleged violations of section 6(3)(d) of FEMA, involving transactions worth Rs 364 crore.ED noted that the case pertains to payments made by Google India to Google Ireland as distributor fees and for the acquisition of equipment from Google US.

The agency contended that Rs 363 crore, payable to Google Ireland, remained unpaid for over four years until May 2014, while payment for Rs 1 crore worth equipment sourced from Google US remained unsettled for more than seven years until January 2014.These transactions were defined as commercial loans by the Enforcement Directorate, for which approval is required from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Google India, however, contested these allegations, asserting that the transactions in question were not foreign exchange borrowings.In its response to the allegations, Google India argued that that there were no loan agree-



ments, deferred payments, or interest involved, and claimed adherence to an RBI circular issued on July 1, 2014.Earlier, on January 11, 2019, the Appellate Tribunal for FEMA in Delhi had granted a stay on the penalties, citing that Google India’s appeal appeared to have merit. The ED subsequently filed second appeals challenging the stay.A division bench comprising Justices V Kameshwar Rao and S Rachaiah observed that the tribunal’s stay was based only on a preliminary view.They have now instructed Google India and the concerned officials to provide bank guarantees for half the total penalties within two weeks.

# ED raids AAP MLA Kulwant Singh’s palatial house in Mohali, parallel searches underway in other locations



GNS News Agency, April 18

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Tuesday began searching the residence of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Mohali MLA Kulwant Singh as well as various locations linked to him across Punjab in connection with an ongoing investigation into a money laundering case.Teams from the ED’s Delhi unit, accompanied by the local police, began searching Singh’s palatial residence in the Janta Land Promoters Limited (JLPL) area in Mohali in the morning. JLPL is Singh’s real estate company. As per ED sources, Singh is not home at present but his family members are

being questioned by the central agency’s team.

Various other locations across Punjab linked to Singh, who is reportedly Punjab’s richest MLA, were also being searched in parallel raids which were still underway at the time of filing this report.Sources with the ED told The Indian Express that the searches were in connection with an ongoing probe into the Pearl Agrotech Corporation Limited (PACL) case. The directors of PACL had allegedly siphoned off investors’ funds by transferring them to shell companies in multiple locations. These funds were then withdrawn in cash and handed over to key PACL associates before being transferred to companies outside India through hawala for purchasing properties.

Last year, Kulwant Singh was questioned by the Jalandhar unit of the ED in connection with a money laundering case related to alleged drug trafficking.Singh, who reportedly has assets worth Rs 1,000 crore, joined the AAP in December 2021 and won the 2022 Assembly elections from Mohali.In 2015, he became the first mayor of the Mohali Municipal Corporation with Congress support. He joined the Shiromani Akali Dal in 2017 but was expelled for “anti-party activities” after he unsuccessfully contested the 2021 civic polls as an Independent.

# Rain and Thunderstorms Expected Across Telugu States

GNS News Agency, April 18

The Amaravati Meteorological Centre has issued a key announcement regarding the diverse weather conditions prevailing in the Telugu states, noting that while some areas are experiencing sunny weather, others are witnessing rainfall. The centre forecasts rain for the next three days, following the development of a trough extending from north-central Maharashtra to the Gulf of Mannar, which includes Marathwada, interior Karnataka, Rayalaseema, and Tamil Nadu. This system continues to extend up to 0.9 km above mean sea level.

Light to moderate rains or thundershowers are expected at one or two locations in North Coast Andhra Pradesh - Yanam on Friday and Saturday, potentially accompanied by thunderstorms with lightning and strong gusty winds reaching speeds of 40-50 km/h. Similar weather patterns are predicted for Sunday, with gusty winds likely to



reach 30-40 km/h.Similar forecasts apply to South Coast Andhra Pradesh, where light to moderate rains or thundershowers are anticipated at one or two places on Friday and Saturday.

# Customs search of Ranya Rao violated rules, her counsel argues; bail plea to be heard again on Monday



GNS News Agency, April 18

The search carried out on actress Ranya Rao, who is accused of smuggling gold from the UAE, violated procedural norms, her counsel argued before the Karnataka High Court during the hearing of her bail application on Thursday.Ranya Rao is accused of smuggling 14.2 kg of gold worth Rs 12.56 crore from Dubai. She was arrested on March 3 at the Bengaluru airport while allegedly attempting to evade customs duty to the tune of Rs 4.83 crore by strapping the gold on her body using bandages. She moved the high court for bail after a sessions court denied the same,

citing alleged use of the hawala route to transfer funds to purchase the gold.Arguing before Justice S Vishwajith Shetty, Senior Advocate Sandesh Chouta, stated that the search and seizure did not adhere to rules prescribed under Section 102 of the Customs Act which requires the person being searched to be taken either before a gazetted Customs officer or a magistrate.

Chouta argued that the gazetted officer that Ranya Rao was produced before was also the investigating officer in the case. Further, officials had allegedly not informed her relatives about the arrest in writing but only telephonically.The counsel also argued that bail would ordinarily be granted for offences that attracted less than seven years’ imprisonment under the Customs Act. He further cited that the actress had been imprisoned for 45 days.The bail matter will be further heard by the high court on April 21, when the Directorate of Revenue and Intelligence (DRI) is set to present its statement of objections.Recently, a special court for economic offences in Bengaluru rejected the bail application of an alleged hawala dealer in the case.The actress’s mother, H P Rohini, had also approached the court to preserve the CCTV footage at the time of her arrest, upon which the court had passed a direction for the material to be preserved for investigation and trial.

# NGT takes notice of NGO report on high chemical pollution in Bengaluru’s Arkavathi River, files suo motu case against Karnataka State Pollution Control Board

GNS News Agency, April 18

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken notice of a January 2025 report by the Paani Earth Foundation on high levels of chemical pollution in the Arkavathi River – which flows through the western part of Bengaluru – to take up a suo motu case against the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board.The Arkavathi River, once considered the lifeline of Bengaluru, is now contaminated with several harmful pollutants, Paani Earth’s report highlighted in January 2025. The report, ‘Uncovering the Hidden Pollution in the Arkavathi: Emerging Contaminants Impacting Bengaluru and Beyond,’ was produced in collaboration with the International Centre for Clean Water.

The report was based on studies conducted in February and March 2024 on the water quality in the Arkavathi as it flows through what was once the western periphery of Bengaluru but is now an integral part of the burgeoning city.The study conducted across seven locations revealed that the river is unable to break down chemicals entering it, resulting in the accumulation of pollutants.As part of the Paani Earth study, researchers tested 65 parameters in water samples and 20 parameters in soil samples across the seven sites and focused on pesticides, industrial and hazardous organic pollutants, and heavy metals.The study “confirmed the presence of emerging contaminants and toxic pollutants, many exceeding international standards and posing long-term risks to ecosystems and human health.” Concentrations of banned pesticides like Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and Endosulfan sulfate were recorded up to 25,000 times above accepted limits by the study.“India’s regulation of chemicals is a lot on paper, but not on the ground. So, we were not surprised when we found pesticides in the river that were banned by the Stockholm convention,” said Madhuri Mandhava, a trustee at Paani Earth Foundation.Heavy metals like Mercury were found to be 26 times in excess of international standards; industrial pollutants like polycyclic aromatic hy-



drocarbons were found to be 3,000 times in excess, and excessive phosphorus levels were found at all sites.Widespread use of phosphate-based detergents is what has led to foaming in the rivers, which can cause irreversible damage. Although phosphate-free alternatives are available, they remain very expensive, and adoption of this will not happen automatically, Mandhava said.

Based on the findings, the Paani Earth Foundation submitted petitions to the Central Pollution Control Board and the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) to initiate measures to reduce the pollution in the river.In March this year, NGT took up a case against the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board on the basis of the findings of the report. The case has been adjourned, and the next hearing will be taken up in July.The Paani Earth Foundation, in its petition to the Central Pollution Control Board, has sought expansion of the parameters monitored under the National Water Quality Monitoring Programme to cover emerging contaminants and upgradation of monitoring infrastructure.In its submissions to the BWSSB, the Paani Earth Foundation has sought measures to arrest the flow of industrial wastewater into the Arkavathi River and sewage treatments in rapidly urbanising regions like Nelamangala in the upstream locations of the Arkavathi.

# From sandwiches to beverages: In Pune’s Yerwada jail, prisoners learn multi-cuisine cooking

GNS News Agency, April 18

pune jail, yerwada,Jalinder Supekar, Special Inspector General of Police (Prisons), said both convicts and under-trials, who have an interest in cooking, are participating in the training programme. At the Yerwada Central Jail in Pune, prisoners have taken up pots and pans as they learn to cook as part of the Maharashtra Prison Department’s initiative to reform and rehabilitate inmates.An idea of Suhas Warke, Additional Director General of Police (Prisons), the four-day multi-cuisine training programme started at the Yerwada Central Prison on April 15. A batch of 58 prisoners is being trained in the basics of cooking and hotel management, as well as personal hygiene, during the programme.

Jalinder Supekar, Special Inspector General of Police (Prisons), said both convicts and under-trials, who have an interest in cooking, are participating in the training programme. “The prison department has been conducting similar skill development initiatives for prisoners with the help of different organisations. When they move out of jails, they can use these skills to earn their living and be financially independent,” said Supekar.“A similar training programme was held recently at prisons in Nagpur and Satara. After the Yerwada Central Prison in Pune, we are planning to conduct it in other jails in the state,” he added.

At the Yerwada jail, one of the largest in the country, the training is being conducted by Tata Strive Skill Development Centre (TSSDC) in Pune.“During the training, the prisoners are being told about safety measures while cooking, and different food items and life skills. It also includes practicals in which items such as Coleslaw Sandwich and non-alcoholic beverages are made,” Mayur Pillewar of TSSDC said“The training sessions are interactive. The re-



sponse from prisoners is good as they raised several questions about the cooking profession,” Pillewar added.A computer training programme for prisoners was also conducted by Sunil Dhamal, Superintendent, Yerwada jail, Pallavi Kadam, Additional Superintendent, deputy superintendents R E Gaikwad and Mangesh Jagtap, jail officer A S Kande, and teacher Angad Gavhane, stated a press release.

In August 2023, the Maharashtra Prison Department and Correctional Services launched a restaurant, Shrunkhala, which means a series or a chain. It comprises eateries set up and managed by inmates of the open prison who cater to the public.The first unit was set up next to the Yerwada Open Prison, and caters to a large working population employed in IT and BPO companies and commercial hubs in the area. Subsequently, four of the 19 other open prisons in Maharashtra have started their Shrunkhala restaurants.

# Rajiv Gandhi International Airport achieves prestigious ACA Level 5 Carbon Accreditation

GNS News Agency, April 18

Hyderabad: GMR Hyderabad International Airport Ltd (GHIAL) operated Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA), announced that it has been awarded the Level 5 Accreditation under the globally recognised Airport Carbon Accreditation (ACA) programme by Airports Council International (ACI).

The ACA programme is the industry standard for the assessment of an airport’s efforts to manage and reduce

carbon emissions.

This milestone places RGIA among the top four airports in the ACI Asia-Pacific & Middle East region to achieve Level 5 — the highest level of carbon management certification under the ACA framework.

The accreditation reflects RGIA’s commitment to aligning with global climate goals, maintaining net-zero CO2 emissions for Scope 1 and 2, and striving towards net-zero Scope 3 emissions by 2050 or earlier, a press release



## SC advocate complains about senior Punjab cop’s ‘sex-for-cash clip’, CM Bhagwant Mann forwards email



GNS News Agency, April 18

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday forwarded an email complaint by Supreme Court advocate Nikhil Saraf on an alleged sex-for-cash scandal involving a senior IPS officer in the state to the administrative secretary of the home affairs and justice department. “The CM’s office has confirmed the receipt and marked it to the administrative secretary of home affairs and justice department for further action. The complaint was also sent to the Police Complaint Authority, which has confirmed the receipt telephonically,” Saraf said. He also sent an email to the Punjab State Commission for Women, but it is yet to respond. Saraf sent his complaints via email on April 8 after an audio recording surfaced on social media platform X, wherein the officer is purportedly heard negotiating terms for sexual services with an unidentified woman. The clip “shocked the conscience of every Indian,” Saraf wrote. According to Saraf, the recording exposes “a serving IPS officer... actively engaged in the organised sex

trade”, and the details of the purported conversation in the clip suggest “a pattern of conduct unbecoming of a public servant and possibly criminal in nature”.

In his complaint, Saraf alleged the officer’s involvement in a sex scandal, abuse of authority, and possible links to organised crime. The complaint outlines several key demands, including an independent forensic investigation of the audio clip to establish its authenticity, immediate witness protection for all individuals involved, a detailed forensic audit of the IPS officer’s assets and financial transactions, the registration of FIRs under applicable laws, and the submission of a comprehensive inquiry report within 15 days. The complaint alleges that the officer appeared to offer large sums of money — “approximately INR 50,000 for a single 3–4 hour engagement” — and made proposals involving two women, raising questions of coercion, misuse of public office, and access to unaccounted financial resources. “The tone, familiarity, and content of the conversation indicate this is not an isolated incident,” Saraf emphasised, warning of a “larger pattern of misconduct”.

The advocate further connected the officer to a dismissed police constable previously arrested in a drug case. “It was alleged that the woman and this officer were having an ongoing relationship,” Saraf wrote, noting that despite the seriousness of the allegations, “the police has not taken any action as of date”. He also expressed concern over “potential institutional complicity”, saying that continued inaction “strongly suggests a deliberate attempt to shield” the officer. Urging that democratic principles be upheld, Saraf said in the complaint, “Unchecked arbitrary and abusive actions by any arm of the Executive are worst prescriptions for a progressive democracy.”

## Buried mangrove patch revived in Vashi, environmentalists pitch for walkway

GNS News Agency, April 18

In a first for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, a four-hectare plot of buried mangroves at Vashi in Navi Mumbai has been brought back to life after a massive debris clearance operation by Maharashtra’s forest department. Situated close to the railway station, the patch had for long remained buried under truckloads of debris. Around 3,500 truckloads of debris have been cleared till now, and the area in survey number 17 of Vashi village is cleared for mangroves.

The 4.2-hectare plot also has 1.91 hectares of artificially formed waterbodies, which were initially excavated to dispose of debris. “This plot naturally has dense and sparse mangrove species, not waterbodies. The scrapped debris will now serve as a landfill for building the access road to the new Airoli-Ghansoli bridge,” said Range Forest Officer Sudhir Manjare. Conservationists welcomed the initiative as a long overdue yet unique and unprecedented attempt to restore nature. “It’s for the first time a mangrove burial site is being brought back in the MMR,” commented B N Kumar, director at the NatConnect Foundation, an NGO that along with others has been working on issues related to preserving mangroves. Though a 2018 Bombay High Court order called for mangrove conservation, activists say the restoration of damaged patches had remained largely untouched until now. In its budget for this year, the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation announced plans to develop



a mangrove park as part of the city’s tourism development. While the Vashi mangrove area is cleared now, environmental activists have suggested putting up a wooden mangrove walkway before anything new grows in the area. “It could be an educational trail to bring awareness to people about the ecologically beneficial work of mangroves as sinks for carbon dioxide, breeding spaces for fish and crabs, and natural purifiers of toxicants,” Kumar said. The activists suggested that the municipal corporation relocate its proposed mangrove park, currently planned for the ecologically sensitive Ghansoli-Airoli stretch, to the Vashi site instead. As the new patch is still bare, building the trail would be easier and less damaging to the ecosystem, they added.

