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## Cyberabad police impose prohibitory orders ahead of NEET exam on Sunday

Hyderabad: The Cyberabad police imposed prohibitory orders banning assembly of five or more persons in view of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) in 200 meters at all examination centers on Sunday. Further, iphotocopy (Xerox) and internet centers located within the radius of 100 meters from the examination centers were asked to shut down. The order will remain in force on Sunday from 06 am to 6 pm at all the examination centers of National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) UG-2025. Any person contravening this order shall be punishable under relevant section of law, the police stated.

## 7 killed, over 30 injured in stampede at Goa temple



GNS News Agency, May 3

Panaji: At least seven people were killed and more than 30 injured after a stampede took place during the Lairai Devi temple in Shrigao village of Goa. The incident occurred in the early hours of Saturday. Preliminary reports suggest the overcrowding and lack of proper arrangements as possible causes behind the incident. Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Saturday visited the hospital to check on the injured persons.

According to the eyewitnesses, the situation escalated after a part of the crowd lost control. Locals and the volunteers at the temple rushed to pull people to safety. The stampede took place as thousands of devotees thronged the temple to witness and participate in the centuries-old ritual

at the temple, where barefoot 'dhonds' walk across a bed of burning embers. The Shri Lairai Yatra is held in North Goa every year, attracting more than 50,000 devotees. The stampede occurred when, at one point along the route, due to a downward slope, the crowd began moving rapidly all at once. According to reports, the injured were shifted to nearby hospitals. North Goa Superintendent of Police Akshat Kaushal said, "Six dead and more than 15 injured in a stampede that occurred at the Lairai Devi temple in Shrigao." The stampede took place amid Shree Devi Lairai jatra, which commenced on Friday, with thousands of devotees flocking there. Around 1,000 police personnel were deployed for the jatra as the administration is on its toes. Drones were also placed for aerial surveillance of crowd movements. Earlier on Friday, Chief Minister Sawant, his wife Sulakshana, Rajya Sabha MP Sadanand Shet Tanawade, and MLAs Premendra Shet and Carlos Ferreira, visited the jatra.

The temple is known for its blend of northern and southern architectural styles, hosts the Shrigao Jatra every May. The festival, which features a traditional fire-walking ritual, attracts thousands of devotees. Villagers from nearby areas, including Maulingem, participate in the religious rituals and offerings dedicated to Goddess Lairai throughout the day, as mentioned on the Goa Tourism website. As midnight nears during the Lairai Jatra, devotees perform a spirited circular dance inside the temple, clashing sticks in rhythm with drum beats.

## Caste census announcement by Centre is a victory for Telangana govt: Bhatti

Hyderabad, May 3 : The Union government's announcement to conduct a caste census is the result of pressure exerted by the Telangana government and the All India Congress, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka said. The Telangana people's government has scientifically conducted a caste census, making the State a role model for the entire country. After India gained independence, it was only in Telangana that such a comprehensive caste census was carried out successfully without any objections. The government has committed to incorporating the findings of this caste survey into its policy-making decisions, he said.

Bhatti further stated that the outcomes of the caste census should be taken to the people and the Backward Classes (BCs) should stand in support of the government. The BC Employees' Association and leaders of various BC caste organisations felicitated Bhatti Vikramarka with grand shawls and extended their congratulations at the Praja Bhavan Camp Office in Khammam on Saturday. On the occasion, the Deputy Chief Minister stated that the Central government's declaration to conduct a caste census across the country is a victory for Telangana's people and their government. He expressed gratitude to the Telangana government for leading the way in pushing the Centre to take this decision. Acting under the directives of AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge, Lok Sabha Opposition Leader Rahul Gandhi, and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, the Telangana government carried out the caste census meticulously, without any errors. A resolution was passed in the State Assembly granting 42 percent reservations to BCs and was submitted to the Centre with significant pressure, Bhatti Vikramarka said. He also mentioned that a resolution was passed during the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting in Gujarat, demanding a nationwide caste census, similar to the one conducted in Telangana. This was followed by raising the issue in Parliament, which ultimately compelled the Centre to agree to a



national caste census.

Bhatti Vikramarka highlighted that no caste census had been conducted in India since 1930, and Telangana's initiative is the first successful effort post-independence. He acknowledged that conducting such a survey was a complex task, but Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, himself (as Deputy CM), and the entire cabinet undertook this challenge and completed the process within 50-55 days. He clarified that the caste census did not merely collect information about castes but also gathered data on people's economic, political, and employment conditions, the distribution of natural resources among communities, and their standard of living. This data will inform the government's future welfare and development policies. The Deputy Chief Minister appealed that the results of the caste census should be made accessible to the public and emphasized that BCs must stand firmly with the people's government. He noted that the implementation of 42 percent BC reservations was only possible under a people's government, and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy along with the entire cabinet is sincerely working towards this goal.

## 28 Government Degree Colleges roll out new courses

GNS News Agency, May 3

Hyderabad: In a move to boost the employability quotient of students, 28 Government Degree Colleges (GDCs) are set to roll out new apprenticeship embedded degree programmes for the academic year 2025-26. The programmes are - BCom Banking, Financial Services & Insurance (BFSI), BCom E-Commerce Operations, BCom Retail Operations, BSc Tourism & Hospitality Operations, BSc Digital/Industrial Electronics, BSc Marketing & Sales, BSc in Pharmaceutical Manufacturing & Quality, and BBA in Content and Creative Writing. These new offerings aimed at boosting employability, fostering skill oriented education, and bridging the gap between academia and industry—ushering in a transformative era for GDCs.

The move by the Commissionerate of Collegiate Education comes as the degree colleges have seen a remarkable increase in their enrollment in the last eight years. Thanks to the past BRS government's initiatives, including the introduction of the bucket system in 2021 that allows students to choose their undergraduate subjects from a pool, the GDCs admissions have gone up by 80 per cent. As per the information shared by the Commissionerate, the GDCs admissions went up from 28,035 in 2018 to 50,477 to the present academic year 2024-25, which translates to 80 per cent hike.

The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), a pivotal reform introduced in 2019, led to a surge of 14,250 addi-



tional admissions in just one year in 2019. Since then, the colleges have maintained a steady growth trajectory.

Further, some GDCs like the Government City College introduced sector skill council courses that aided students acquire industry skills besides paid internships during the course work. The courses include retailing, e-commerce, operations and logistics, content and creative writing, media and entertainment, animation, entertainment, and pharmacy and allied courses. The courses are domain specific.

Students taking up these courses are mapped to the industry concerned, which offers paid internships to the tune of Rs 6,000 to Rs 10,000 per month and guaranteed jobs upon completion of an under-graduation.