## CAG flags safety issues, cost overruns and questionable construction quality on Mumbai’s Coastal Road project

GNS News Agency, April 18

A year after the first phase of the Mumbai Coastal Road — a 10.5-km stretch that connects Nariman Point to the Bandra-Worli Sea Link — was opened to the public, a draft report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has flagged several financial and operational discrepancies observed between 2020 and 2024. The draft report prepared by the Principal Accountant General (Audit I), Maharashtra, and submitted to the Chief Engineer of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) July last, points to BMC’s failure to conduct safety tests before inauguration, questionable construction quality, cost escalations, and undue benefits granted to contractors. A senior BMC official said the civic body had adhered to all norms to ensure that quality of work was maintained at all times. It has responded to the CAG’s observations and presented its views in a meeting last month, he said. “The auditor has assured, our views would be included in the final report,” the BMC official said. BMC and the state government have named the 10.5-km high speed corridor Dharamveer Swarajya Raksha Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj Mumbai Coastal Road. Constructed at a cost of Rs 13,000 crore, the project was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 19, 2024.

The draft report is learnt to have said that the road was inaugurated without completing key components like ‘Testing and Commissioning’ and establishing ‘Operation and Maintenance’ during the Defect Liability Period (DLP). It flagged structural deficiencies that surfaced within three months of the road’s inauguration. In May 2024, water seepage was reported from the walls of the southbound tunnel. The leakage was traced to expansion joints which raised concerns about construction quality. The draft report states that instead of implementing a permanent fix, BMC opted to inject cement into the cracks, a temporary measure. “Seepage or leakage of water from these expansion joints needs explanation as this may have been caused due to inferior quality of construction,” the draft report is learnt to have pointed out. The CAG’s draft also highlights the flooding of the pedestrian underpass (PUP) at Haji Ali during a 4.9-meter high tide in the 2024 monsoon. A senior BMC official told The Indian Express, “Quality tests of each and every item starting from raw material to machinery were carried out during the construction process. The leakage incident was uncalled for and it happened for some other reason, which we had specified in detail in our statement. Blaming the quality of work is not justified.” The draft report criticised the BMC for awarding multiple contracts without inviting tenders. One such instance involved awarding the Traffic Management Control System (TMCS) contract for the Marine Drive–Priyadarshini Park stretch directly to the existing consultant involved in construction.

This Rs 80.83 crore work order was issued without competitive bidding, which violated both BMC’s own guidelines and directives from the Maharashtra government. “The department without accessing competitive rates for the aforesaid work from existing and experienced contractors handling various TMCS works across various projects in

India had to allot the aforesaid work directly to existing contractors at very little negotiations on the rates quoted by them and provided them with an undue advantage,” the draft report is learnt to have pointed out. The draft report also flagged an excess payment of Rs 147 crore made to contractors after the GST rate was increased from 12% to 18%. This violated tender terms which explicitly stated that accepted rates would remain fixed regardless of tax changes. The BMC defended the payment, citing legal department advice and municipal commissioner approval. The report, however, maintained, “Any cost increase due to GST should have been absorbed by the contractors, as per the contract conditions.” The draft report also highlights the cost escalation in the car park construction. Work orders for the construction of two car parks—at Amarsons Garden and Haji Ali—were issued in 2018 at an estimated cost of ₹107.95 crore, with a project timeline of 48 months. However, construction could not commence that year due to opposition from local residents.

In September 2022, the Supreme Court directed that the car park construction should proceed concurrently with the Mumbai Coastal Road project. Despite this directive, progress remained sluggish. The CAG report noted that as of February 2024, large mounds of waste and construction debris remained at the project sites for several months, indicating minimal on-ground activity. The draft audit report flagged the delay as a violation of the court’s order and pointed out that, by early 2024, the cost of the project had already escalated by Rs 27.91 crore. With construction still lagging, the final expenditure is expected to rise further. In its response, the BMC stated that construction work at Amarsons Garden had begun and that ‘in-principle’ approval was being sought for the Haji Ali layout. The civic body further justified the increased cost by citing tender provisions that allow for a price variation of up to 20% of the original contract value. However, the CAG dismissed this explanation, noting that the cost escalation had already reached nearly 26% of the base value—surpassing the permissible 20% threshold. “The reply is not tenable as the price escalation has worked out till February 2024 stands at Rs 27.91 crore against a base price of Rs 107.95 crore — which is almost above the 20% mark. Also the possibility of rise in rates of material during the construction and completion could not be ruled out. This fact needs to be checked and the cost rise of price escalation claimed by the contractor during the completion of the two car parkings needs to be verified on actual completion of this work,” the draft report states. The draft report also states that the cost escalation in the project to increase the navigation span of the bridge in Worli seems to be unjustified. In response to demands from local fisherfolk, BMC agreed in 2023 to widen a navigation span in Worli from 60 meters to 120 meters to allow traditional wooden boats easier access to the sea. The expansion led to the adoption of a costlier “bow-string” bridge design, increasing project costs by 922 crore. “The increase in the width of the span was not justified as there were differences in opinions of the experts from time to time. Further the NOC was also given by the Fisheries department, but there was no demand for a span of more than 60 meters.

## Biggest Sikh jatha in several years cross border as Pakistan approves more than double the usual number of visas



GNS News Agency, April 18

According to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), this time, the number of pilgrims is more than double the usual as Pakistan issued 6,751 visas to Sikhs — the highest for any festival in several years. More than 3,500 Sikh pilgrims crossed to Pakistan from Amritsar Thursday morning, and the rest are set to do so later in the day. One of the pilgrims said he was elated as their visa applications were rejected previously. “My visa request to visit gurdwaras in Pakistan was denied twice. I had no hope this time, either. I prayed to the Almighty to bless me so that I could get a visa. I am very happy that now, finally, I can go to Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev ji,” said Harvinder Singh, 57, from Moga. Among those going to Pakistan this time were 1,942 pilgrims from a group coordinated by SGPC, which has consistently raised the issue of the neighbouring country not granting visas to all devotees who apply to visit gurdwaras. Partap Singh, secretary of the Committee, said, “SGPC had submitted 1,942 passports to the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi, which has now issued the required visas. After a long time, all the visa requests have been accepted.” Partap Singh said the jatha departed from the SGPC office in Amritsar and is expected to cross over to Pakistan by Thursday evening. “The jatha will attend the main congregation at Gurdwara Sri Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal and will also visit other gurdwaras. They are scheduled to return on April 19,” he

said.

Satbir Singh Dhumi, officer on special duty, SGPC, said, “In the previous years, many devotees were denied visas, which was disappointing. This time, an SGPC delegation met officials at the Pakistan High Commission and requested approval for all applicants.” “We are thankful to the Pakistan High Commission and both governments for allowing all pilgrims to travel this year,” he added. Saifullah Khokhar, Additional Secretary of Pakistan’s Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), was quoted as saying by Pakistan-based newspaper Dawn that they have made several arrangements for the visiting pilgrims. “Under the Pakistan-India Religious Protocol Agreement 1974, up to 3,000 Sikh pilgrims are permitted to visit Pakistan for any religious festival. However, the government of Pakistan has issued a total of 6,751 visas, granting 3,751 additional visas on the special request of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Evacuee Trust Property Board,” said Khokhar. SGPC and other Sikh bodies send pilgrims to Pakistan under the Simla Agreement of 1972 on four occasions yearly: the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak (November 15), Vaisakhi, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjun Dev (June 16) and the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (June 27). SGPC president thanks Pakistan High Commission

SGPC president Harjinder Singh Dhumi has written a letter to Saad Warraich, Chief Commissioner at the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi, expressing his gratitude for “generously granting visas to Sikh pilgrims”. In the letter, the SGPC president stated that this cooperation has enabled Sikh pilgrims to visit their historical and sacred shrines. He added that such a decision not only respects the religious sentiments of the pilgrims but also contributes significantly to strengthening the cultural and communal ties between India and Pakistan. He also thanked the Pakistan government for issuing many visas and making suitable arrangements for the pilgrims.

The SGPC president expressed hope that such cooperation will continue in the future, allowing the Sikh community to remain connected with their heritage and to visit their revered gurdwara.

## Probe into Cong MLA’s allegation of breach of privilege: Vidhan Sabha Secretariat seeks IPS Ilma Afroz’s fresh statement

GNS News Agency, April 18

Almost three months after Director General of Police (DGP) Atul Verma submitted a probe report into the allegation of breach of privilege against 2018-batch IPS officer Ilma Afroz, the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha Secretariat has sought a fresh written statement from the woman IPS officer posted as the Superintendent of Police in Lahaul & Spiti district. The Vidhan Sabha Secretariat issued a letter to the office of Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Onkar Chand Sharma, requesting a reply from Afroz a fortnight ago, followed by reminders requesting the statement at the earliest, sources said. The ACS office directed Afroz to submit her response, which is still awaited, they said. The Vidhan Sabha Secretariat requested a new statement after finding the officer’s previous statement recorded during the state police investigation had not been accurately documented, they said.

A senior officer at the Vidhan Sabha Secretariat told The Indian Express, “DGP Atul Verma submitted his report on January 25. We found that Afroz’s recorded statement did not meet the required standards for a formal inquiry. We are seeking a proper written response from the officer, which is why the ACS was asked to provide her with a detailed statement. The Vidhan Sabha Secretariat does not communicate directly with individuals or the state government. We always correspond through the office of the ACS.” Congress Doon MLA Ram Kumar Chaudhary had alleged that former SP of Baddi Ilma Afroz attempted to breach his privacy in 2024. Chaudhary lodged a complaint with the privilege committee during the monsoon session in September 2024. The committee directed the DGP to investigate the matter, and the inquiry was subsequently assigned to DIG Abhishek Dullar, who submitted the final report to the Vidhan Sabha on January 25. Afroz, then posted



as the Baddi SP, on January 27, 2023, proceeded on a 15-day earned leave starting November 7, reportedly due to differences with MLA Chaudhary. The MLA, however, denied his involvement in the officer’s sanctioned leave. However, during her leave, the charge of the Baddi SP was handed over to Himachal Pradesh Police Service (HPPS) officer Vinod Kumar Dhiman on November 14.

Meanwhile, a Baddi resident filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Himachal Pradesh High Court, seeking Afroz’s reinstatement as the SP Baddi. The petitioner, Sucha Ram, claimed that Afroz was “pressured into taking leave and that law and order in the area deteriorated after her transfer”. The petition highlighted that during her tenure, Afroz took strict action against illegal mining, drug menace, and organised crime in the Baddi-Barotiwala-Nalagarh Development (BBND) area.

## West Bengal school staff who lost their jobs sit overnight in front of SSC office in Kolkata



GNS News Agency, April 18

Having lost their jobs after the Supreme Court annulled the appointments of over 25,000 West Bengal school staffers, they will rally till the Rani Rashmoni Road in Esplanade. Having lost their jobs after the Supreme Court annulled the appointments of over 25,000 West Bengal school staffers, the people will rally till the Rani Rashmoni Road in Esplanade. On a hot Thursday, a group of teaching and non-teaching staff members sat in front of the School Service Commission office in Kolkata’s Salt Lake, before they joined a mega rally at Sealdah. They had been in front of the office since Wednesday night, with their OMR sheets in hand, hopeful that the government might “understand their plight”.

Having lost their jobs after the Supreme Court annulled the appointments of over 25,000 West Bengal school staffers, they will rally till the Rani Rashmoni Road in Esplanade. The demand is for separate lists of “genuine” and “tainted” candidates of the 2016 SSC examination. This comes a day after police lathi-charged teaching and non-teaching staffers outside the office of the district inspector of schools in the Kasba area, after the groups clashed. Some staff members alleged that the police kicked them. Pritam Pramanik, a teacher at Rai Diggi school, told The Indian

Express: “We demand mirror copies of the lists, and that the list of genuine candidates be certified and published. We are also protesting against yesterday’s incident at the DI office. And why should the tainted get salaries? We will not give voluntary service. Outside the SSC office, Krishna Mondol told media persons: “No one can ever say that I have given a single penny ever in my life but today, I have lost my job because of some tainted candidates. Where do I stand?” Kolkata Police Commissioner Manoj Verma Wednesday said in a press conference that police are investigating the lathi-charge incident and will take action against anyone found responsible. He said: “Our officer was also injured... But I must say, lathi-charge or kicking the teachers is not desirable.”

## Marijuana worth Rs 26 lakh seized at Secunderabad railway station

GNS News Agency, April 18

Hyderabad: The Secunderabad Government Railway Police (GRP) along with the Railway Protection Force (RPF) officials during a regular checking have seized 52 kgs of marijuana worth Rs 26 lakh from the luggage which was abandoned in the Secunderabad railway station on Wednesday night.

According to the GRP and RPF officials, while conducting regular checking on the railway station platforms, they found four luggage bags abandoned beside a food stall on Platform No. 7, towards the Kazipet end side. “We have enquired with the rail passengers who were available in the vicinity, shopkeepers and hawkers about the bags, but there was no clarity. When we opened them to check, the contraband substance was found wrapped in brown plaster and stuffed in them,” said a railway police official



# Police’s ‘loot attempt’ theory fake: Majithia, claims ‘AAP wants to eliminate Opp leaders’



GNS News Agency, April 18

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader and former minister Bikram Singh Majithia on Monday, alleged that the Punjab Police terming the attack on a petrol pump of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) member Jodh Singh Samra on Sunday night “a loot attempt” was an effort to “sweep the matter under the carpet”. Claiming that the AAP wants to “eliminate opposition leaders”, Majithia said Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was “targeting opposition leaders instead of controlling the law and order situation”. Addressing a press conference here, Majithia said gangsters were openly attacking opposition leaders.

Majithia claimed that the attack on the petrol pump at Kaler Mangat village in the Majithia Assembly segment took place because it was owned by SGPC member Jodh Singh

Samra, his close aide and the SAD Ajnala segment in-charge. He alleged that the prime motive of the attack was to target Samra, who was supposed to visit the pump.A petrol pump employee died, and two suffered serious injuries after a group of youths travelling in a car allegedly assaulted petrol pump staff and then opened indiscriminate fire after pump staff reportedly refused to refuel their vehicle in Kaler Mangat village, about 4 kilometres from the Majithia area of Amritsar, on Sunday night.One of the employees, Gautam, a resident of Uttar Pradesh, died on his way to a hospital. Two other employees, Amit and Darpan, were admitted to Guru Ram Das Hospital in Amritsar.Accusing police of postulating “a fake theory” that it was “a loot attempt”, Majithia said the attack took place late at night after the pump was shut down.“Attackers parked their vehicle on the road and opened indiscriminate fire, killing one person and seriously injuring two, but the attackers did not take away even a single rupee from the pump,” he said.On registration of a case against leader of the Opposition (LoP) Partap Singh Bajwa, the SAD leader said that he had predicted in mid-January that attempts were being made to disturb peace and communal harmony in the state and any prominent Hindu leader or businessman could be the next target of attackers.Majithia claimed that two months after his prediction, the residence of former minister Manoranjan Kalia was attacked.Similarly, when Bajwa blew the whistle and disclosed that “there are threats of more grenade attacks”, he was booked.