## UoH partners with Krismo, aims at developing next-generation therapies for inflammatory diseases

Hyderabad: The University of Hyderabad (UoH) and Krismo Biosciences Private Limited, a biotechnology start-up incubated at ASPIRE-BioNEST in UoH, on Saturday announced a partnership aimed at developing next-generation therapies for inflammatory diseases and serious infectious conditions. As per the partnership, the two institutions will leverage their respective expertise to research and develop innovative therapeutic products targeting a range of inflammatory disorders. The key focus will also be on the design of antibody-based therapies to effectively combat viral infections, including Dengue, COVID-19, and Influenza, as well as potent toxins produced by harmful bacteria responsible for debilitating conditions like gas gangrene.

## PM Modi announces \$200 million for modernisation of Angolan armed forces



GNS News Agency, May 3

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday (May 3, 2025) announced a \$200 million Defence credit line for Angola and expressed commitment to act firmly and decisively against terrorists and their backers, an assertion that came days after the Pahalgam terror strike. PM Modi made the remarks after holding wide-ranging talks with Angolan President Joao Manuel Goncalves Laurengo that focused

on ramping up overall bilateral ties, including in areas of digital public infrastructure. In his media statement, the Prime Minister said Mr. Laurengo's visit to India not only gives a new direction to the bilateral relations but also strengthens the India-Africa partnership. "I am pleased to announce India's \$200 million defence credit line to support modernisation of Angola's defence forces," he said. The Prime Minister also said that there was a discussion on repair, overhaul and supply of defence platforms as well. PM Modi calls terrorism the biggest threat during joint presser with Angola President | Video Credit: The Hindu

India will also share its capabilities with Angola in the areas of digital public infrastructure, space technology and capacity building, Modi said. "We have also decided to further strengthen our relations in areas of healthcare, diamond processing, fertiliser and critical minerals." The Prime Minister also said, "We are committed to taking firm and decisive action against terrorists and those who support them." Highlighting the importance of ties between India and the African Union, he said, "We are partners in progress, we are pillars of the Global South."

## You have failed to uphold 'Rajdharm': Kharge to PM on Manipur 'no-show'

GNS News Agency, May 3

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday (May 3, 2025) accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of failing to uphold 'Rajdharm' by not visiting Manipur even once in the last two years. In a post on X, he said Manipur continues to be troubled for two years without the Prime Minister setting foot on its soil. Mr. Kharge said the violence in Manipur began on May 3, 2023 and still continues. Just two days ago, 25 people were injured in a violent clash in Tamenglong district, he noted. He said more than 260 people have died and 68,000 people displaced and thousands are still living in relief camps. "Narendra Modi ji, Even as Manipur awaits your presence and return of peace and normalcy, we want to ask 3 pointed questions to you. "Since January 2022, your last election rally in Manipur, you have made 44 Foreign visits around the globe and 250 domestic visits across the nation, yet you have not spent a single second in Manipur. Why this apathy and disdain for the people of Manipur? Where is the political accountability," the Congress chief asked. He said the President's rule in the state was not imposed despite its people demanding it. He said that it was imposed only after 20 months of the request when the BJP was faced by a no-confidence motion brought in by the Congress party and BJP's own MLAs couldn't decide a chief minister. "Why did the DOUBLE ENGINE Government fail in its Constitutional duty to pro-



vide security and safety for its citizens? Why did you not sack the Chief Minister earlier?" "Your DOUBLE ASSAULT Government is still failing Manipur. Despite the Home Ministry's rule in place now, incidents of violence haven't stopped," Mr. Kharge claimed. He alleged that the Centre passed a resolution for the President's rule "in a hurried manner, at 2 AM midnight" to hide its "rank incompetence." The Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha said Manipur's economy has lost thousands of crores in damages in the past two years' of ethnic strife. He said that the demand for grants for the state, which the Centre brought in the Parliament, made several social spending cuts. "What happened to the Peace Committee announced by the Home Minister? Why didn't you meet the affected people of all communities even in Delhi? Why didn't you announce a special package for the state?"

## Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese wins a second three-year term



GNS News Agency, May 3

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has become the first Australian Prime Minister to win a second consecutive three-year term in 21 years. Opposition leader Peter Dutton conceded defeat in Saturday's election, saying, "We didn't do well enough during this campaign, that much is obvious tonight, and I accept full responsibility for that." "Earlier on, I called the prime minister to congratulate him on his success tonight. It's a historic occasion for the Labor Party and we recognise that," he

added. The Australian Electoral Commission's projections gave Mr. Albanese's ruling center-left Labor Party 70 seats and the conservative opposition coalition 24 seats in the 150-seat House of Representatives, the lower chamber where parties need a majority to form governments. Unaligned minor parties and independent candidates appeared likely to win 13 seats. Australian Broadcasting Corp. election analyst Antony Green predicted Labor would win 76 seats, the coalition 36 and unaligned lawmakers 13. Green said Labor would form a majority or minority government and that the coalition had no hope of forming even a minority government. Energy policy and inflation have been major issues in the campaign, with both sides agreeing the country faces a cost of living crisis. Mr. Dutton's conservative Liberal Party blames government waste for fueling inflation and increasing interest rates, and has pledged to axe more than one in five public service jobs to reduce government spending. While both say the country should reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, Mr. Dutton argues that relying on more nuclear power instead of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind turbines would deliver less expensive electricity.

## India bans direct, indirect imports from Pakistan

GNS News Agency, May 3

India has banned direct or indirect import of all goods from Pakistan with immediate effect in the interest of national security and public policy, following the Pahalgam terror attack last month in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed, according to a Government Order issued on Friday (May 2, 2025). The decision will completely halt all inbound shipments of goods from Pakistan to India. India's exports to Pakistan in April-January 2024-25 stood at \$447.65 million, while imports were meagre \$0.42 million. A provision in this regard has been added in Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023 "to prohibit direct or indirect import or transit of all goods originating in or exported from Pakistan with immediate effect until further orders," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade

(DGFT) said in a notification dated May 2. It added that this restriction is imposed in the interest of national security and public policy. "Any exception to this prohibition will require approval of Government of India," the Order said. Inserting the provision under the heading "Prohibition on Import from Pakistan" in the FTP, it said: "Direct or indirect import or transit of all goods originating in or exported from Pakistan, whether or not freely importable or otherwise permitted, shall be prohibited with immediate effect, until further orders." Main imports from the neighbouring country during April-January 2024-25 included fruits and nuts (\$0.08 million), certain oil seeds and medicinal plants (\$0.26 million) and organic chemicals. The decision follows a terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22, in which 26 people were killed.

# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Voice of sanity

IT's heartening to hear a voice of sanity when anger and hatred are sweeping the country after the Pahalgam massacre. Himanshi Narwal, whose husband, naval officer Lt Vinay Narwal, was gunned down by terrorists in the Baisaran meadow, wants nobody except the perpetrators punished. "We don't want people going after Muslims and Kashmiris," she said at a blood donation camp organised on May 1 to commemorate Vinay's birth anniversary. She chose the occasion to make a fervent appeal for peace and communal harmony, in stark contrast to the rabble-rousers who are baying for the blood of Muslims, particularly Kashmiris.

Himanshi has sent out a clear message to the bigots who are exploiting a national tragedy to target a minority community. A disturbing case has been reported from Agra, where a self-proclaimed cow vigilante allegedly shot dead a Muslim biryani vendor and later declared on social media that the murder was 'retribution' for the Pahalgam attack. The reluctance of political and religious leaders to condemn such vengeful crimes and hate speech is inexcusable — it threatens our secular fabric, which is already fraying at the edges.

The communal killings in Pahalgam were aimed at escalating Hindu-Muslim tensions and disturbing peace not only in J&K but across the country. Such nefarious designs can only be scuttled with a collective resolve. Gurmehar Kaur, whose father died fighting terrorists in J&K in 1999, has wisely said that the true defeat of terrorism comes when we refuse to let violence divide us. In the best interests of the nation, citizens should firmly shun those who are adding fuel to the fire. Central and state governments must crack down on the elements who are bent on making innocents pay for the heinous acts of terrorists. Only a united India can deal terrorism a crushing blow.

## Signify and SELCO Foundation Collaborate to Solarize 10 24x7 Primary Health Centres in Karnataka under the 'Swasthya Kiran' CSR Initiative



Hyderabad: Signify (Euronext: LIGHT), the world leader in lighting, has successfully solarized 10 Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in Karnataka under its flagship CSR initiative, 'Swasthya Kiran', in collaboration with SELCO Foundation. This transformative initiative aims to ensure uninterrupted access to lighting and reliable electricity in rural healthcare facilities, significantly enhancing the quality of healthcare services in underserved communities.

Each PHC has been equipped with a 5 kWp solar panel, a 19.2 kWh battery, and a 6 kVA solar PCU, ensuring continuous power supply for critical healthcare operations, lighting, and essential medical equipment. The initiative is expected to save approximately 7,000 electricity units per PHC annually, resulting in a total savings of around 70,000 units across all 10 centres. This translates to an estimated financial saving of ₹4.5 lakhs per year, while simultaneously reducing carbon emissions by approximately 50 metric tons annually—promoting a greener, more sustainable environment alongside improved healthcare delivery.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by Dr. Mohandas, T.B. Officer, District Health Office, Tumakur, and Dr. Sidheshwara, Taluk Health Officer, Sira Block, along

with Gram Panchayat dignitaries. They applauded the project's vital contribution to strengthening rural healthcare infrastructure.

Nikhil Gupta, Head of Marketing, Strategy, Govt. Affairs & CSR - Signify, Greater India, shared his thoughts on this project, "At Signify, we are committed to using our lighting expertise to create a positive impact on communities through our CSR initiatives. Our Swasthya Kiran CSR project exemplifies this commitment by providing reliable and sustainable energy to power critical healthcare services in rural Karnataka. We are proud to partner with SELCO Foundation in improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of people." The Swasthya Kiran project covers PHCs across four districts: 4 in Tumkur, 3 in Bangalore Urban, 1 in Kolar, and 2 in Mysore. Selection criteria prioritized PHCs that serve as high-delivery points and those with high outpatient (OPD) footfall to maximize community impact. Speaking at the event, SELCO Foundation remarked, "At SELCO Foundation, we are committed to enabling sustainable energy solutions for underserved communities. Our partnership with Signify ensures that rural healthcare facilities receive reliable, round-the-clock power to deliver critical health services effectively."

## PhysicsWallah (PW) Organises a Meet-Up with Alakh Sir in Hyderabad; Announces 5 New Centres in the city

Hyderabad: Education Company, PhysicsWallah (PW), recently organised a Meet-Up with Alakh Sir, in Hyderabad, which was attended by more than 2500 students and parents. Alakh Sir addressed the students and parents, focusing on the importance of hard work, consistency, and family support in education. His session was to try and encourage students to stay committed to their academics. Speaking at the event, Alakh Sir said, "Success is not about being the smartest, it's about staying committed to your journey even when it gets tough. Hard work and belief in yourself are key to achieving your goals."

At the event, the expansion of PW Vidyapeeth in the city was highlighted, with the number of centres growing to eight for the academic year 2025. The newly added centres in Shaikpet, Suchitra, Chanda Nagar, AS Rao Nagar,



and Kothapet extend its presence to more areas of Hyderabad. These join the existing centres located at Madhapur, Habsiguda, and Kukatpally. Furthermore, PW Vidyapeeth's offerings were also highlighted, which include an academic roadmap featuring preparation for JEE, NEET, and foundation courses.

PhysicsWallah (PW) continues to try to make quality education accessible to students across India. The Hyderabad Meet-Up marked another step toward reaching more students and trying to help them in their academic journey.

## India's Market Diversification and Bilateral Trade Strategy



Hyderabad: As the USA is India's second-largest trading partner, next to China, a decline in exports from India to the US market due to high tariffs will have far-reaching repercussions. India is likely to experience a hike in the current account deficit and volatility in currency value. In other words, India may be significantly affected by America's tariff policy due to its strong trade exposure to the United States, especially in sectors like electronics, textiles, gems and jewellery, seafood, pharmaceuticals, and automobile parts. India may face reduced export competitiveness, a suppression in demand in US markets, and an overall increased vulnerability in its export-driven sectors.

Given the higher tariffs imposed by the USA, India must identify alternative countries to establish trade relations while considering the implications of the USA-China trade war. If a strategy comprising market diversification and bilateral agreements is not laid out, the likely upcoming volatility in the Indian rupee may result in capital outflows, inflationary pressures through imported inflation, and a widening trade deficit. India's total trade in value terms with the United States of America has averaged approximately USD 120 billion annually over the last 5 years (2018-2023) (Department of Commerce, GoI). The value of essential commodities exported to the USA in 2022-23 includes Gems and Jewellery (USD 11.4 billion), Pharmaceuticals (USD 8.5 billion), Electronics (USD 8.3 billion), Textiles and garments (USD 7.2 billion), and Machinery, nuclear reactors (USD 6.8 billion) and seafood (USD 2.55 billion). Imports from the USA to India included Petroleum products (USD 13.2 billion), Machinery (USD 5.5 billion), Aircraft and spacecraft (USD 4.1 billion), Electrical machinery (USD 3.8 billion), and Medical and surgical equipment (USD 2.5 billion). Imports from the US may also become costlier, though the import impact is relatively lower due to fewer reciprocal tariffs. According to GTRI and Emkay Global estimates, India may lose up to USD 8-10 billion annually in export revenue due to reduced US demand across affected sectors. The sectors that will be hit the hardest are textiles, which will experience a 33% decline in competitiveness; seafood, which will have a 20.2% projected fall; and electronics, which will experience a 12% reduction.