# Cop caught on camera assaulting minor, his family at Nayagaon

GNS News Agency, April 18

A shocking video of a Chandigarh Police constable has gone viral on social media, showing the officer allegedly misusing his authority inside a private residence at Nayagaon, Mohali district. The constable, identified as Inderjeet, is seen entering a home without a warrant, attempting to assault a minor boy, and manhandle family members who tried to intervene.The video displays his name badge, “Inderjeet Constable,” and his uniform marked with “Chandigarh Police”. His belt number, 5002, is also visible. In the footage, the constable can be seen pushing and shoving a woman relative who tried to defuse the situation.Following the incident, local resident Monika Sharma lodged a formal complaint with the police, demanding strict action against the constable for his misconduct and physical aggression.

“He abused and threatened us inside our home,” said the complainant.According to the complainant, the altercation began over a dispute involving two minor children. Instead of addressing the matter civilly, the constable stormed into the house and started yelling, using abusive language, and tried to assault the minor. When the family intervened, he began pushing them and issued threats. “He came claiming he was from Chandigarh Police and shouted, “No one can touch me. I’m above law,”” said the complainant.‘He threatened to kill us’Monika Sharma, who works at PGIMER,



Chandigarh, said she was on duty when the incident happened. Her children and relatives were home at the time. “My children called me in panic. When I rushed home from the hospital, they told me that the constable threatened to kill them,” she said.The family also alleged that the constable warned them against entering Chandigarh, saying, “If any member of your family steps into Chandigarh, which is my area, I won’t spare them.”The incident has sparked public outrage, raising serious concerns about police conduct and misuse of power.When contacted, DSP (City-1) Prithvi Singh stated, “The complainant is on the way, and we are currently verifying the facts and details. An investigation is underway, and appropriate action will be taken based on the findings.”

# His wish granted, daily wager who walked barefoot for 14 yrs puts on shoes gifted by PM



GNS News Agency, April 18

Rampal Kashyap, a daily wage labourer from Kaithal in Haryana, took a vow 14 years ago not to wear footwear until Narendra Modi become the Prime Minister and he meets him in person. Kashyap (54) finally put on a pair of shoes, gifted to him by Modi who met the father of three on the sidelines of a function in Yamunanagar.“Aaj hum tumko joota pehna rahe hai, lekin baad mai phir aaisa kabhi aise

kuch karna nahi (I am making you wear shoes, but do not do it again),” PM Modi said, as he handed over a pair of grey sneakers to Kashyap.PM also posted a video of his brief conversation with Kashyap. “Are bhai, why did you do so (remain barefoot for so long)?,” Modi is heard asking Kashyap, who say that he was ready to remain barefoot for the entire life.A resident of village Kheri Gulam Ali village in Kaithal, Kashyap works in the agricultural fields apart from taking up jobs at construction sites.After meeting the Prime Minister, Kashyap told The Indian Express: “It was like I met Bhagwan Ram.”

“Back home, the fellow villagers from Congress used to say that the BJP will never form a government at the Centre and in Haryana. Then, I took a vow not to wear shoes till the BJP doesn’t form a government with full majority and Modi ji becomes the Prime Minister,” said Kashyap, who studied up to class 5.“Initially, it was painful to be barefoot but later it had become a habit,” he addsKashyap says BJP leaders Ashok Gurjar and Kulwant Ram Bazigar from Kaithal and MPs Naveen Jindal and Rekha Sharma were instrumental in conveying the PMO about his vow and arranging his subsequent meeting with the Prime Minister.

When Kashyap reached home, the villagers welcomed him with garlands. Sharing the video of his meeting with Kashyap on X, PM said, “I am humbled by people like Rampal Ji and also accept their affection. But I want to request everyone who takes up such vows — I cherish your love... Please focus on something that is linked to social work and nation building.”In another post in Hindi, the Prime Minister said: “Today, I had the opportunity to help him (Kashyap) wear shoes. I deeply respect the sentiments of all such individuals, but I urge them to take vows for social or national welfare instead of such personal commitments.”

# Log into ‘Swagatam’ portal to access Chandigarh Police HQ

GNS News Agency, April 18

Chandigarh Police Headquarter- digital portal-swagatam“This is a major step toward strengthening the security of the police headquarters and enhancing visitor accountability,” said SP (Headquarters) Manjeet Sheoran.The public access to the Chandigarh Police headquarters will now be managed digitally through the Government of India’s ‘Swagatam’ portal, replacing the earlier walk-in pass system.The move aims to enhance security and streamline the visitor management process in a facility that deals with highly sensitive law enforcement data.Under the new system, visitors must pre-register online to obtain a digital gate pass, reducing wait time and ensuring tighter security protocols.“This is a major step toward strengthening the security of the police headquarters and enhancing visitor accountability,” said SP (Headquarters) Manjeet Sheoran.

The headquarters regularly hosts a diverse group of visitors, including complainants, advocates, RTI applicants, retired officers, and officials from various government departments.The new system is expected to improve their



experience while safeguarding sensitive operations.Previously, both civilians and police personnel were issued on-the-spot entry passes, often after long queues.With the introduction of the Swagatam portal, police personnel will no longer require separate passes, and digital entry for civilians will be the norm.For those unable to register online, on-the-spot digital passes can still be generated without denying access.

# Dera Bassi ‘encounter’: Spot encircled by chalk — and suspicion



GNS News Agency, April 18

An alleged encounter carried out by the Mohali police in Dera Bassi last Saturday has come under a cloud of suspicion with photographs and videos of the incident having emerged showing an injured gangster lying on the ground with spent cartridges marked with chalk circles, suggesting a staged crime scene.An ambulance had yet to arrive, but one TV channel had already reached the location raising suspicions, as it was only after media presence that the suspects were picked up and removed from the scene.While one gangster is seen sitting in a police vehicle, the injured one, allegedly shot at by the police in the encounter, is lying on the ground in media presence with neatly marked circles.

He is picked up and put in a police vehicle by two policemen in front of TV crews and media photographers who seemingly arrived at the crime scene within minutes of the encounter.The Mohali police had on Saturday claimed to have arrested two operatives of gangster-turned-terrorist Goldy Brar following an exchange of fire near the railway under-bridge located on the Ambala–Dera Bassi highway.The police said a .32-calibre pistol, along with four cartridges, was recovered from accused Kartik Singh, alias Ravi, a resident of Naraingarh, and Deepak, alias Deepu,

of Jagadhri in Haryana, currently residing at Dera Bassi, who had allegedly sought Rs 50 lakh as extortion money from an immigration consultancy-cum-IELTS centre located near Dera Bassi police station.

It is Ravi who is seen lying on the ground in the photographs and video grabs after having suffered a bullet injury in the left leg during alleged retaliatory firing by the police. The police claim he fired two bullets at the police vehicle in a bid to flee.Former SAD MLA from Dera Bassi N K Sharma reacted to the development saying the police were being pressured to carry out encounters in front of the media to gain publicity.“This atmosphere of fear is being deliberately created to intimidate people in Punjab with the aim of harvesting votes. Punjab has already suffered enough. If this continues, the state is heading down a dangerous path, and the Aam Aadmi Party will also feel the consequences,” he said.Sharma said the police should do their duty and act as required but questioned if they are now really bringing media crew along for encounters and sprucing up crime scenes.When asked for his comments on the matter in the light of the photographs, Mohali SSP Deepak Pareek defended his officials. “Due procedure has been followed by the police team. Ambulance and Forensic Science Laboratory team were also informed to reach the spot. Further investigation in the matter is going on,” he said.However, the neatly staged crime scene with well-marked evidence and area taped off even as the injured person is lying on the ground displayed before media persons has raised suspicions on the police claim of an encounter. A senior retired police officer, who requested anonymity, said the whole scenario looked “too good to be true”.Recent reports indicate a significant rise in police encounters in Punjab, particularly targeting gangsters and suspected terrorists. Between January and March 2025, the Punjab Police recorded 41 encounters, a sharp increase from 64 for the entire year of 2024, averaging nearly one every two days.Most encounters have left gangsters with an injury to the leg like the one suffered in the Dera Bassi encounter.

# What creates city’s top-notch Korean cafe? A special coffee and Buddhist way of business



GNS News Agency, April 18

Pune news, korean cafe, indian expressMayuri Bhalerao and Bae Daeguk met over a language app – he wanted to learn modern Indian languages, such as Marathi or Hindi, while she was keen on Korean. (Source: Special Arrangement)The word “Annyeong” is a simple way for Koreans to greet one another. In Pune, this greeting can be heard frequently at a cafe on the Baner-Pashan link road, almost as often as the cheerful “hellos” exchanged by patrons entering for a bite to eat and a conversation.Cafe Annyeong is reputed for offering among the finest Korean coffees in the city, and its financier, a croissant-shaped butter roll, is a rare delight. But, what sets the cafe apart is the focus on “good energy”.

“We want to practise Buddhist teachings. We might not be able to apply all the teachings in business but, at

least, we can have a Buddhist attitude,” says Bae Daeguk, who helps the cafe’s founders – his wife Mayuri Bhalerao and her mother, Lata Bhalerao – with operations.

“There is a teaching that, even if we don’t have anything to give as a donation, the first thing we can still give to another person is a smile. We get so much good energy from the customers. Even if a customer gives us very bad and serious energy, we make sure we respond with a smile,” says Bae Daeguk.The cafe began with a different sort of objective, and it was not to make money. “In Korea, my parents are working. My father is more interested in helping other people, especially in poor countries in Africa. So, he travels around the world donating spectacles, sunglasses and so on. We were keen that Mayuri’s parents also keep working because a few hours of work and healthy stress are helpful to your health and essential for your well-being,” says Daeguk.

Daeguk, who was born and raised in Changwon-si, the capital of South Gyeongsang Province in South Korea, should have known the direction his life would take when he found out that the meaning of his name was “Maharashtra”.He had come to India in 2017 to understand how to translate Indian scriptures in Sanskrit and Pali into Korean. He had studied Sanskrit back home for 10 years “as a hobby”.Mayuri and Daeguk met over a language app – he wanted to learn modern Indian languages, such as Marathi or Hindi, while she was keen on Korean.The items at the cafe are baked or made in-house and Daeguk points to the sweets and savouries on display as customers try to make a choice.“The concept of combining coffee with fresh cream is not very common in India, but in Korea, it is very popular. The cafe offered this coffee to Pune and people liked it. There are also several items that are not strictly Korean but are popular in the country right now,” he says.The cafe is “doing well” and the plan is to open an academy to train baristas in Pune.“Our will is also to focus on hygiene, which is very important to the Korean way of life,” says Daeguk.

# Extortion threats ignored: Mohali man’s car set ablaze, police apathy under fire



GNS News Agency, April 18

A local resident’s car was set on fire after five months of receiving extortion threats. Despite complaints to the police about calls received from international and local numbers, no preventive action was taken.Mandeep Singh, a 33-year-old resident of Sector 78, Mohali, had been receiving WhatsApp calls demanding Rs 10 lakh in extortion since November 2024. The calls reportedly originated from Dubai, South Africa, Austria, and even local sources.

“I told them I had just bought a new car and didn’t have the money,” Mandeep recalled. “They replied, ‘Tere nal tan hai hi gall karega, te oh dasega tenu, natejee bhugtan lai teyar rahin (Only the boss will talk to you now. He’ll explain it to you. Be ready to face the consequences).”Mandeep said he lodged a complaint regarding the threats at Sohana police station on November 16, 2024. However, no action was taken, and his complaint wasn’t even formally registered. On the morning of April 14 at 12:44 am, three unidentified individuals poured an unknown substance on his parked new Verna and set it ablaze. Though the fire brigade was alerted immediately, the car was engulfed in flames before they could arrive. Fortunately, other nearby vehicles were saved from damage.Following the incident, a PCR team arrived at the scene. Mandeep alleged that he was repeatedly asked by the police to return at different times — first in the morning, then in the afternoon, and again in the evening. “The police have neither taken the threat calls se-

riously since November, nor today’s attack,” he said.Phone calls to SHO Kulwant Singh of the Mataur police station went unanswered.When contacted about the threatening calls to the complainant, DSP City 2 Harsimran Singh Bal said that the matter is not in his knowledge and the police will investigate the matter.This incident raises serious questions about the preparedness and responsiveness of the Mohali police, highlighting how a citizen continues to face threats to life and property while the authorities remain inactive.Following media intervention in the case, the police now appear to be taking action as well. Complainant Mandeep Singh told The Indian Express at 5 pm that he received a call from the SHO, assuring him that culprits would be apprehended and would be behind bars within 24 hours.

# Jilted woman dies by suicide, relatives stage demonstration at man's house in Nalgonda

Nalgonda: Relatives of a woman who died by suicide are staging a demonstration with her body in front of the house of a person, holding him responsible for the suicide in Bokkamantulapadu village on Tuesday. Tension escalated in the village as the relatives are refusing to remove the body.

Reports reaching here said the woman Mallishwari died by suicide in Hyderabad after coming to know that her lover Jana Reddy got married to another woman. Her relatives alleged that she was in relationship with Jana Reddy of the same village and came to know about his wedding after seeing some photographs shared on whatsapp.

Police are trying to convince to convince the relatives to remove the body. Investigation is in progress.



# Salvadoran fugitive convicted in deadly attack of Maryland hiker



GNS News Agency, April 18

A fugitive from El Salvador was convicted on Monday (April 14, 2025) in the 2023 slaying of a Maryland woman who was attacked while exercising on a popular hiking trail northeast of Baltimore. Prosecutors alleged that Victor Martinez-Hernandez, 24, was carrying out a planned attack when he grabbed Rachel Morin off the trail, bashed her head against nearby rocks, raped her and concealed her body in a drainage culvert. Their case hinged on DNA evidence connecting him to the crime. A jury found Martinez-Hernandez guilty of first-degree murder and first-degree rape, among other offenses, according to Randolph Rice, an attorney representing Morin's relatives.

"The Morin family is incredibly relieved that justice was served today," Mr. Rice said in a statement. Martinez-Hernandez was accused of entering the United States illegally after allegedly killing another woman in his home coun-

# Tehran says next round of Iran-U.S. nuclear talks in Oman after Rome named by officials

GNS News Agency, April 18

Talks between Iran and the United States over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program had appeared ready on Monday (April 14, 2025) to leave the Middle East, as an Italian source and others said the next round of negotiations would take place in Rome. However, Iran early Tuesday (April 15, 2025) insisted they'd again be held in Oman. It wasn't immediately clear where the negotiations would be held after Tehran's overnight announcement. American officials have not said where the talks would be held. President Donald Trump separately complained Monday about the pace of nuclear talks between the United States and Iran as the two countries start a new round of pivotal negotiations.

The next meeting had been expected to take place on Saturday in Rome, according to a source in the Italian government who spoke on the condition of anonymity to The Associated Press because they weren't authorized to speak publicly. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani also signaled the talks would take place there. "We received the request from the interested parties, from Oman, which plays the role of mediator and we gave a positive response," Tajani told reporters during a trip to Osaka, Japan. "We are ready to welcome, as always, meetings that can bring positive results, in this case on the nuclear issue."

Dutch Foreign Minister Caspar Veldkamp, speaking at a meeting in Luxembourg, also said the coming talks would be in Rome. U.S. and Iranian officials have not confirmed the change in venue. And Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reportedly said the talks would happen in Rome while speaking to his Iraqi counterpart on Monday, according to the state-run Iraqi News Agency. Then early Tuesday, the State-run IRNA news agency quoted Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei as saying the talks would be back in Oman, without elaborating on the reason. Easter Sunday will be this coming weekend, a major holiday in Rome, which surrounds Vatican City, the home of the Roman Catholic church. The first round of talks over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program took place over the past weekend in Oman.

The stakes of the negotiations couldn't be higher for the two nations closing in on half a century of enmity. Mr. Trump has repeatedly threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's nuclear program if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn that they could pursue a nuclear weapon with their stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels. Speaking of Iran, Mr. Trump said, "I want them to be a rich, great nation." However, he said, "These are radicalized people, and they cannot have a nuclear weapon." Meanwhile, the head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog separately confirmed he would be taking a trip to Iran later in the week, possibly to discuss ways to improve access for his inspectors to Tehran's program. The talks will follow a visit by Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency to Iran later this week. The

# China accuses U.S. of launching 'advanced' cyberattacks, names alleged NSA agents



GNS News Agency, April 18

Chinese police in the northeastern city of Harbin have accused the United States National Security Agency (NSA) of launching "advanced" cyberattacks during the Asian Winter Games in February, targeting essential industries. Police added three alleged NSA agents to a wanted list and also accused the University of California and Virginia Tech of being involved in the attacks after carrying out investigations, according to a report by state news agency Xinhua on Tuesday.

However, the report contained a considerable amount of detail on the cyberattacks and the alleged individuals involved, and comes as the world's two largest economies spiral deeper into a trade war that has already spurred travel warnings for Chinese tourists going to the U.S. and halted imports of U.S. films into China. "The U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) launched cyber attacks against impor-

try. Authorities also linked him to a 2023 home invasion in Los Angeles. Morin was killed in August 2023. The act of violence sent shock waves through Bel Air, a suburban community northeast of Baltimore. It also became a political flashpoint during the 2024 presidential election campaign as Donald Trump called for increased border security and mass deportations of immigrants living in the U.S. illegally.

Mr. Trump posted on social media about the verdict Monday night, saying Morin's "life was taken at the hands of a monster who should have NEVER been here in the first place" and blaming the Biden administration for failing to properly secure the border. Martinez-Hernandez was arrested last summer in Oklahoma. He had been living in Bel Air around the time of Morin's death, prosecutors said. They said Morin went walking or running along the same route almost every day, usually in the evenings. Defense attorneys challenged prosecutors' assertion that the crime was a random attack and said police simply got the wrong guy. They also asked jurors to pay close attention to unanswered questions during the trial, including questions of motive. Detectives collected DNA from several places on Morin's body and developed Martinez-Hernandez as a suspect, according to prosecutors. After interviewing some of his relatives, detectives matched DNA from the scene with DNA collected from socks that Martinez-Hernandez left behind when he fled Maryland. Morin, 37, left behind five children. Her 14-year-old daughter was the first witness to testify last week, fighting back tears as she described the immediate aftermath of her mom's disappearance.



IAEA played a key role in verifying Iran's compliance with its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and has continued to work in the Islamic Republic, even as the country's theocracy slowly peeled away its access after Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord in 2018. "Continued engagement and cooperation with the Agency is essential at a time when diplomatic solutions are urgently needed," Grossi wrote on X. Grossi will arrive in Iran on Wednesday night and will meet with Araghchi and President Masoud Pezeshkian, the state-run IRNA news agency reported, quoting Kazem Gharibabadi, a deputy foreign minister. The 2015 nuclear deal saw Iran agree to drastically reduce its stockpile of uranium and only enrich up to 3.67% — enough for its nuclear power plant at Bushehr. Today, Iran enriches up to 60%, a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels and has enough stockpile for multiple nuclear bombs, should it choose to build them. The deal lifted economic sanctions on Iran and unfroze assets around the world. The deal's collapse froze those funds and limited Iran's ability to sell crude oil abroad — though it still sells to China, likely at a sharp discount. While the U.S. can offer sanctions relief for Iran's beleaguered economy, it remains unclear just how much Iran will be willing to concede. Judging from negotiations since 2018, Iran will likely ask to keep enriching uranium up to at least 20%. However, neither side has offered any public statements about what it is specifically seeking in the talks.

"There must definitely be guarantees in place regarding the fulfillment of commitments," Baghaei said Monday. "The issue of guarantees is especially important given the history of broken promises in the past. God willing, the negotiating team will continue its work with all these factors and points in mind." He added: "As long as the language of sanctions, pressure, threats, and intimidation continues, direct negotiations will not take place." However, Araghchi and U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff did meet and speak face to face after some two hours of indirect talks mediated by Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi. Speaking to journalists on Air Force One on Sunday, Mr. Trump said he had met with Mr. Witkoff and that his envoy had "very good meetings on the Middle East." "We'll be making a decision on Iran very quickly," Mr. Trump said, without elaborating.

tant industries such as energy, transportation, water conservancy, communications, and national defence research institutions in Heilongjiang province," the report said, citing the Harbin city public security bureau. The U.S. Embassy in China did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. The attacks had "the intention of sabotaging China's critical information infrastructure, causing social disorder, and stealing important confidential information," it added. Xinhua said the NSA operations took place during the Winter Games and were "suspected of activating specific pre-installed backdoors" in Microsoft Windows operating systems on specific devices in Heilongjiang.

Three named individuals "repeatedly carried out cyber attacks on China's critical information infrastructure and participated in cyber attacks on Huawei and other enterprises", it added. The U.S. routinely accuses Chinese state-backed hackers of launching attacks against its critical infrastructure and government bodies. Last month, Washington announced indictments against a slew of alleged Chinese hackers who targeted the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the foreign ministries of Taiwan, South Korea, India, and Indonesia. Beijing denies all involvement in overseas cyber espionage. After years of being accused by Western governments of cyberattacks and industrial espionage, in the past two years several Chinese organisations and government organs have accused the United States and its allies of similar behaviour. In December, China said it found and dealt with two U.S. cyber attacks on Chinese tech firms to "steal trade secrets" since May 2023, but did not name the agency involved.

# White House proposes drastic cuts to State Department and funding for UN, NATO and other groups



GNS News Agency, April 18

The White House's Office of Management and Budget has proposed gutting the State Department's budget by almost 50%, closing a number of overseas diplomatic missions, slashing the number of diplomatic staff, and eliminating funding for nearly all international organizations, including the United Nations, many of its agencies and for NATO headquarters, officials said. The proposal, which was presented to the State Department last week and is still in a highly preliminary phase, is not expected to pass muster with either the department's leadership or Congress, which will ultimately be asked to vote on the entire federal budget in the coming months. Officials familiar with the proposal say it must still go through several rounds of review before it even gets to lawmakers, who in the past have amended and even rejected White House budget requests. Though the proposal is preliminary, it gives an indication of the Trump administration's priorities and coincides with massive job and funding cuts across the federal government, from Health and Human Services and the Education Department to the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Notes from an internal meeting about the proposal have been circulated in online chat groups among foreign ser-

vise officers since the weekend but exploded Monday when the State Department was due to present a separate unrelated reorganization plan to the OMB. One senior U.S. official familiar with the OMB proposal called it "aggressive" in terms of cost-cutting, but also stressed that it was an early outline that mirrored what OMB chief Russell Vought sought to do in President Donald Trump's first administration when he served in the same job. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal administration deliberations. So did two people familiar with the matter who confirmed the proposal, one of whom also said it originated from OMB. OMB spokesperson Alexandra McCandless said that "no final funding decisions have been made." OMB's efforts to severely reduce the State Department's budget during Trump's first term were met with fierce resistance on Capitol Hill and largely failed. However, Trump's second administration has moved swiftly to scale back the federal government, slashing jobs and funding across agencies. It's already dismantled USAID and moved to defund so-called other "soft power" institutions of foreign policy importance like the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Radio Free Asia and Radio/TV Marti, which broadcasts to Cuba. Thus, State Department officials and others have expressed increasing concern about the possibility that the proposed drastic cuts could actually be implemented. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said she was "deeply troubled" by the reported proposed cuts.

"When America First becomes America Alone, our economy, security and prosperity will suffer as adversaries fill the void the Trump Administration leaves behind," Shaheen said in a statement. "Investments in diplomatic programs that promote peace and stability, and advance American national security interests are commonsense priorities that should be reflected in the State Department's budget request."

# US government freezes \$2.2 billion in grants to Harvard University

GNS News Agency, April 18

Boston: The federal government says it's freezing more than USD 2.2 billion in grants and contracts to Harvard University, since the institution said on Monday it won't comply with the Trump administration's demands to limit activism on campus. In a letter to Harvard on Friday, the administration called for broad government and leadership reforms, a requirement that Harvard institute what it calls "merit-based" admissions and hiring policies as well as conduct an audit of the study body, faculty and leadership on their views about diversity. The demands, which are an update from an earlier letter, also call for a ban on face masks — which appeared to target pro-Palestinian protesters. They also pressure the university to stop recognizing or funding "any student group or club that endorses or promotes criminal activity, illegal violence, or illegal harassment." Harvard president Alan Garber, in a letter to the Harvard community Monday, said the demands violated the university's First Amendment rights and "exceeds the statutory limits of the government's authority under Title VI," which prohibits discrimination against students based on their race, colour or national origin.

"No government — regardless of which party is in power — should dictate what private universities can teach, whom they can admit and hire, and which areas of study and inquiry they can pursue," Garber wrote, adding that the university had taken extensive reforms to address antisemitism. "These ends will not be achieved by assertions of power, unmoored from the law, to control teaching and learning at Harvard and to dictate how we operate," he wrote. "The work of addressing our shortcomings, fulfilling our commitments, and embodying our values is ours to define and undertake as a community."

The demands of Harvard are part of a broader push of using taxpayer dollars to pressure major academic institutions to comply with President Donald Trump's political agenda and to influence campus policy. The administration has also argued that universities allowed what it considered to be antisemitism to go unchecked at campus protests last year against Israel's war in Gaza; the schools deny it. Harvard is one of several Ivy League schools targeted in a pressure campaign by the administration, which



also has paused federal funding for the University of Pennsylvania, Brown, and Princeton to force compliance with its agenda. Harvard's demand letter is similar to the one that prompted changes at Columbia University under the threat of billions of dollars in cuts. The demands from the Trump administration prompted a group of alumni to write to university leaders calling for it to "legally contest and refuse to comply with unlawful demands that threaten academic freedom and university self-governance."

"Harvard stood up today for the integrity, values, and freedoms that serve as the foundation of higher education," said Anurima Bhargava, one of the alumni behind the letter. "Harvard reminded the world that learning, innovation and transformative growth will not yield to bullying and authoritarian whims." It also sparked a protest over the weekend from members of the Harvard community and from residents of Cambridge and a lawsuit from the American Association of University Professors on Friday challenging the cuts. In their lawsuit, plaintiffs argue that the Trump administration has failed to follow steps required under Title VI before it starts cutting funds, and giving notice of the cuts to both the university and Congress. "These sweeping yet indeterminate demands are not remedies targeting the causes of any determination of noncompliance with federal law. Instead, they overtly seek to impose on Harvard University political views and policy preferences advanced by the Trump administration and commit the University to punishing disfavoured speech," plaintiffs wrote.

# SADC denies claims of joint military operations with Congo forces



GNS News Agency, April 18

Gaborone: The Southern African Development Community (SADC) dismissed claims that its regional force deployed in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is conducting joint military operations with Congolese troops. In a statement issued Monday by its headquarters in Gaborone, Botswana's capital, the 16-member bloc rejected allegations made by the March 23 Movement (M23) in a communique dated April 12, calling them "inaccurate and misleading." "SADC firmly refutes these allegations. These assertions are both inaccurate and misleading," the bloc said, adding that the SADC Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) has not participated in any joint operations as claimed.

SADC noted that SAMIDRC is currently implementing a structured and coordinated withdrawal from the DRC in line with directives from the SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government. The bloc had announced the end of the deployment in March, Xinhua news agency reported. SADC also reaffirmed its commitment to the outcomes of a consultative meeting held on March 28, 2025, in Goma, eastern DRC, between SADC representatives and M23 leadership.

The statement said that SADC remains dedicated to

supporting peaceful and diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving lasting stability in eastern DRC. All parties have been urged by the SADC secretariat to act responsibly, refrain from the spread of misinformation, and work collectively to de-escalate tensions and restore peace in the region. Eastern DRC has endured decades of conflict, with armed groups including M23 vying for control of the mineral-rich region. The violence has displaced millions and deepened an ongoing humanitarian crisis. SAMIDRC, which includes troops from Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania, was deployed in December 2023 as part of regional efforts to support peace processes and bolster security in collaboration with Congolese authorities.

# Senior SCCL staffer, grandfather of three, wins medals in sprinting and bodybuilding in Mancherial

Mancherial: Pulishetti Krishna Swamy, a senior employee of Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) has become a role model to youngsters of this region and his three grandchildren by excelling in both sprinting and bodybuilding at the age of 53. Hailing from Dwarakanagar in Thandur mandal, Krishnaswamy has been working with Services and Protection Corps (S&PC) wing of the SCCL for 30 years. He developed a passion for sprinting long ago but recently ventured into bodybuilding by pushing his mental and physical limitations. "I have been participating in inter-coal mine sprinting competitions held by SCCL. I began building my body in 2017. I am fascinated by the two fields as they help me in staying physically fit, earning fame and bringing recognition to my parents. It has been a satisfying journey so far," Krishnaswamy told 'Telangana Today.'



# The Teesta dam and the long shadow of climate change



2025, an expert committee constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change recommended a proposal to rebuild the Teesta-3 dam on the Teesta river in Sikkim. In October 2023, a powerful glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) from the South Lhonak lake had decimated the dam and its hydroelectric power generation facility. The waters also carried debris from the dam forward like a fluid battering ram, heightening the damage further downstream. In all, over 100 people were killed while more than 80,000 people in four districts were affected.It became clear later that a moraine on the South Lhonak lake’s flank suffered a slope failure, weakening the terminus. The failure also sent rocks tumbling into the lake, generating a strong ripple. The outlet subsequently gave way, with satellite data indicating that around 50 billion litres of water had spilled into the valley. The event also set off multiple landslides about 30 to 40 kilometres downstream. Experts who have since been monitoring the lake also said the moraine has remained unstable.The link with global warming

As global warming and particulate matter — especially black carbon, also known as soot — accelerate the melting of Himalayan glaciers, more runoff is pooling into new lakes or adding to the existing ones. The rate of melting is inversely proportional to the volume, so, as glaciers shrink, they melt faster. A report by the Central Water Commission of last year found that the number of “glacial lakes and other water bodies” in the Himalayan region had become 10.8% more numerous between 2011 and 2024 and that their combined surface area had increased by 33.7% in the same period. The South Lhonak lake itself was formed in the early 1960s and grew to 167 hectares by 2023. Glacial retreat has also been known to destabilise extant geological formations and create new sources of risk. Against this background, the expert committee’s decision to recommend the rebuilding of the Teesta-3 dam is worrisome.