During the American crisis, Indian exports fell by 3.5% from USD 189 billion in 2008-09 to USD 182.5 billion in 2009-10. Imports fell sharply by 5.5% from USD 303.7 billion to USD 287.7 billion. This slowdown prompted the launch of market diversification as a core policy response in FTP 2009-14. Market diversification was adopted — 27 countries were identified under the Market Access Initiative Scheme in the 2009-14 Foreign Trade Policy. The assistance intensity ranged from 25% to 75% of eligible costs, depending on the type of activity and market targeted. These initiatives contributed to India's revival in international trade in the subsequent years. Bilateral Trade Agreements

In light of elevated tariffs imposed by the United States, India must actively diversify its export destinations. Viable alternative markets for key export sectors include Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia for electronics; UAE, Hong Kong, and Singapore for gems and jewellery; Germany, France, and Spain for textiles; the UK, Germany, and Australia for pharmaceuticals; and Germany, ASEAN countries, and Mexico for auto parts and machinery.

## Sikara Clinics Hosts GLAM SOIRÉE to Celebrate Beauty, Wellness, and Women's Empowerment

Hyderabad: SIKARA Clinics, Hyderabad's premier destination for advanced dermatology and aesthetic treatments, hosted its highly anticipated GLAM SOIRÉE an exclusive Hi-Tea event at its Banjara Hills flagship clinic. The elegant gathering brought together leading voices from the media, social influencers, industry thought leaders, and wellness enthusiasts for an afternoon dedicated to celebrating transformation, innovation, and empowerment. Illuminating the event with her charisma, renowned actress Poonam Kaur graced the GLAM SOIRÉE as a special guest. Speaking at the occasion, Ms. Poonam Kaur shared, "SIKARA Clinics stands at the intersection of science and beauty, and today's event is a testament to their commitment towards empowering individuals. I am inspired by the vision and the



dedication behind this initiative, and I believe wellness truly begins with self-confidence." Ms. Sreeleela, Assistant Commissioner, GST, honored the occasion as Guest of Honour, commending SIKARA Clinics' exceptional contributions to women-led entrepreneur-

ship and the rapidly evolving wellness industry. Ms. Sirisha Alapati, Founder & COO of SIKARA Clinics, was the driving force behind the event's thoughtful curation. Reflecting on the clinic's journey and the significance of the soiree, Ms. Sirisha Alapati commented,

"At SIKARA Clinics, our mission is not just to enhance outer beauty, but to nurture confidence and well-being from within. The Glam Soiree is a celebration of the community we're building one rooted in trust, clinical excellence, and genuine compassion."

## PROMOTE MANTHANI'S SPIRITUAL LEGACY THROUGH MEANINGFUL JOURNALISM: MINISTER SRIDHAR BABU



"PS ASHOKAN" INDIAN CHRONICLE "MANTHANI, MAY 4" Veteran Journalist Mahavadi Satish Kumar Honoured for Exceptional Reporting on Spiritual Heritage "Manthani, renowned for its profound spiritual and cultural significance, must find a prominent place in the media through well-researched and evocative reporting, stated Telangana IT and Industries Minister Sri Duddilla Sridhar Babu. He was speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the Manthani Division Press Club on Thursday. "The Minister emphasized that the region, steeped in historical and spiritual richness, deserves focused media attention to bring its ancient temples and sacred sites into public consciousness. "Manthani stands as a beacon of spiritual tradition. It is the responsibility of the journalistic community to chronicle its forgotten glory and showcase its cultural wealth to the world," he urged. "He commended senior journalist Mahavadi Satish Kumar for his commendable work in highlighting spiritual narratives and temple histories through his articles. As a token of appreciation, Minister Sridhar Babu felicitated Satish Kumar with a memento during a ceremo-

nial mass recital of the Bhagavad Gita. Ramadugu Srinivas, Vice President of the Press Club's Spiritual and Cultural Committee, was also honoured. "The Minister also applauded the efforts of Medagoni Rajamouli Goud, a spiritual missionary and honorary advisor to the Telangana Hindu Religious Council, for his unwavering dedication to organizing spiritual programmes in the region. "The event was attended by Press Club President Motukuri Srinivas, Vice President Jabbar Khan, General Secretary Mallesh Yadav, Assistant Secretary Kishan, Treasurer Gadipalli Ajay Kumar, PS Ashokan, Siliveru Mahender, Sadavali, Vasu, and other esteemed journalists.

## CS meets Minister Sridhar Babu

Hyderabad, May 3 K. Ramakrishna Rao, who has newly assumed charge as the Chief Secretary, paid a courtesy call on Minister for IT and Industries Duddilla Sridhar Babu at his chamber in the Secretariat on Saturday. On the occasion, the Minister extended his congratulations to the Chief Secretary and emphasised the need to

steer the State administration in alignment with the government's priorities. Sridhar Babu urged the Chief Secretary to ensure effective implementation of government promises and welfare schemes, so that the intended benefits reach all eligible citizens at the grassroots level.

## Volkswagen India to open pre-bookings for the iconic Golf GTI

Hyderabad: Volkswagen India is proud to announce that pre-bookings for the legendary Volkswagen Golf GTI will commence from the 5th of May 2025. With the latest generation Golf GTI Mk 8.5, Indian enthusiasts will have access to the globally celebrated carline for the very first time through a limited allocation. With its rich motorsport heritage, timeless design language, and exhilarating performance, the Golf GTI is more than just a car — it's a symbol of dynamic driving, and iconic appeal. The Golf GTI is available as a Fully built unit (FBU) offering customers an opportunity to experience the true GTI DNA in its purest form. Commenting on the announcement, Mr. Ashish Gupta, Brand Director, Volkswagen India, said, "The Golf GTI is revered as one of the most iconic cars globally, and we are truly proud to offer customers in India the opportunity to own a piece of Volkswagen's performance legacy. It's a car that blends everyday usability with turbocharged driving experience - perfect for discerning enthusiasts who ap-



preciate precision engineering designed to deliver thrilling performance. It's an embodiment of German Engineering at its finest. Key highlights of the Golf GTI Mk 8.5: 265 PS of power and 370 Nm of torque 0-100 Km/h in 5.9 seconds. Pre-bookings for the Volkswagen Golf GTI will open on 5th of May 2025 exclusively on Volkswagen India's official website (www.volkswagen.co.in) for a limited duration. Due to limited availability, early pre-bookings are highly recommended. Deliveries are expected to begin in June 2025 from selected Volkswagen dealerships across India. To pre-book or know more visit www.volkswagen.co.in

## Medical tourism in Telangana experiencing rapid growth

Hyderabad, May 3 The Telangana State is currently drawing international patients by offering top-notch medical facilities, advanced technology, and high-quality treatments. With the upcoming Miss World Pageant in 2025, the state is set to establish itself as a key player on the global medical tourism stage. Following the directives of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, officials are implementing special measures to effectively highlight medical tourism during the Miss World event, which will see participants from 120 countries and will be streamed live in over 150 nations. As part of the Miss World Pageant-2025 activities, a dedicated medical tourism event will be held at AIG Hospital in Hyderabad on May 16. This will feature Miss World contestants and aims to showcase the advanced medical services available at affordable rates in Telangana, as well as the state's advancements in medical tourism. Authorities noted that healthcare costs in Telangana are 60-80 percent lower than those in the United States and Europe. Renowned hospitals such as Osmania Hospital, NIMS, and MNJ Cancer Hospital, along with private institutions like Apollo and Yashoda, have been delivering medical services for many years. These facilities are equipped with cutting-edge technology, including robotic surgery and telemedicine, as well as multispecialty centers that offer expert treatment for complex medical procedures like cardiology, orthopedics, cancer care, organ transplants, cosmetic plastic surgery, and fertility treatments like IVF.

## Book Launch of "Vivaham Divyatva Saadhanam" "by NSU VC & TTD DELEGATES



"May 3, Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema coordinator" SVU Vice Chancellor Acharya Apparao and Registrar Acharya Bhupathi Naidu congratulated the students who studied data science at Sri Venkateswara University and were selected for job internships. This morning, at the V. C. office, they congratulated the students who got placements in organizations like NARL, SHAR, ISRO. "1. M. Prabhas Raj - SHAR" 2. V. Bharat Kumar - VSCC" 3. K. Vinay - NARL" 4. M. Deepa - NARL" 5. N. Navya Nikhitha - NARL" 6. G. V. Sumanth - NARL" 7. T. Kirti - NARL They praised the students. They said that the university has started such courses to achieve skills. They were congratulated by Principal Acharya PV Narasai, Head & Coordinator Anjan Babu, Assistants of Exafluence Inc., T N Srinivasulu and the students. "Some new courses were launched on this occasion. Sri Venkateswara University, in collaboration with Exafluence Inc., (USA), announced new courses in Data Science for the benefit of students. 1. PG Diploma in Data Science - (1 year duration), 2. Certificate in Python for AI, ML & GenAI - (6 months duration) 3. Cer-

the values and responsibilities of a householder, and how society depends on householders. He emphasized that the entire world looks to the Indian family system as a model for a value-based way of life. "Presiding over the event, Prof. GSR Krishnamurthy cited Sita Devi as an excellent example, referencing how the poet Bhavabhuti described her in "Uttara Rama Charita" as a reflection of the Indian family system. He explained that everyone should follow the duties of a householder."

"The event was attended by Amudala Murali, Professor Dakshinamurthy Sharma, Dr. C.V. Reddy, editor Gangavaram Sridevi, Sudhakar Reddy from Ramakrishna Seva Samaj, Pudipatla, and members of the public, all of whom contributed to the success of the program including Dr Mohan Muni Srida Reddy garu.

## WOMAN BLUDGEONED TO DEATH IN KALVACHARLA AFTER DRUNKEN ALTERCATION

"PS ASHOKAN" INDIAN CHRONICLE "MANTHANI MAY 4" "A horrific act of violence unfolded in Kalvacharla village, Ramagiri mandal, within the Manthani Assembly constituency, where a woman was brutally killed after being struck on the head with a cement brick. The incident, fueled by alcohol and rage, has sent shockwaves through the local community. "According to police, the accused, Pattik Kanakayya from IB Tandur in Mancherial district, is alleged to have fatally attacked Motam Toorpati Sammakka during a visit to their relatives' home in Kalvacharla. "The two were reportedly consuming alcohol on Friday night when a verbal argument escalated. In a moment of uncontrolled anger, Kanakayya allegedly picked up a cement brick and struck Sammakka on the head, causing her instant death. "Ramagiri Sub-Inspector Chandrakumar stated that both were involved in enrolling members for local chit fund schemes. Following the incident, the accused fled the scene. Police have registered a case and launched an intensive search to apprehend him. "The victim's body was shifted to Peddapalli Government Hospital for a post-mortem examination. "Preliminary investigations revealed that



Sammakka had been living with Kanakayya, as she was unmarried. She is survived by three children. Kanakayya, however, is married and has a family.

## DATA Science is the future - SVU Vice Chancellor



"May 3, Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema coordinator" SVU Vice Chancellor Acharya Apparao and Registrar Acharya Bhupathi Naidu congratulated the students who studied data science at Sri Venkateswara University and were selected for job internships. This morning, at the V. C. office, they congratulated the students who got placements in organizations like NARL, SHAR, ISRO. "1. M. Prabhas Raj - SHAR" 2. V. Bharat Kumar - VSCC" 3. K. Vinay - NARL" 4. M. Deepa - NARL" 5. N. Navya Nikhitha - NARL" 6. G. V. Sumanth - NARL" 7. T. Kirti - NARL They praised the students. They said that the university has started such courses to achieve skills. They were congratulated by Principal Acharya PV Narasai, Head & Coordinator Anjan Babu, Assistants of Exafluence Inc., T N Srinivasulu and the students. "Some new courses were launched on this occasion. Sri Venkateswara University, in collaboration with Exafluence Inc., (USA), announced new courses in Data Science for the benefit of students. 1. PG Diploma in Data Science - (1 year duration), 2. Certificate in Python for AI, ML & GenAI - (6 months duration) 3. Cer-



Exafluence Education  
SV University Campus  
Tirupati - 517502  
Phone: 0877 - 2248094  
Mobile: 7396866627 / 7396866628  
contact@exafluence.com  
www.svuuniversity.edu.in  
www.exf.edu.in



tificate in Data Visualization - (6 months duration) 4. Certificate in Cloud Technologies - (6 months duration) The Vice Chancellor and Registrar released the brochure of the courses.