As The Hindu has reported, the committee’s decision was motivated by the fact that Teesta-3 was “successful” and “commercially viable” and that its power-generating equipment “was largely intact” following the GLOF. Environmental activists and hydrogeology experts alike have expressed misgivings about large hydroelectric power projects in the Himalaya and have questioned the new design’s green clearance. Teesta-3 has also been the subject of several public interest litigations asking for it be scrapped: because of its location (in an earthquake- and landslide-prone area); issues in its techno-economic clearance; its non-compliance with a 1996 notification to have Sikkim hold 51% equity; and alleged corruption.According to the committee, Teesta-3 2.0 is to be built with concrete alone rather than concrete and rocks as before; to have a spillway nearly three-times more voluminous; and to have an early-warning system for flooding. The facility’s new design is reportedly based on a “worst-case scenario” modelled by the India Meteorological Department, with the “maximum possible rain” in the next century in the region. But one of the hallmarks of climate change is that it is a risk-multiplier. If the slope failure off the South Lhonak lake had

# Addressing the growing threat of forest fires

As wildfires swept throughout Los Angeles last month, destroying homes and causing casualties and displacements, the urgency of addressing and preventing forest fires took centre stage once again. Unfortunately, forest fires become a point of conversation only when some major incident causes irrevocable damage and captures media and public attention. The fires are a stark reminder that no place is immune from their impacts and that we need a clear pathway to prevent and manage them as their frequency increases.In India, the situation is equally alarming. According to the Forest Survey of India, more than 36% of the country’s forest cover is prone to fire. An analysis by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water states that there has been a 10-fold increase in forest fire incidences in the last two decades, whereas the total forest cover has increased by merely 1.12%.

Living on the fringes of the Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand, I see the immense value of India’s forests, not just as critical enablers of wildlife conservation and sources of biodiversity, but as lifelines for local communities that live around them. While Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh often capture headlines for forest fires, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Karnataka, among others, are also grappling with the frequency and intensity of forest fires.According to various reports, nearly 90% of these fires are caused by human activities such as deliberate land clearing, slash-and-burn agriculture, and unattended campfires. These factors, coupled with climate change-driven factors such as rising temperatures and extended dry spells, intensify the risk of forest fires.Forest fires have widespread consequences — natural, social, and economic — that are all interconnected. Besides the direct loss of trees, wildlife, and biodiversity, they contribute significantly to carbon emissions. A report by the World Resources Institute estimates that Indian forest fires emit approximately 69 million tonnes of CO2 annually. Forest fires result in the loss of timber and non-timber forest products, essential for forest-dependent communities, contributing to direct economic losses. A 2018 report by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change estimated that forest degradation (including forest fires) results in an annual economic loss of approximately ₹1.74 lakh crore. Forest fires also disrupt the water cycle, cause soil fertility degradation, and worsen human-wildlife conflict as animals seek refuge in human settlements.India has put in place several policies and schemes to address forest fire management, such as the National Action Plan on Forest Fires and the Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FFPMS). The centrally sponsored FFPMS assists State governments in strengthening their forest fire prevention and management capabilities.

A more robust responseHowever, given the growing intensity of forest fires in India, much more remains to be done. First, Budget constraints have proven to be an obstacle. For example, the FFPMS’s funding allotment has

occurred without there being a lake, there is unlikely to have been a flood. Likewise, if the moraine had not collapsed, the gradual accumulation of water may have caused the overtopping to flow into the valley less violently than during a GLOF.

The proliferation of glacial lakes, geological instability, dynamics of transient landscape features, and even the flux of atmospheric soot blowing in from industrial centres in the Gangetic plains all increase risks in a way that cannot reasonably be captured by a rainfall-centric model, however. Experts had already doubted whether the 2023 GLOF was triggered by heavy rain because local weather stations recorded only moderate rainfall or less in the area around the time. Professor Raghu Murtugudde has also written in The Hindu (“The value of attributing extreme events to climate change | Explained”, May 24, 2024) that the relationships between climate change and local rainfall are hard to characterise because the data for modelling is seldom sufficient. In his words, climate models are “notoriously bad at properly capturing normal rainfall and worse at extreme ones”.On January 30, 2025, an international team including experts from the Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar, the Indian Institute of Science Bengaluru, the Indo Tibetan Border Police, and the Government of Sikkim published a comprehensive assessment of the GLOF (“The Sikkim flood of October 2023: Drivers, causes and impacts of a multihazard cascade”). Among other things, they wrote: “Prevailing GLOF modeling and assessment approaches insufficiently account for processes of erosion and sediment transport, as well as hillslope-channel interactions such as riverbank collapses and landslides triggered by toe-undercutting as well as the impact of sediment transport on local bed elevations and hence water levels. The latter is of particular importance in large river basins because water waves move faster than sediment waves...”.

The commercial viability of Teesta-3, pre-GLOF, speaks to India’s soaring power demand and the pressing need to produce it somewhere. But since climate change multiplies risk everywhere, production in specific locales should be weighed against the consequences. Property and livelihoods downstream of Teesta-3 1.0 suffered greater damage due to the dam being in the swelling river’s way. If the new design holds, Teesta-3 2.0 may be able to reduce the downstream damage due to a (hypothetically) identical flood. But if a stronger and/or significantly different flood occurs, the damage could be even greater. A new facility with more moving parts will also create both new success and failure modes.The social security of the region’s residents will have to be improved accordingly so that, in the event of a disaster, they are able to piece their lives back together without slipping on any social, health, and/or economic indicators. Brian Stone, Jr., a professor in the School of City and Regional Planning at the Georgia Institute of Technology, U.S., wrote in a 2024 article (“The lunacy of rebuilding in disaster-prone areas”), “We cannot engineer our way out of climate change; retreat is inevitable.” That is, if the climate-change-induced risk to X in an area is to be kept constant, in time either the area will shrink or the costs of maintaining X will increase. X could be property, livelihoods, even human lives.

That the facility was commercially viable is an insufficient excuse to restore it. Instead, the decision should be made within a framework of priorities led by the need to minimise risk to locals, their property, and their livelihoods and maximise their socio-economic resilience. The framework should also include a risk determination matrix with a response plan and a hard ‘unacceptable risk’ level. The cost of these measures should be included in the dam’s hydroelectric power tariff rather than externalising it in the determination of commercial viability. Anything else would be unsustainable by definition.



fluctuated over time. In 2019-2020, it received ₹746.40 crore, followed by ₹732.47 crore in 2020-2021, ₹734.26 crore in 2021-2022, and ₹728.25 crore in 2022-2023. The budget projection for 2023-2024 was ₹751 crore, which was revised to ₹740 crore. The planned allocation for 2024-2025 is ₹750 crore. This shows the need for more steady support.On the technology front, the existing Forest Fire Alert System cannot distinguish between forest fires and other types of fires, delaying ground-level validation and response. India could use advanced predictive modelling to help identify high-risk areas based on climatic and geographic data. This must be supplemented by using drones equipped with thermal imaging cameras to monitor fire-prone areas, assess damage, and guide firefighting efforts. States such as Tamil Nadu and Odisha have already piloted such initiatives, which could be scaled nationally. In addition, there is merit in also exploring how relevant and existing data from the Forest Survey of India, the India Meteorological Department, and the Indian Space Research Organisation can be integrated and analysed for better forest fire management.

Equipping more and more local communities to collect and share real-time data to report fires as soon as they are sighted through mobile applications, toll-free helplines, and SMS-based systems can strengthen early warning systems and ensure rapid, localised response. In Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, self-help groups, primarily women, collect pine needles to blunt future fires. India can also draw from Nepal’s Community Forest User Groups and Indonesia’s Fire-Free Village Program to strengthen community forest fire management. Empowering communities with awareness, training, and resources and engaging youth as ‘forest fire scouts’ can foster stewardship, combining local knowledge with modern tools like fire risk mapping and controlled burns.Forest fires are not just an environmental issue — they are societal and economic, affecting livelihoods, health, and the foundation of our ecosystems. Addressing this challenge requires the collaboration of policymakers, scientists, civil society groups, and communities. From creating supporting infrastructure through policy intervention, improved budgeting, technology adoption, and building a cadre of trained personnel to empowering communities — all measures must go hand-in-hand to turn the tide.

# Bandipur authorities intensify awareness drives in villages surrounding the tiger reserve to prevent forest fires



Bandipur is rich in wildlife, including tigers and elephants, and fire prevention measures are taken seriously to protect the habitat.Bandipur is rich in wildlife, including tigers and elephants, and fire prevention measures are taken seriously to protect the habitat. | Photo Credit: M.A. SRIRAMAuthorities in Bandipur are bracing for a scorching summer in the coming weeks and have launched awareness campaigns in local villages and hamlets surrounding the tiger reserve to emphasise the importance of preventing forest fires during the season.

So far, 65 awareness camps and drives have been conducted in a bid to curb the outbreak of fires, which are a major concern in Bandipur during the dry season. The tiger reserve has a history of devastating fires that have previously ravaged vast stretches of forest.S. Prabhakaran, director of Bandipur Tiger Reserve, told The Hindu that the awareness drive will continue until nearly all the hamlets and villages bordering the forests are covered. “This is a proactive measure to build goodwill and gain the trust of the local community in protecting the fragile ecosystem, which is highly vulnerable to fire,” he said.The importance of this initiative stems from the need to enlist local cooperation in the early detection of fires. Also, fire prevention is most effective when the community is involved and feels a sense

# The two sides of the rising phenomenon of internet-based self-diagnosis of mental health disorders

People in general are more aware now in terms of both physical and mental health due to the widespread dissemination of information on the internet, say doctors. People in general are more aware now in terms of both physical and mental health due to the widespread dissemination of information on the internet, say doctors. | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphotoHave you ever seen a list of symptoms on social media and thought you had a mental disorder? It turns out that many people especially youngsters, have begun diagnosing themselves with mental health disorders after checking out symptoms on social media or through internet search engines.

Both psychologists and psychiatrists in Bengaluru say they have noticed an increase in the number of patients who walk into their clinics with such diagnoses. Anxiety, depression and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are some commonly self-diagnoses in such patients. “We see many young adults, specifically in their 20s or early 30s, coming in with information they have derived from social media. For instance, they say things like, “I procrastinate, so I have ADHD. Medical terms are very loosely used on the internet and people see these broad, vague, non-specific criteria and diagnose themselves,” said Arohi Vardhan Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist at Cadabams Hospitals. In a country like India, where speaking about, or seeking help for mental health issues has been taboo and stigmatised for a long time, doctors believe that celebrities coming out and speaking about their mental health issues has led to greater awareness and openness, and may have led to more people trying to identify their own issues. “People, in general, are more aware now in terms of both physical and mental health due to the widespread dissemination of information on the internet. One in five persons usually suffers from either anxiety or depression and while these problems existed in society for a long time, there was a lot of stigma around it. It is evident in literature that when there is more awareness in the community, people reach out for help more and that leads to better outcomes,” says Senthil Reddi, professor of psychiatry at NIMHANS. He added, “A lot of famous people have spoken about their disorders, including learning disabilities and this has been helpful in starting a conversation around mental health. The fact that people are coming in and seeking help is a good thing, as there have been some changes even in the classification of diseases recently. It has been recognised that there is

# Why mainframe education is key to thriving in Hybrid IT

As we navigate the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in IT, mainframe technology remains critical. Once viewed as legacy systems, mainframes now play a vital role in Hybrid IT environments, supporting essential applications across sectors such as banking, healthcare, and government. However, for mainframes to remain competitive, we must bridge a notable skills gap, one that is compounded by rapid digital transformation and evolving industry needs.To meet the demands of Hybrid IT, an enhanced focus on mainframe education is essential. Here is why fostering specialised skills and encouraging advanced educational initiatives is critical to thrive in this field.As AI enhances mainframe capabilities, traditional mainframe expertise and advanced AI-driven skills are required. This new skill set encompasses machine learning, data analysis, cybersecurity, and generative AI integration and requires an interdisciplinary approach where mainframe experts not only handle legacy systems but also manage and optimise AI-powered processes, using tools to modernise applications for the cloud. To address this, mainframe education must expand beyond foundational knowledge to include training in AI integrations, Hybrid IT architecture, and secure coding practices.Universities and technical institutes play a crucial role in preparing students for a career in mainframe technology. While traditional programming and IT management remain important, there is a growing need for partnerships with tech organisations to introduce advanced mainframe courses. Collaborative programmes such as IBM’s Academic Initiative offer hands-on experience and tailored certifications for students to acquire theoretical knowledge and practical skills.Moreover, institutions could enhance curriculums by including industry-led workshops, simula-

of ownership over the forest.Spread over 912 sq.km., Bandipur had more than 150 tigers as per the Status of Tigers and Co-predators – 2022, published by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. It also has over 1,100 elephants and harbours leopards, dholes, and a healthy prey density to support the carnivore population. Hence fire protection is taken seriously as the outbreak of any conflagration could mar the quality of the habit which is already under threat from weeds like lantana.Though forest fires are considered a natural part of the ecosystem, it tends to be uncontrolled and devastating when aggravated by human activity such as agricultural burning, or careless disposal of cigarette butts.

There have also been instances of deliberate stoking of fire to get even with the Forest Department when it files cases against the locals on charges of trespassing, timber logging, or any other offence.The Bandipur Yuva Mitra outreach programme, which is an ongoing project that conducts educational workshops for local students, is also paying dividends and has created a batch of eco-volunteers who will keep a watch on outbreaks of fire if any.The outreach programme has targeted students who have been apprised of the long-term consequences of fires in the forest and how it not only affects wildlife but also have a negative bearing on the livelihood of people surrounding the forests.In addition to the above, the customary burning of fire lines has been completed by clearing vegetation, said Mr. Prabhakaran. Nearly 2,900 km of fire line has been created, he added.Creating firelines is one of the fire management techniques adopted in India wherein vegetation is removed through controlled burning to create a bald patch of land along the boundaries of different compartments in the forest. If a fire breaks out in one compartment, the bald strip of land or firelines will prevent its spread to other compartments. Mr. Prabhakaran said the major hotspots for fire in Bandipur are the Kundukere range, G.S. Betta, and Maddur ranges which are also surrounded by a lot of villages thus increasing their vulnerability to human-induced fire.



an overlap of disorders and when it comes to ADHD, autism and similar diseases, it is difficult to compartmentalise, and it is important to identify those who are struggling across the spectrum and not just the ones struggling with severe symptoms.”