## GOVERNMENT NEGLIGENCE CAUSES HUGE LOSS TO FARMERS: FORMER MLA PUTTA MADHUKAR



"PS ASHOKAN" INDIAN CHRONICLE "MANTHANI MAY 4" "The Congress government, which boasts of "people's governance," is directly responsible for the irreparable damage caused to farmers due to its negligence, said former Manthani MLA Putta Madhukar. He demanded that the government take full responsibility for the crop losses caused by unseasonal rains. "During his visit to the paddy procurement centers in Mahadevapur Mandal, Jayashankar Bhupalpally district, Madhukar examined the rain-drenched paddy and consoled the affected farmers. He said that despite knowing that unseasonal rains occur every year during this season, the government failed to take timely precautions. This lack of foresight has led to severe damage to the harvested crops. "He criticized the delay in starting procurement operations, citing moisture content as an excuse. Farmers who brought their produce 15 to 20 days ago were denied procurement, which resulted in extensive losses. He also condemned the inaction of the local administration, stating that although the Additional Collector visited the centers, no concrete measures were taken. He found

it appalling that even the local MLA did not respond to the crisis. "Madhukar questioned how the same MLA, who attended caste meetings and claimed to care about the people during elections, could now ignore the plight of the farmers. He pointed out that the rice mills are refusing to accept soaked paddy, despite earlier assurances. If procurement doesn't resume, he warned that farmers will protest by laying siege to the rice mills. "He strongly criticized the ruling party for exploiting the poor for votes and later neglecting them. He alleged that public funds are being looted through multiple offices in Hyderabad, and demanded that at least a portion of these funds be diverted to help the farmers. He also demanded that the Sripada Trust offer ₹10,000 to each affected farmer. "Madhukar challenged the MLA to define the ideals he claims to follow in his father's name. If those ideals truly focus on helping the poor, then the government must offer ₹50,000 compensation per acre to farmers affected by the unseasonal rains. "He blamed both the government and local officials for the disaster, questioning why even the PACS Chairman, a farmer's son, is not standing with the farming community. He criticized the poor planning and lack of facilities at procurement centers, saying the commissions earned should be used for farmers' welfare, not for personal gain. "He concluded that the government should stop boasting about its legacy and instead support the people during times of crisis. He expressed disappointment that a minister who sits beside the Chief Minister every day hasn't shown any concern for the local people. He asserted that if the government and local MLA continue to remain silent, a strong protest movement will be launched to secure justice and compensation for the farmers.

## Scientists to meet farmers in fields from Monday: PJTAU Vice Chancellor

Hyderabad, May 3 Professor Jayashankar Telangana Agricultural University (PJTAU) has taken an initiative to create awareness among the Telangana farmers on important farming related issues. As part of this, an innovative program called "Scientists in the Farmer's Field" will be launched across the State from May 5. The Vice Chancellor of the University Prof. Aldas Janaiah said as part of this, 200 teams of scientists would visit about 1200 revenue villages in the State till June 13. He said about 100 teams of the scientists would visit the South Agricultural Zone and about 50 teams of scientists each would visit the North and Central Telangana Zones.

"Every working day from 8 am to 12 noon, a team of scientists will meet the farmers at the Rythu Vedika or any other place selected in the village. Each team will consist of two scientists, officials of the Department of Agriculture, agricultural students, staff of other local government departments, and progressive farmers. Similarly, local public representatives, school teachers, and students will also be involved in this program. Reducing the use of urea, using chemicals only necessary and conserving soil fertility, the team of scientists will educate the farmers on important issues such as efficient use of irrigation water, crop rotation, tree plantation, environmental protection and so on. All agricultural colleges, polytechnics, agricultural research institutes, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, and Eruvaka Kendras under the Agricultural University will be full participants in the



management of this program. University officials, joint research directors and college deans will continuously monitor this program," he said. In a statement, he also said through this prestigious program, scientists and students would get an opportunity to directly know the various problems faced by the food producers at the field level. He said the farmers would be able to increase their awareness about cultivation techniques and advanced technologies through the scientists on many major cultivation issues. "Let us all work in coordination and make this program a success," he said.

## Massive scam in cotton procurement: Peddi Sudarshan Reddy

Hyderabad, May 3 BRS party leader and former MLA Peddi Sudarshan Reddy today alleged that there was a scam of Rs 3,000 crore in cotton procurement in Telangana. He alleged that there was an involvement of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and State Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy in the cotton procurement scam. He said the cotton farmers lost Rs 2,000 per quintal. Addressing media persons at Telangana Bhavan on Saturday, Sudarshan Reddy alleged that brokers had bought a quintal of cotton from farmers for Rs 5,000 and charged more than Rs 7,000 from other buyers. He demanded a sitting judge to investigate the cotton procurement case. He alleged that the CCI and marketing officials had cheated the cotton farmers. He said the farmers had suffered losses due to the delay in the procurement of cotton by the CCI. He said only 20% of the farmers had sold their crop to the CCI. He alleged that the remaining crop was sold to the CCI by the Congress leaders, who formed a syndicate. Peddi Sudarshan Reddy alleged that the seeds of the scam were sown in a secret meeting be-

tween the CCI officials and traders at a hotel in Hyderabad on the occasion of Diwali.

## AIFF Annual Awards Day held

Hyderabad, May 3 : The All India Football Federation (AIFF) Annual Awards day was held on Friday at Bhubaneswar.

Sports Authority of Telangana was honoured by the All India Football Federation (AIFF) for its outstanding contribution, support in encouraging and promoting football in Hyderabad, Telangana for 2024-25 on the AIFF Annual Awards day function. The Award was received by Sonibala Devi, IFS, VC & MD, Sports Authority of Telangana. Among the dignitaries present in the AIFF Annual Awards function along with AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey, were Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, Deputy Chief Minister, Odisha, Suryabanshi Suraj, Minister for Higher Education,...

## "Operation Kagar should be stopped and Adivasi rights must be protected"

Demand by Adivasi Rights Struggle Committee (Tudum Debba)



Hyderabad: Leaders of the Adivasi Rights Struggle Committee have demanded that the Central Government immediately stop Operation Kagar, initiate discussions with the Naxalites, and take steps to safeguard the rights of Adivasis. Speaking at a press conference organized on Saturday at Somajiguda Press Club, the State Founding President Burb Pochayya, State President Kotnak Vijay, and General Secretary Siddaboyin Lakshminarayana emphasized their concerns.

They read out the declaration of the Adivasi Rights Struggle Committee held from April 12 to 14 in Jodeghat, Asifabad district. They alleged that across the country and in various states, Operation Kagar is being used as a tool

to create chaos in Adivasi habitats and to forcibly evict Adivasis from their forest lands.

They pointed out that in places like Chhattisgarh and Bastar, Adivasis are living in fear and distress. Therefore, they urged both the Central and State governments to respond to the peace talks proposed by Maoists and work towards creating a peaceful atmosphere in the forests. They also demanded that the Lambadi, Banjara, Nuwari, and Gori communities, who are currently receiving Scheduled Tribe (ST) reservations and benefits but do not belong to indigenous Adivasi groups, should be removed from the ST list to ensure justice for genuine Adivasi communities. The event was attended by Adivasi Students' Association members including Saguboyin Paparao, RM Arun Kumar, Kaiti

## Disneyland management congratulates SSC ranked students..

"Damera, May 03 (Indian Chronicle) "Disneyland management congratulates SSC ranked students. Students have shown the best talent in Tenth results 'Disneyland' high school in Oglapur Village, Damera Mandal Hanumakonda district. D. Sadaya, B. Lakshmi Nivasam, Directors B. Shobharani, D Rakesh Bhanu and D. Dinesh Chander greeted the students with bouquets. Speaking at the meeting afterwards, the school management said, "In the future, the



best results in the future and to get the highest peaks and bring a good name to the school. He said that no matter how many fluctuations come to reach the desired goal, he said.

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## Shabbir Ali vows to complete Pranahita-Chevella project

Kamareddy, May 3 Telangana Government Advisor Mohammed Ali Shabbir on Saturday reiterated his lifelong commitment to the completion of the Pranahita-Chevella project, declaring that he would not rest until irrigation water permanently reaches farmers in Kamareddy district. Chairing a review meeting with Pranahita-Chevella RWS officials at the R&B Guest House in Kamareddy, Shabbir Ali said, "It is my dream of a lifetime, and even if it takes my last breath, I will fight to see this project completed. I want to see joy in the eyes of Kamareddy farmers before I die." Shabbir Ali thanked Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy, and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka for sanctioning Rs 23 crore for the revival of the project. He criticised the previous BRS government, accusing it of conspiring to cancel the original Pranahita-Chevella project by merging it into the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme. "This move deprived poor farmers of 3.5 TMC of irrigation water, affecting hundreds of acres," he said. Shabbir Ali directed officials to expedite land acquisition and other pending issues to resume work immediately. So far, 80% of compensation has been distributed, and the remaining will be completed using the

sanctioned Rs 23.15 crore. "We will begin construction within 15 days," he assured. The project is expected to irrigate 80,000 acres in Kamareddy, 10,000 acres in Banswada, 30,000 acres in Yellareddy, and 12,000 acres in Ramayampet of Medak district. He also pledged to ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply for the next 20 years by repairing old pipelines and laying a new pipeline to fully utilise Godavari waters. "As summer peaks, every effort must be made to avoid water shortage," he instructed. In a separate meeting with Mission Bhagiratha officials, Shabbir Ali reviewed works taken up under the Amrut Kaal scheme. Of the 104-km-long second pipeline being laid to supply Godavari water, 24 km has been completed so far. The remaining works will be completed in the next two months. Under Mission Bhagiratha, 7,200 new free tap connections will be provided within the Kamareddy municipal limits, especially in slum areas, starting this week. Currently, Kamareddy municipality and surrounding villages need 11 MLD of water. Supply is being managed with 6 MLD from Sriram Sagar Project, 1 MLD from Burra Mathadi, and 2.5 MLD from Pedda Cheruvu. Once the second pipeline is completed, all shortages will be resolved, he assured.

## Governor flags off machinery vehicles for making eco-friendly leaf plates



Rs.15 lakh support from the Governor for Nagarkurnool district, the programme was taken up to help these youth find jobs while giving tourists a real taste of the Nallamala forest's culture and biodiversity. In his address, the Governor highlighted the cultural importance of tribal communities, calling them the original guardians of nature. He reiterated the commitment to improving their lives through focused development programs. Jishnu Dev Varma further asserted that the Adivasis live beyond the boundaries of caste, creed, or religion. Their way of life is deeply connected to nature and grounded in age-old traditions. Living with simplicity and minimal needs, they find contentment not in material wealth but in their close relationship with the natural world, he said. Praising the energy of the tribal youth, the Governor said, "These are not favours, these are your rights. This is your time." The event was attended by key officials, including M. Dana Kishore, Principal Secretary to the Governor; Dr. G. Narendra Kumar, DG, NIRDPR; Dr. A. Sharat, Secretary, Tribal Welfare; Badavath Santhosh, Collector of Nagarkurnool district; Rohit Gopidi, Project Officer of ITDA (Chenchus); Dr. A. Sri Ramulu, CEO, Indian Red Cross Society (Telangana); and representatives from Leaf Plate Technologies Pvt. Ltd., Raj Bhavan, and Red Cross district units from Nagarkurnool, Bhadradi Kothagudem and Adilabad districts.

This initiative is a strong step toward sustainable development, livelihood enhancement and empowerment of tribal communities in Telangana, the Governor added.

Hyderabad, May 3 Governor Jishnu Dev Varma flagged off vehicles carrying machinery for making eco-friendly leaf plates and cups to tribal villages funded from the Governor's Discretionary Grants. The event took place at Raj Bhavan here on Saturday, aimed at supporting the livelihood of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). After the flag-off, the Governor interacted with young members of PVTG communities, including those undergoing training as nature guides and in leaf plate production.

A group of 32 local youth, mainly from the Chenchu community with a strong bond to the forest, were trained as nature guides at The Naturalist School in Bengaluru. With

## Young India Sports University coming soon: Sridhar Babu

Hyderabad, May 3 : Minister for IT and Industries Duddilla Sridhar Babu announced that a Young India Sports University will soon be established in the Telangana State to foster the development of all sports. As part of this initiative, dedicated sports academies will be set up district-wise to support and nurture talent across various disciplines, he said.

The Minister emphasised his commitment to ensuring that rural youth receive proper training and opportunities in sports. He urged youngsters to develop their skills in athletics alongside academics, highlighting the importance of a well-rounded education. On Saturday, at the Ministers' Quarters, Minister Sridhar Babu congratulated Kosaraju Lakshman, who was recently appointed as the Advisor to the Telangana Badminton Association and Venkata Ramana Reddy, appointed as the Media Coordinator. He personally handed over their appointment letters.

As the President of the Telangana Badminton Association,



the Minister guided them on their roles and encouraged efforts to further expand the reach and impact of badminton across the State. UVN Babu, the Events & Protocol coordinator of the Badminton Association and other dignitaries were also present

## KT Rama Rao extends support to family of sisters killed in Nizamabad road accident



GNS News Agency, May 3

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao assured full support to the bereaved family of Banavath

Manjula (17) and her sibling Ashwini (19), who died in a road accident in Nizamabad on Friday. Upon learning that their father Banavath Reddy was in Malaysia for work and struggling to reach home, Rama Rao directed his office to make necessary arrangements for his return to Telangana. He also coordinated with Indian diplomats in Malaysia to expedite travel permissions and ticket arrangements.

Following his instructions, BRS in-charge for Khanapur Assembly constituency Bhukya Johnson Naik rushed to the Armour Government Hospital late night on Friday to provide assistance to the grieving family. Ensuring proper coordination between doctors, police and officials, he facilitated the swift completion of post-mortem procedures. The bodies were then transported by ambulance to their native village, Lothair thanda, where funeral arrangements were made.