While being largely appreciative of the fact that people are seeking help, doctors have also noticed that a chunk of such patients tend to convince themselves that they have a specific disorder or that medicines have side effects. This sometimes leads to the development of the infamous ‘Internet Derived Information Obstructing Treatment (IDIOT) syndrome, doctors have observed. “While patients may have some features of a disorder, it should be decided by a professional as to whether they actually have that disorder. But some patients decide that they have a specific disorder and seek specific treatment. It is very difficult to convince them that their symptoms indicate a different disorder. We usually evaluate them in the first few sessions and then tell them what the core disorder is. Then, most people are very understanding,” Dr. Vardhan said. Similar issues were also flagged by Shashidhar Bilagi, a practising psychiatrist in Bengaluru. “Most people seek information on the internet and just go to a therapist. However, for severe disorders, it is very important to consult psychiatrists. When it comes to medicines especially, there is a lot of misconception and wrong information on the internet about side effects. Patients refuse to take these medicines and suffer from severe disorders. To reduce the stigma, they go on the internet, but fail to seek the right kind of treatment. It is important that patients do not rely on the internet for help,” he said.

tions, and real-world case studies. In doing so, they equip students with applied skills in areas such as mainframe application modernisation and Hybrid IT integration, bridging the gap between academia and industry expectations. Technology has redefined educational delivery methods. Virtual labs, interactive simulations, and AI-driven tutoring platforms are reshaping how students engage with mainframe technologies. Online certification programmes such as those offered by IBM, Coursera, Interskills and BMC make it easier to gain credentials in specialised areas such as mainframe administration and AI-powered system management. Additionally, advanced learning platforms incorporate gamification to make learning more engaging, especially for complex topics such as mainframe security and hybrid cloud management.Digital tools also facilitate remote internships and mentoring programmes. For example, BMC Software’s DevOps initiatives integrate mainframe training into development processes, enabling students to practice real-world mainframe applications and collaborate on virtual projects with industry experts. By harnessing these technologies, students and professionals can acquire skills that are practical and directly applicable in today’s IT environments.Certifications are increasingly recognised as a valuable means to stay competitive in the mainframe space. Popular certifications such as IBM’s z/OS Mainframe Practitioner Professional Certificate focus on foundational skills, while advanced certifications in AI integration, cloud computing, and cybersecurity are now also available. BMC’s AMI for Security certification, for instance, is gaining popularity as companies prioritise secure, AI-enhanced mainframe operations to safeguard sensitive data.



# Ishant Sharma says Anushka Sharma has made Virat Kohli calmer: ‘We talk a lot about...’



Virat Kohli-Anushka Sharma's love story continues to take the world by charm. Whether it is Virat blowing flying kisses to Anushka in-between matches; the actor cheering for the former Indian Men's cricket captain, or him taking out a few moments to celebrate a win with Anushka and their children on video calls, they surely set massive couple goals! But Anushka's influence on Virat's life goes beyond what is visible to the public, according to long-time friend and cricketer Ishant Sharma. "After Anushka's arrival, Virat has become calmer in life. We talk a lot about god and spirituality. He is a very chill person otherwise. But it is not easy for him to be casual with everyone," the bowler told Ranveer Allahabadia.

How can partners be a source of calm in each other's lives?

Dr Santosh Bangar, senior consultant, and psychiatrist, Gleneagles Hospitals Parel Mumbai said that often relationships come with great responsibilities and problems like disagreements, arguments, differences in opinions, unrealistic expectations, and trust issues. "This can take a toll on a couple's physical and psychological health, leading to feelings of frustration, agitation, anger, sadness, guilt,

and irritation," said Dr Bangar. This is where being calm and composed helps. "Being assured that someone is by your side through ups and downs can lead to a sense of peace and stability," added Dr Bangar.

Maintaining open and honest communication can help overcome these shortcomings of a relationship. According to Dr Bangar, sharing or expressing thoughts, feelings, and concerns with your partner can significantly lighten up your mental load and reduce stress. "This approach could provide emotional support and stability in the relationship resulting in a more grounded state of mind. During tough times of stress or anxiety, a partner can exercise calmness and try being patient until the situation cools down to avoid further problems," Dr Bangar told indianexpress.com. Being empathic, and showing comfort and understanding can help induce calmness in life. Dr Bangar said that factors like communication, mutual respect, and creating a safe space can help create deep connections. "Seek professional advice from experts to discuss concerns related to relationship issues. Their expert guidance can help you address the root cause of the problem leading to a stable and healthy relationship," said Dr Bangar.

# The double-layer technique for sunscreen application, and its effectiveness

Wearing sunscreen is one of the easiest and most effective ways to protect your skin from harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. Sunscreen can be rewarding in numerous ways and should be applied every day for better results. But have you ever tried the double-layer sunscreen technique? According to dermatologist Dr Aparajita Lamba, the double-layer technique ensures that you "apply the sunscreen correctly, in a layered way". "In this technique, whatever the amount of sunscreen, you are supposed to apply half as one layer, wait for five minutes, and then go for the second layer. You don't necessarily need to apply more sunscreen. All you need to do is layer it," said Dr Lamba, adding that it is a tan-proof technique. Dr Pinky Kapoor, consultant dermatologist, cosmetic dermatologist, and dermatologist, The Esthetic Clinics shed light on the technique.

She said that abiding by the technique would mean that the quantity of sunscreen that was supposed to be applied in one go, "will now be divided and used in two stages". "Apply the first layer generously, covering all the essential areas that are directly exposed to UV rays such as the face, neck, and also behind the neck, hands, legs, and feet. Apply the second layer of sunscreen once the first layer is absorbed, which is mostly after 10 to 15 minutes," explained Dr Kapoor. She said that this double-layer application "can provide maximum coverage to your skin ensuring no spots are missed and also provides a thicker barrier against harmful UV rays". Dr Kapoor cautioned that



some might feel greasy or heavy due to the thicker layer of sunscreen. "Increased amounts of sunscreen may result in clogged pores, and breakouts, especially for those with sensitive, oily, and acne-prone skin. To avoid clogged pores, individuals can use non-comedogenic sunscreen for fruitful results," shared Dr Kapoor. For those with sensitive skin, layering your sunscreen could exacerbate existing conditions like rosacea. "For such individuals, it is instead advisable to thoroughly apply a good sunscreen, with SPF 30 and above, and reapply as needed," said Dr Niti Gaur, board-certified dermatologist founder of Citrine Clinic, Gurgaon. "However, for those who wish to try this trend, it is advisable to consult a dermatologist, who will guide you to the appropriate products meant for your skin type and its needs," said Dr Gaur.

# Experts debunk viral remedy to reduce uric acid: ‘We cannot endorse...’

Some people experience unexplained heel pain that is often diagnosed as a high concentration of uric acid. For the unversed, uric acid is a chemical created when the body breaks down purines — found in foods like dried beans, urad dal, peas, and beer. "Uric acid is a chemical formed when purines break down. High uric acid levels can increase the risk of developing health issues like gout, kidney stones, and arthritis," said Dr Ashutosh Baghel, consultant urologist, Wockhardt Hospitals Mira Road. While lifestyle changes help manage the condition, there are many takers for home remedies, too. One that we recently came across claimed to reduce uric acid levels in just 10 days. The Instagram reel from Satinder Kaur claimed that the juice of fresh cucumber with a pinch of fresh cumin powder, lemon juice, and black salt when consumed on an empty stomach every morning can help reduce uric acid production in the body. "Reduce the quantity of protein in your food," added Kaur. Is this remedy effective?

According to Dr Baghel, "There is no scientific study on such a remedy. We cannot endorse claims. They need to be medically proven." To reduce uric acid concentration in the blood, it is advisable to avoid alcohol, processed foods and drinks, and reduce consumption of red meats, said Dr Aashish Chaudhry, managing director, senior consultant, and head, department of orthopaedics and joint replacement, Aakash Healthcare. Maintain a moderate weight: Keeping a moderate weight can help lower blood uric acid levels and enhance overall health. "Experts suggest focusing on long-term, sustainable changes for weight management, such as increasing physical activity, eating a balanced diet, and opting for nutrient-dense foods," said Dr Chaudhry. Avoid alcohol and sugary drinks: High consumption of alcohol and sugary drinks, like sodas and sweetened juices, is linked to an increased risk of developing gout. "These beverages also contribute unnecessary calories to the diet, potentially leading to weight gain and metabolic issues, which can raise uric acid levels," elucidated Dr Chaudhry. Increase vitamin C intake: "Research indicates a positive relationship between vitamin C intake and lower blood uric acid levels. However, no study has conclusively shown that vitamin C can prevent or reduce gout attacks. Individuals should consult their doctor to determine if they should take vitamin C supplements or simply increase their



dietary intake of vitamin C," said Dr Chaudhry. Increase dietary fibre: A diet high in fibre may help reduce blood uric acid levels. "

# YouTube launches new feature for registered health professionals to reach people

New Delhi: Google-owned YouTube announced new features to help Indian viewers find high-quality health information from healthcare professionals.

Building on its previously launched health source information panels and health content shelves, it is bringing up applications for registered doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, and health information providers to make their channels eligible for their health product features. "This will allow us to expand to include high quality information from a wider group of healthcare channels," Dr. Garth Graham, Director and Head of YouTube Health, in a blogpost.

"The expansion represents a big step towards helping people more easily find and connect with content that comes from the extraordinary community of healthcare creators on YouTube, the smart, dedicated and creative folks who are transforming the ways that we share medical information," he added.

# Bengali Chingri Malai grabs spot in Top 50 best seafood dishes in the world

India's Bengali Chingri Malai has grabbed a spot on the World's 50 Best Seafood Dish list by Taste Atlas. Standing at rank #31, it also became the best Indian seafood dish, and the only entrant from the country. But do you know the fascinating history and culinary secrets behind the Bengali Chingri Malai? The prawn curry is not just rich in taste, but also tradition. The story of Chingri Malai is intricately woven with the cultural evolution of Bengal, according to Chef Vaibhav Bhargava. He highlighted a clear division between East and West Bengal's food styles. Traditionally, East Bengal favoured vegetarian dishes and fish cooked without onion and garlic, while West Bengal embraced influences from the British East India Company. This is where Chingri Malai takes centre stage.

Prior to partition, Hilsa fish reigned supreme in Bengali cuisine. However, the British, with their preference for softer textures, found prawns more appealing. This shift in tastes led to the rise of Chingri Malai, a dish fit for the British aristocracy, explained Bhargava. Chingri Malai's journey reflects Bengal's openness to cultural influences. The dish incorporates elements from Southeast Asia, with the introduction of prawns and coconut milk through trade routes. Furthermore, the creamy texture caters to foreign palates, making it a bridge between robust Bengali fish curries and a more delicate style, he added.

Creating the perfect Chingri Malai requires patience and meticulous attention to detail. Chef Bhargava emphasises two key methods: Slow Caramelised Onions: Gently simmering chopped onions in ghee unlocks their



sweetness, forming the base of the curry. Grated Coconut Magic: Freshly grated coconut and coconut milk add a creamy texture and depth of flavor to the dish. A touch of sugar further enhances the taste. While the creamy coconut and succulent prawns are the stars, the secret weapon lies in the prawn heads. Traditionally, Bengalis relish the "Ghilu," the grey matter inside the head, for its intense flavour. Chef Bhargava suggests using "Baghda Chingri" (tiger prawns) for their superior head quality. For those seeking a quicker method or lacking access to fresh ingredients, Chef Bhargava offers substitutes. Prawn paste can be used to replicate the umami flavor of the prawn heads, while canned or powdered coconut milk can be used in a pinch. However, he emphasises the unmatched quality of fresh ingredients.

# The key to India's e-bus adoption strategy

As India develops standards for swappable electric bus batteries to ensure interoperability and ease of battery change, parallelly addressing range anxiety, there continues to be a focus on creating common swapping stations for all e-buses. This will improve overall efficiency while reducing infrastructure constraints. As of early July 2024, 8,583 electric buses were registered across India. That number is set to increase fairly dramatically soon as by 2030, the Indian government intends to replace 800,000 diesel buses with electric buses.

In an effort to boost the adoption of electric buses, the Central Government is planning to implement uniform battery standards for e-buses. NITI Aayog's draft Battery Swapping Policy primarily targets electric two and three-wheeler segments. However, introducing uniform battery standards for e-buses is expected to enhance interoperability and promote battery swapping within the e-bus sector.

While national schemes such as FAME, National Electric Bus Program, and PM e-Bus Sewa have supported State Transportation Undertakings (STUs) in increasing the number of electric buses in their fleets, electric bus adoption in the private sector is limited. Only a few established private operators with sufficient financial capacity are making noticeable progress. Currently, there are central government subsidies for STUs to procure electric buses through Gross Cost Contracts (GCC) that cover bus supply, operation, maintenance, charging infrastructure, and driver costs. But for the private sector, which constitutes 94% of the 2.39 million buses registered across India, if not through such subsidy, could battery swapping with certain financial incentives be a catalyst for faster adoption of electric buses? The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), supported by NITI Aayog, explored battery swapping for electric two-wheelers in India by analysing factors affecting the total cost of ownership (TCO). That work provides a strategic framework from which to also explore adopting battery swapping in the private bus market. Current context All electric buses in India rely on plug-in charging. To attain a full charge, these typically take 20-40 minutes using DC fast charging or 6-8 hours using lower-powered slow charging. To support the 8 lakh buses by 2030, an overall investment of ₹1.5 trillion (\$18 billion) is estimated to be required, and this includes the power and upstream infrastructure across cities and on intercity routes. The estimate also includes large spaces for charging stations at every 100 km on each side of highways. The process of land acquisition in India is often lengthy and costly, and installing fast charging brings challenges related to not only space and costs but also power availability and continuous supply on isolated interstate routes in rural areas. Benefits of battery swapping Separating batteries from buses would enable battery swapping operators (BSOs) to own the batteries instead of the bus owner. This converts the battery



into a variable cost and reduces the upfront capital cost of the bus dramatically, as batteries constitute 40%–50% of this cost. Battery swapping is about as fast as refuelling a combustion engine vehicle and typically takes 1-3 minutes. Sun Mobility's battery swapping station in Ahmedabad required only 33% of the energy and 60% less area than depot-based charging. The strategic deployment of battery swapping stations could help reduce range anxiety, and the short turnaround time of battery swapping instead of opportunity charging may benefit bus operators by lowering overall travel time and thus making the service more desirable to passengers.

The emergence of a battery-swapping industry in India

The industry has advanced towards battery swapping for electric two- and three-wheelers because of the Ministry of Power's Battery Swapping Stations policy. Delhi led with purchase incentives for swappable EVs, and last-mile service aggregators are improving efficiency with low-cost, swappable vehicles. In the Union Budget 2022–23, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced plans for a national battery-swapping policy with interoperability standards. NITI Aayog is working to standardise the policy across all vehicle segments, and the Heavy industry ministry is set to implement norms for electric buses. Purchase-subsidy based scheme and usage-linked incentives The ICCT's battery swapping report included a strategy framework for an early policy that highlighted the potential of purchase subsidy and usage-linked incentives for electric two-wheelers. The framework may be considered for its potential to accelerate the adoption of private electric buses. Under a purchase-subsidy-based scheme, electric buses sold without pre-fitted batteries could qualify for certain financial incentives under national or state-level programs. The incentives could be given to manufacturers, which can then choose to pass them on to registered BSOs that meet safety standards. Additionally, the usage-linked leasing scheme may allow bus operators to lease battery-swappable buses rather than buying them outright.

# Why you must consciously take shorter (or longer) steps while walking

It is widely believed that walking is beneficial for health — whether it is brisk, slow, backward, or normal. But have you ever wondered if stride length also plays a role? According to neurologist Dr Sudhir Kumar, varying stride lengths can indeed help you optimise your walks. "Take shorter or longer steps while walking. For every 1 per cent increase in step length variability, there is a 0.7 per cent increase in the metabolic cost of walking," Dr Kumar wrote on X. Walking is an effective and easy way to manage weight and overall health. It is a low-impact exercise that can be beneficial in various ways such as in increasing blood flow to the entire body and brain, improving cardiovascular and pulmonary health, and reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. "Walking speed can be categorised into 2 variables — stride rate and stride length," said Dr Anup Khatri, senior consultant, orthopedics, Gleneagles Hospital, Parel, Mumbai. Stride length refers to the distance covered between consecutive placements of the same foot, while stride rate is the number of steps completed per minute. "Varying stride length can indeed impact your walking efficiency and overall health," said Dr Udit Kapoor, orthopaedic consultant, Metro Hospital. In simple words, stride length is the distance from the heel strike of one foot to the heel strike of the same foot again. Dr Khatri explained that ineffective walking stride or poor posture can result in chronic lower back pain, knee pain, and ankle pain. "Stride length is a great tool for athletes, fitness enthusiasts, or people who want to lose weight. This can help them monitor their performance and efficiency in physical activities like running or walking," said Dr Khatri. He added that frequent variation in stride length can boost metabolism, helping you burn more calories. Walking becomes less metabolically taxing and more energy-efficient when one maintains an ideal stride length consistently. "As a result of evenly spreading stress across various muscles and joints and encouraging a well-rounded workout, proper stride variety also helps prevent overuse issues," elucidated Dr Akhilesh Yadav, associate irector — orthopaedics and joint replacement, Max Hospital, Vaishali.

How to vary stride length?



You can vary your stride length by consciously taking either shorter or longer steps while walking. "Shorter steps involve more frequent foot placements, while longer steps cover more ground per stride," said Dr Kapoor, sharing the benefits of varying stride length. Metabolic efficiency: Research suggests that varying stride length affects the metabolic cost of walking. For instance, shorter steps may be more metabolically costly over time because of increased step frequency. Joint impact: Varying stride lengths can distribute impact differently across joints, potentially reducing strain on specific areas like the knees or hips. Muscle engagement: Different stride lengths engage muscles differently. "Longer strides may engage more of the hamstrings and glutes, while shorter strides may engage calves and shins more," said Dr Kapoor.

Varying stride length can make walking more effective. How?

Calorie burning: Longer strides can increase the intensity of walking and calorie burn, said Dr Kapoor. Endurance: Alternating between longer and shorter strides can improve endurance and stamina. Overall fitness: on factors like height, leg length, fitness level, and any existing health conditions. "It's essential to find a stride length that feels comfortable and natural to you," said Dr Kapoor.







## ‘I think we need to find a way to get more spin into our bowling attack’: Punjab pace bowling coach



GNS News Agency, April 18

PBKs bowler Arshdeep Singh with bowling coach James Hopes during a practice session a day before their IPL match against KKR at New PCA Stadium in Mohali, Monday. Kamleshwar Singh/PBKs bowler Arshdeep Singh with bowling coach James Hopes during a practice session a day before their IPL match against KKR at New PCA Stadium in Mohali, Monday. (Express photo by Kamleshwar Singh)

With their bowling unit conceding more than 200 runs in four matches out of the five matches they have played, Punjab Kings have seen the pace attack struggle in this edition of the IPL. The Shreyas Iyer side, which was on top of the point table after the opening week in IPL, have slid to the sixth spot after two losses in their last three matches. With the side facing an eight-wicket wicket loss against Sunrisers Hyderabad in their last match, Punjab Kings fast bowling coach James Hopes believes that the team needs to find a way to get more spin in their bowling attack.

“Of course it’s a concern, but once again, we tend not to look at, like, he’s going at 9.5, he’s going at 10, because we’re playing games where 200 is a score, or 220 is a score, or 240 is a score. If we keep playing games where 230 is a score, our guys keep going to 10 and over, well, we’re going to win most games. So that’s how we tend to look at it. And I think I answered the question before, we need to get Yuzi (Yuzvendra Chahal) into the tournament a little bit. Like, he’s being used in a lot of different roles at a lot of different times at the moment, and we’re very pace-heavy at the moment. I think we need to find a way to get more spin into our bowling attack, and hopefully we see that over the next few games,” Hopes said on the eve of the team’s home

match against Kolkata Knight Riders to be played at Maharaaja Yadavindra Singh PCA International Stadium, Mullanpur, on Tuesday evening.

While Punjab Kings pace spearhead Lockie Ferguson suffered an injury in their last match against Sunrisers Hyderabad and is not expected to play till the end of the tournament, Punjab Kings have seen all their bowlers outside the top 20 bowlers in terms of the bowling economy. The Shreyas Iyer side have tried seven bowlers in this year’s IPL so far with Ferguson having the best economy of 9.7 and picking up five wickets in five matches. Arshdeep Singh has picked up seven wickets with an economy of 9.50 in the five matches with only Glen Maxwell being the other bowler to have an economy below 10. Hopes talked of the need to have an economy of below 10 but also lauded some of the bowlers for their economy in high-scoring matches this season. In the match against Sunrisers Hyderabad, where the Hyderabad side chased the target of 246 runs in 18.3 overs, only Arshdeep had an economy of less than 10 with Ferguson and Marcus Stoinis bowling two balls and four balls in the match.

“On such a pitch, if you conceded less than 10 runs an over, you’re a genius. So the confidence we take from that is, someone like Arshdeep bowled unbelievably in the last game. I think he bowled four overs for 37 and on that venue, for the fast bowlers in that game, that was outstanding. So we’ve got a lot of confidence with that. We’re going to have to bring someone in for Lockie, so we’re going to have to change our bowling attack slightly. We are in a good spot in the competition where we’ve got a big week coming up against the same two opposition, KKR and RCB. That’s just the way the draws work for us. We’ve got them for the next four games. So if we can have a good week, we’re going to be well-placed going into the back half,” said Hopes. The former Aussie bowler has also been impressed with Singh, who has so far taken 83 wickets in 70 matches in IPL in his career. The left-arm pacer had also become India’s leading wicket-taker in T20s earlier this year. “Arshdeep is a world-class bowler. His economy rate at the depth, he’s keeping in check, in comparison to what the game requires. He is a very, very good flat wicket bowler, which is what we need right now. And I’m excited for the day where he gets something with just a little bit of seam movement in it. We saw it in Lucknow. We saw the damage that he can do up top. Just get a couple more wickets like that for him, he’d be nice,” added the coach.

## Eye on ‘oversized’ bats, IPL hands umpires a gauge to check during games

GNS News Agency, April 18

At the start of this IPL season, South African fast bowler Kagiso Rabada echoed a key concern voiced by many about the lack of balance between bat and ball in T20 cricket. With teams pushing to cross the 300-run mark, he said that if the trend continued, the game should be called “batting” not “cricket”. Going ahead, every IPL batsman will have to pass the bat through a gauge before taking guard. While the fourth umpire will check the bats of openers before they enter the field, every subsequent batsman will have to clear the “bat gauge” wielded by on-field umpires.

The move comes after several cases of batsmen using “oversized” bats came to light. In the IPL, such batsmen have been let off with warnings but on the English county circuit, Nottinghamshire was docked points last year in one such case. Speaking to The Indian Express, IPL chairman Arun Dhimal said the decision was taken to ensure fairness on the field. “Nobody should feel that somebody’s got an undue advantage,” he said. “The BCCI and IPL have always taken all initiatives in this direction so that fairness of the game is maintained. We have used technology to the maximum to make sure that all decisions can be reviewed so that the games don’t get unfairly affected. The idea behind this initiative is to ensure that the spirit of the game is maintained,” Dhimal said. The triangle-shaped plastic gauge has the dimensions of a legal bat printed on it: depth 2.68 inches, width 4.33 inches, edges 1.61 inches. The curve, or the bulge of the bat, seen on the lower non-hitting side of the bat, needs to be within 0.20 inches. Before this season, bats were not tested on match days; officials would conduct tests on the eve of the game. But this system had an obvious loophole: some batsmen would turn up for the game with different bats.

According to IPL insiders, T20 batsmen who bend rules generally tweak the “bat bulge” to their advantage, making the so-called “sweet spot” sweeter without increasing the legal weight. “They bulk up the lower part of the bat since that is the area of the bat where the batsmen try to make contact with the ball. More wood around the ‘sweet



spot’ and less wood close to the handle gives more power to strokes,” said an international batsman who has played with oversized bats. The less-cautious batsmen, known for hitting sixes from the first ball, prefer bats with thicker edges. This means that even the balls they mistime often sail over the boundary. But now with stricter scrutiny on the field in the public eye, officials hope no batsman would knowingly walk out with an oversized illegal bat. Bat manufacturers have also welcomed the BCCI move and promised to be “more stringent”.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Paras Anand, CEO, Sanspareils Greenlands Pvt Ltd, said, “Bats made by SG go through the bat gauge. But because players’ bats were not being closely scrutinised, we were not being 100 percent particular about it (bat size). However, the variation was just about 1mm, or one-and-a-half mm, which does not make a big difference. It is good that cricket bats of all players are being closely checked (by referees and umpires) at the IPL now or else players can take the liberty of getting bigger bats made.” Anand said, “We at SG will also be more stringent about checking our bats. But that said there is unlikely to be a reduction in the number of sixes being hit because it is not just the size of the bat that is a factor, but this generation of players are stronger, practice power hitting a lot more and practice innovative shot making.”



Iyer overcame New Zealand duo Jacob Duffy and Rachin Ravindra to win the men’s award, with Voll seeing off compatriot Annabel Sutherland and the USA’s Chetnaa Prasad in the women’s category.

mates, coaches, and support staff for their unwavering support and belief,” he said.

ICC Women’s Player of the Month Voll only made her international debut back in December, yet she has already given a glimpse of her potential on the world stage. March’s contests against rivals New Zealand witnessed an explosive array of strokes by the 21-year-old and she wasted no time in grabbing the headlines, smashing her maiden T20 half-century in just 30 balls in the opening match in Auckland as Australia capably chased down 138 for victory. “Winning this award is certainly a nice way to cap off what’s been an incredible summer for myself and the team,” Voll said.

## Mykolas Alekna shatters discus throw world record, becomes first man to cross 75m



GNS News Agency, April 18

Mykolas Alekna of Lithuania improved his own discus throw world record by more than a metre throwing a historic 75.56m throw at the Oklahoma Throws Series World Invitational, a World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze meeting, in Ramona on Sunday. The 2024 Paris Olympics silver medalist improved his mark twice first setting a world record of 74.89m with his opening throw and then improving to 75.56m in the fourth round. The 22-year-old has become the first athlete in the history of sport to surpass 75 metres

mark. The Alekna family has produced two of the top four men’s discus throwers in history, with two-time Olympic champion Virgilijus Alekna, father of Mykolas, is now placed fourth on the world all-time list with his 73.88m from 2000.

Alekna’s 74.35m in Ramona on 14 April last year had broken the longest standing men’s world record — that 74.08m having been achieved by Jurgen Schult in 1986, some 16 years before Alekna was born. Along with Mykolas, Australian thrower Matt Denny also surpassed his previous world record throwing his personal best of 74.78m. The Olympic bronze medallist backed up that throw with four other attempts beyond 70 metres, including 73.36m in the final round. It was a very competitive field with five athletes crossing the 70m mark and seven athletes going beyond the 69m. USA’s Sam Mattis, who threw 70.08m to finish runner-up to Denny three days earlier, improved to 71.27m to finish third in Sunday’s contest and Germany’s Clemens Prüfer threw 71.01m to finish fourth. Great Britain’s Lawrence Okoye finished fifth with 70.76m. Mykolas Alekna’s latest world record came the day after Valarie Allman threw a North American record of 73.52m in Ramona for the farthest women’s discus throw in the world since 1989.

## With Freestyle Chess, Magnus Carlsen rediscovers child-like joy and the hunger to ‘prove himself’ that made him a legend



GNS News Agency, April 18

Carlsen declared so himself. Right after he had defeated one-time arch-nemesis Hikaru Nakamura in the final of the Paris leg of the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour on Sunday. The sport had seemed to constantly cause him bitterness over the last few years. The man known to fight till the last pawn on the board had started to pick up plenty of fights off the board. But over the past week, as he has duelled his way to the title at the Paris leg of the Freestyle Tour, Carlsen has repeatedly spoken about the “different joy and calmness” he feels while sitting down over the board to play a game of freestyle chess. Never mind that he has battled the flu for a significant portion of the event in Paris. He seems to love the format so much, in fact, that in a couple of days, Carlsen will be back on the board on Thursday to play in another freestyle event in Grenke: this time in an open tournament where players will play two classical games per day (something Carlsen has not done in over 20 years). Carlsen said he expected the experience to be exciting but exhausting. And unlike regular chess, where he would have scoffed at being asked to prove himself, he was actually looking forward to it.

“I’m not looking forward to playing with black pieces against some 2200-rated player on Thursday night,” Carlsen said, albeit with a wide grin that has become a rare sight when he talks chess these days. “I think it’s pretty cool that we get to prove ourselves in very, very different formats. That’s the way it should be.” In another interview he did after winning the crown at Paris, Carlsen opened up about the “child-like joy” he feels in the Freestyle variant where the pieces on the back ranks can be shuffled in 960 different ways.

“Going to the board to play Freestyle Chess, compared to classical chess, is a completely different feeling. There’s more of a child-like joy of just playing chess rather than being worried about openings, rating points — things which are important, but don’t necessarily equate joy,” Carlsen said before adding: “I want to win too. You want to be reminded as to why you started playing chess early on. And I am reminded of that when I sit down for a Freestyle Chess game.” It’s not just Carlsen. His opponent Nakamura too has seemed disenchanted with classical chess over the

last few months, going to the extent of calling himself a chess streamer first and a chess player second. Despite losing to Carlsen, he admitted that the Freestyle Chess variant was a “lot of fun to play.” So dominant has Carlsen been at the Paris event, that he has not needed a tiebreaker against any of his opponents in the knockout phase: Nodirbek Abdusattarov, Fabiano Caruana and now Nakamura.

Of course, plenty of Carlsen’s happiness playing at Freestyle Chess also comes from the considerable heft he enjoys. Recently, Jan Henric Buettner, the man behind the Freestyle Chess Tour, revealed that from the next event of the tour in Las Vegas, games will be reduced from 90-minute encounters to 45-minute battles. Both games of a round will be played on the same day at Las Vegas. Buettner also quietly slipped in that the idea had come from Carlsen. Changes to the format itself will also be implemented at the suggestion of Carlsen’s father, Henrik, Buettner added. Hikaru Nakamura and Magnus Carlsen in action during the Paris Freestyle chess. (Stev Bonhage/Freestyle Chess) Hikaru Nakamura and Magnus Carlsen in action during the Paris Freestyle chess. (Stev Bonhage/Freestyle Chess) For players of Carlsen’s generation like Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura — Carlsen, Nakamura and Caruana incidentally ended as the top 3 at Paris — the Freestyle Chess variant also serves a practical purpose: players need to spend very little time preparing for a game before the duel begins in the playing hall. This is because they only find out which one of the 959 possible positions they will have to play that day 10 minutes before the game begins. Young players like Arjun Erigaisi, Gukesh and Praggnandhaa have a slight edge in classical chess because they can prepare for an opponent for hours at a stretch in the morning and then still have enough energy left in the tank to play a five-hour game without mental and physical fatigue creeping in. But Freestyle Chess offers players the luxury of waking up five minutes before they have to make it to the playing hall and still be absolutely fine. “I don’t have the energy to play really good games. I can still be creative, I can still understand the position and the dynamic and strategic ideas. But I cannot implement them without blundering, which is what happened yesterday (game 2 of the semis against Caruana which ended in a draw) and today (game 1 of the final, which he won after his opponent, Nakamura, blundered horribly at the end). Essentially, I had to win the game three times today (against Nakamura): I got a winning position two times and I threw them away. I just won because he made the last blunder,” admitted Carlsen after defeating Nakamura in the first game on Sunday. Chess’ biggest takeaway from Paris is not that Carlsen won. It’s that he’s rediscovered that child-like joy and the hunger to ‘prove himself’ that propelled him to five world championship titles back in the day.

## Salima Tete to lead Indian women’s hockey team on Australia tour

GNS News Agency, April 18

Midfielder Salima Tete is set to lead the Indian women’s hockey team for upcoming tour of Australia, scheduled to take place from 26th April to 4th May 2025 at the Perth Hockey Stadium. India will take on Australia A in the first two games, followed by three matches against the senior Australian team. The tour will be a crucial preparatory assignment ahead of the team’s European leg of the FIH Pro League 2024-25, set to be held in June.

Navneet Kaur has been named deputy to Salima while Savita Punia will share goalkeeping responsibilities with youngster Bichu Devi Kharibam. Experienced Sushila Chanu will lead the defensive along with Ishika Chaudhary, Jyoti Singh, Sujata Kujur, Jyoti, Ajmina Kujur, Sakshi Rana, and Suman Devi Thoudam. In the midfield, along with Salima, Vaishnavi Phalke, Nehal, Sharmila Devi, Manisha Chauhan, Sunelita Toppo, Pooja Yadav, Mahima Tete, and Lalremsiami will take the



field. India will field a young forward line with Deepika, Rutuja Dadaso Pisal, Mumtaz Khan, Baljeet Kaur, Deepika Soreng, and Beauty Dungdung. Additionally, Bansari Solanki (goalkeeper), Anjana Dondung and Lalthanluangi (defenders), Sakshi Shukla and Khaidem Shileima Chanu (midfielders), along with Dipi Monika Toppo and Sonam (forwards), have been named as standby players.

“This tour to Australia is an important opportunity for

us to test our skills and strategies against top-level competition. We’ve selected a balanced squad that combines experience with fresh energy. It’s great to see young players earning their spots through consistent performances in national level tournaments and senior camps. It will be exciting to see how they adapt and rise to the challenge at the international level,” said Harendra Singh in an official press release. Indian women’s hockey squad for Australia tour Goalkeepers:

Savita Punia, Bichu Devi Kharibam Defenders: Sushila Chanu, Ishika Chaudhary, Jyoti Singh, Sujata Kujur, Jyoti, Ajmina Kujur, Sakshi Rana, Suman Devi Thoudam. Midfielders: Salima Tete, Vaishnavi Phalke, Nehal, Sharmila Devi, Manisha Chauhan, Sunelita Toppo, Pooja Yadav, Mahima Tete, Lalremsiami.

Forwards: Navneet Kaur, Deepika, Rutuja Dadaso Pisal, Mumtaz Khan, Baljeet Kaur, Deepika Soreng, Beauty Dungdung.



## Even Sharmila Tagore can't defend Nadaaniyan, but says grandson Ibrahim Ali Khan 'looked great' in it: 'Not up to the mark'



The veteran actor Sharmila Tagore has shared her two cents on her grandson Ibrahim Ali Khan's much-talked-about debut film, Nadaaniyan, which was released on Netflix on March 7. The legendary actor acknowledged the efforts of both her grandchildren, Ibrahim and Sara Ali Khan, but

agreed with many in the industry (and the audience) that Nadaaniyan could have been much better.

In an interview with Anand Bazaar Patrika, the veteran actor admitted that while Ibrahim looked good on the screen, the film didn't work for her. "The film was not good, even though Ibrahim looked great. These things shouldn't be discussed out in the open, but at the end of the day, the film has to be up to the mark, and it wasn't," she said. Since Nadaaniyan dropped on Netflix, the film has faced a lot of criticism, and most of it has been directed towards Ibrahim Ali Khan and Khushi Kapoor's performances. While a barrage of bad reviews followed, many defended the newcomers and the film. Sara came out in support of her brother on Instagram, and shared screenshots of the film trending in various countries, while Ibrahim's aunt, Soha Ali Khan, had advice for the young actor and told him that "one has to be receptive to certain criticism and have to work on their craft and go forward."

Actors Dia Mirza and Juggal Hansraj, who played Ibrahim's character's parents in the film, blamed the backlash on the 'eat the privilege' culture. Many others from the industry, such as Sonu Sood, Hansal Mehta and Karan Johar, have expressed their sorrow regarding the kind of comments that were made about Ibrahim and Khushi's performance. Only time will tell whether Ibrahim will be able to take the rich legacy of his family forward. Sharmila Tagore made her debut with Satyajit Ray's critically acclaimed Apur Sansar (1959) and quickly made people stop and take notice of her skill as an actor. Her most recent appearance was in the Bengali film Puratawn, directed by Suman Ghosh.

## Satish Kaushik felt suicidal after Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja flopped, started howling in front of Boney Kapoor: 'Sridevi consoled me'

Late actor-filmmaker Satish Kaushik came into the limelight after he featured in the role of Calendar in producer Boney Kapoor's Mr India (1987). While acting was his passion when he entered the film industry, he stumbled upon direction with Boney Kapoor's Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja (1993). Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja was Boney's passion project, as he wanted to recreate the magic of Mr India with this film.

Boney even retained the cast and crew of Mr India. Like Mr India, this film was also to be directed by Shekhar Kapur and was set to star Mr India's lead actors – Anil Kapoor and Sridevi. While everything else remained the same, Shekhar ditched the film midway to pursue projects in Hollywood. This left Satish Kaushik, Shekhar's assistant director, with the reins of the film. Boney Kapoor trusted Satish not only with the film but also with his money. Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja was, in fact, the most expensive film of its time, with a staggering budget of Rs 10 crore. The film, however, proved to be a "disaster," leaving Boney in deep debt.

Things didn't go well for Satish either. Newly married at the time, he felt suicidal after his first directorial bombed at the box office. In an earlier interaction with Mumbai Mirror, he expressed the same and said, "I was newly married and even my wife was fed up. If I would have jumped out of the window, nothing would have happened, as I was on the first floor. The dinner table was set on the ground floor. If I had jumped I would have landed on Bhindi Ki Sabzi and people would have made fun of that as well." In another interaction with Komal Nahta, Satish Kaushik remembered



bawling in front of Boney Kapoor. He said, "Flop is a small word. It was a disaster. I lost my mind. The film had a big hype but it flopped. The film worked only in premieres, by the time 9th premier of the film was organised only me, Anil Kapoor and Boney Kapoor were left."

Talking about how Boney broke the news of the film being a flop, Satish said, "So, we were going for the film's premier in Hyderabad and I asked Boney, 'What is the report of the film?' He said, 'Satish it is a disaster.' Then there was silence. I started howling. Sridevi tried to console me. Boney told me, 'Satish don't cry. Don't make me weak.' I wiped my tears and was ready for the premiere."

Boney Kapoor took four years to clear his debts. After Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja's release, Satish Kaushik and Shekhar Kapur's relationship became sour, and the two didn't talk for years. However, Boney continued to believe in Satish, and they worked together again, with the actor-filmmaker directing films like Prem (1995) and Hamara Dil Aapke Paas Hai (2000).

## Vir Das calls out Air India, says wife forced to climb down stepladder with fractured foot: '50 grand for seats with broken tables and foot-rests'



Vir Das shared that the ground crew could not even provide them with a wheelchair for his wife, who had a fractured foot. He said she was forced to climb down a stepladder as the staff refused to help.

Comedian Vir Das has spoken up on X (formerly Twitter) about his flying experience with aviation giant Air India. Das shared the sad state of affairs in the cabin of

the flight and the mismanagement he had to deal with while travelling with his wife whose foot was fractured. He talked about broken seats, a confused crew and a lack of empathy for his wife, who needed a wheelchair but was not offered one despite booking it prior to travel.

The post on X opened with Das calling himself an Air India loyalist as he proceeded to explain the disappointing journey in detail. "Dear @airindia, Please reclaim your wheelchair. I'm a lifetime loyalist. I believe you've got the nicest cabin crew in the sky; this post pains me to write. My wife and I book Pranaam and a wheelchair because she's got a foot fracture that's still healing. We're flying to Delhi. 50 grand a seat. Broken table, broken leg rests, her seat is stuck reclined, and it won't straighten fully. Were told the flight is 'newly refurbished'."

The comedian then shared that the flight was delayed and the crew was completely aloof regarding the couple's needs. "Two hours late, we get off in Delhi, and we're told it's a stepladder. Again, a wheelchair and an escort were pre-booked. I ask the air hostesses at the front of the plane to assist my wife while I carry four bags. Silence and a clueless look at each other. We step off the plane to the top of the ladder. I ask an Air India male ground staff member to help us; he looks at me, shrugs, and ignores me. My wife with a fracture makes it down the stepladder. I tell an Air India staff member at the bottom near the buses what happened. He says, "Sir, kya Karein... Sorry."

Ultimately, no one helped Das, and he had to procure a wheelchair himself. In the closing statements of the post, Das wrote, "One of your wheelchairs is on the second floor of the parking in Delhi. Do claim it. Cheers." Air India responded to the complaint and asked for Das' flight number while promising to look into the matter. It wasn't a surprise that Das spoke out so candidly about his experience, after all he has made a name for himself by being direct and unapologetic in all his work, including his comedy sets and his movies. His prowess on the microphone has gained him a huge international audience and has also won him an Emmy award. The comedian has also hosted the prestigious award show, making him the first Indian to do so.

## Rasha Thadani says 'it's fair for people to judge star kids,' reveals warning she got before entering the industry: 'I was entering the lion's den'



Raveena Tandon's daughter, Rasha Thadani, made her debut earlier this year with the Ajay Devgn-produced Azaad. The film didn't do well commercially, however, Rasha managed to stand out thanks to a dance number titled "Uyi Amma." Being a star kid, she had to face some nasty remarks too. She recently opened up about dealing

with trolling, and said that she was warned about it prior to making her debut. In a conversation with the BBC Asian Network, Rasha revealed how her mother, Raveena Tandon, groomed her for the industry.

Rasha shared, "It's fair to judge the way people judge; it is something we have to take to our stride and work at it even more. When you come from a legacy, it is fair for you to work at it even more, so when the nepotism term comes up in conversations with me, I always try to work at it harder. When I am given that opportunity, what I do with it is in my hands. So, I try my best." The young actor also recalled how she was warned about facing it all before entering the industry. "When I first started shooting with a film, people used to warn me. They would say that I was entering the lion's den. But at that time, I was not even thinking of it, I was very clueless about anything other than what was happening on my set. My focus was half here and half at my school, I kept flying in and out, I didn't think very far about getting criticism or anything, of course I was warned that not everyone is going to like you and that is okay. It wasn't something that scared me at that time," Rasha added.

When asked if her mother, Raveena, helped her navigate her way to the craft, Rasha explained that the hand-holding was different. She explained, "My mother taught me a lot of character and personality building, but never acting. I think, to be good at anything, you need to be a good person. It was never about doing this to be a good actor, of course, she gave me tips and tricks for the camera and how to deal with the people around me, but it was never about 'do this to be successful', but about being humble, focused, and working hard."

## 'Won't stand behind Aamir Khan': Randeep Hood recalls rejecting Rang De Basanti due to his 'Jaat akad'

Filmmaker Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra had once approached Randeep Hooda to play a pivotal role in his acclaimed 2006 film Rang De Basanti. However, the actor made the decision to walk away from the project in favour of a Ram Gopal Varma film. In a recent interaction, the Murder 2 actor admitted that he regrets missing out on an opportunity that could have taken his acting career to a 'different league.'

Speaking to Shubhankar Mishra, Randeep shared that he was approached to play Bhagat Singh's role in the film, which ultimately went to Siddharth. He said, "If I would have done Rang De Basanti, I would have come in a different league. I gave the audition and I liked it. Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra would come me, sometimes driving drunk, and he would ask me 'kar le kar le picture karle.' I asked him to drive safely. I wanted to do that film but during that time, Ram Gopal Varma told me, 'I am thinking of cast you in lead role in D and you will go and stand behind Aamir in the poster.' Meri Jaat akad nikal aai (My Jaat arrogance came up) and I said, 'I won't stand behind Aamir.' That happened and I left Rock On also for similar reasons." Explaining his rationale on why he left career-defining projects for niche roles, he said, "So, I have always worked with a little different kind of filmmakers and producers and not with industry insiders, maybe that's why my growth was slow. I used to



think I am enough and that craft is everything but it is not the case." Rang De Basanti went on to become one of the most successful and celebrated Hindi films of all time. It won the National Film Award for Best Popular Film and was chosen as India's official entry for the Oscars that year. It was also nominated for a BAFTA. D was the second film of Randeep's career after Monsoon Wedding. It was the third installment of the Gangster film series and achieved moderate success at box office. Randeep is currently seen in Sunny Deol's Jaat.

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Ibrahim's character's parents in the film, blamed the backlash on the 'eat the privilege' culture. Many others from the industry, such as Sonu Sood, Hansal Mehta and Karan Johar, have expressed their sorrow regarding the kind of comments that were made about Ibrahim and Khushi's performance. Only time will tell whether Ibrahim will be able to take the rich legacy of his family forward. Sharmila Tagore made her debut with Satyajit Ray's critically acclaimed Apur Sansar (1959) and quickly made people stop and take notice of her skill as an actor. Her most recent appearance was in the Bengali film Puratawn, directed by Suman Ghosh.

## Rashmika shares positivity-filled video after shooting for entire night

Mumbai: Actress Rashmika Mandanna shared a "super random" video filled with positivity after she shot for the entire night for her upcoming film "Thama."

Rashmika took to her Instagram, where she shared the video. In the clip, the actress is heard saying, "Hi guys, good morning. I know it's super random. I just shot for the entire night, hence the red eyes, but I just wanted to randomly drop this message saying, a very, very good morning to you." "I hope you have a wonderful day, and here's me throwing a bit of positivity your way if at all you need it, and even if you don't need it, you just got it. Biggest love, biggest hugs, and big, big, big kisses (sic)," she added. In the caption section, the actress said it is a reminder to smile. She added, "A random reminder for you to smile and have a freaking awesome day! EVERYDAY!" A few days ago, on April 9, the "Chhaava" actress revealed that she has joined back at work after ringing in her 29th birthday in Oman.

Posting a glimpse of the night sky on her Instagram stories, she wrote, "Shooting nights for the next couple of days... So the only posts and stories you'll get of us is of either the moon or the camera lights or the stars (which in our city is impossible to see) Agreed?" Back in March, Rashmika revealed who's keeping her busy with late-night shoots. She took to her Instagram stories to share a candid photo of 'Thama' director Aditya A. Sarpotdar sitting on a plastic chair and closely monitoring the shoot on a screen. "Thama" tells the tale of a determined historian who immerses himself in ancient manuscripts, uncovering dark secrets about local vampire myths as supernatural forces begin to stir. His journey not only reveals long-forgotten history but also sparks a fierce battle for the soul of the town.