## Harish Rao demands Centre to increase wage days under MGNREGS

Hyderabad, May 3 : Former minister and Siddipet MLA T. Harish Rao today criticized Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for visiting Delhi 42 times, but achieving nothing for Telangana State from Delhi.

In a statement, he said it was wicked not to keep quiet about the loss to Telangana. Harish Rao also said the State government was playing with the lives of the employment guarantee workers by not paying their wages for four months. He accused the State government and the Central government of jointly weakening the employment guarantee scheme. He said it was regrettable that the Central government was reducing the MGNREGS (NREGA) workdays by half even though it is sanctioned to the State. "In 2024-25, Rs 12.22 crore workdays were sanctioned, but this year it was only Rs 6.5 crore workdays," he alleged. He said



even if the Congress and BJP have eight MPs each in Telangana, it would be of no use.

## TELANGANA TO ESTABLISH ELECTRONIC CITY IN FUTURE CITY WITH 300 CRORE INVESTMENT



"PS ASHOKAN"INDIAN CHRONICLE"MANTHANI MAY 4""In a statement issued from his Manthani office, the Minister revealed that SIRA Networks (Taiwan) and LCGC Resolute Group (Telangana) will jointly invest ₹300 crore in setting up a telecom manufacturing facility. The announcement followed a high-level meeting held on Saturday at the State Secretariat with representatives from both companies. "Minister Sridhar Babu emphasized the state

government's commitment to fostering high-tech industries through strategic infrastructure and policy support. He announced the formation of a dedicated task force to ensure seamless coordination with relevant departments and to fast-track project implementation. "Highlighting the government's focus on decentralised industrial development, he stated that special incentives will be provided to entrepreneurs establishing units in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. Infrastructure in such areas will be developed in line with the specific requirements of incoming industries. "The upcoming facility, planned over 10 acres, is expected to create employment opportunities for approximately 2,500 youth. It will manufacture advanced telecom products including 5G networks, multi-layer networking solutions, and servers. "The Minister expressed confidence that this investment will further strengthen the bilateral relationship between India and Taiwan. He also thanked SIRA Networks and LCGC Resolute Group for their decision to partner in Telangana's growth story, assuring them full government support throughout the process. "The meeting was attended by TGIC CEO Madhusudan, T-Fiber MD Venu Prasad, SIRA Networks representatives Chuyan, Joy Bhattacharya, Douglas, and LCGC Resolute Group executives Ranvinder Singh and Geetanjali Sabharwal.

## CONGRESS LEADERS ACCUSE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OF UNDERMINING CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

Senior Congress leaders Odnal Srinivas, Pentali Raju, Polu Shiva.



"PS ASHOKAN"INDIAN CHRONICLE"MANTHANI APRIL 4""Congress party leaders have expressed serious concerns over the central government's actions that they claim are undermining the constitutional rights granted to citizens. The criticism was made during a large-scale rally organized in Manthani, led by Manthani Campaign Committee Chairman Odnal Srinivas, Town Congress President Polu Shiva, and Town Youth Congress President Pentali Raju. The rally, which bore the slogans "Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Constitution," aimed to educate the public about the government's alleged infringement on constitutional values. "Addressing the media, the Congress leaders stated

that the "Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Constitution" initiative was part of a broader "Constitution Protection March," which was organized with the support of IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu and youth leader Srinubabu. The leaders highlighted the historical significance of the Congress party's role in India's freedom struggle, as well as its contributions to the nation's development and the welfare schemes it has introduced since independence. "The Congress leaders condemned the BJP-led central government for allegedly disregarding the Constitution, dismantling essential democratic institutions, and pursuing policies they claim are detrimental to the public welfare. They expressed their concern over the government's actions, which they argue weaken the democratic fabric of the nation. "The rally also paid tribute to the legacy of iconic leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, and Savitribai Phule, whose revolutionary ideas, ideals, and achievements have shaped the path to social justice and equality in India. "The event was attended by prominent Congress figures, including Kotha Srinivas, Konda Shankar, Peraleni Lingayya Yadav, Azeem Khan, Ravikanti Satish, Kodukula Venkanna, Odnal Pravalika, Srirambhatla Santoshi, Marupaka Niharika, and other dedicated activists.

## Kolkata Port launches night navigation on River Hooghly, significant increase in trade expected

GNS News Agency, May 3

Kolkata port, night patrolling, The absence of night navigation between Diamond Harbour and Kolkata was a longstanding impediment to optimal maritime operations, port authorities said. The Kolkata Port Saturday successfully commenced night navigation in the upper reaches of the River Hooghly to the Bay of Bengal. This development will reduce turnaround time and pre-berthing detention of vessels.

According to Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata (SMPK), the inaugural run, conducted in the early hours of Saturday, saw the successful transit of container vessel M V SinarPenida carrying a cargo quantity of 8,000 MT from Budge Budge to the sea during complete darkness. Speaking of the achievement, Rathendra Raman, Chairman, SMPK, said, "This is a historic day for SMPK Kolkata. The successful introduction of night navigation in the upper stretches of the River Hooghly is a testament to the scientific and technological approach adopted by the port. It will significantly improve operational efficiency and turnaround time, paving the way for enhanced trade throughput."

Historically, the long and meandering 232-km river channel from the sea to Kolkata Dock System (KDS), marked by restrictions in navigable depth and strong cross-tidal currents, posed a significant challenge for continuous vessel movement. The absence of night navigation between Diamond Harbour and Kolkata was a longstanding impediment to optimal maritime operations, port authorities said. According to SMPK authorities, nighttime vessel transit through the river channel will now be done by using modern electronic aids like electronic charts and navigational simulators, and backed by significant improvements in navigation infrastructure, including track lights, transit lights, and illuminated channel buoys.



The National Technology Centre for Ports, Waterways and Coasts (NTCPWC), IIT Madras, prepared a comprehensive study and roadmap for night navigation in collaboration with the Port of Antwerp. A navigational simulator, jointly installed by IIT Madras and Applied Research International, is now operational to support pilot training and real-time scenario analysis, authorities stated. They also said that with the introduction of night navigation, the port is expected to witness a notable increase in the number of vessels that can be handled daily. "The ability to operate round the clock will decongest the channel, facilitate quicker vessel turnaround, and directly impact critical Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as Pre-Berthing Delay, Berth Occupancy Rate, and Ship-Day Productivity. This strategic enhancement is poised to make SMPK a more attractive and competitive hub for global shipping lines," said Samrat Rahi, Deputy Chairperson, SMPK. Raman also said, "With further acclimatisation of pilots and continuous technological upgradation, we look forward to enabling night navigation for larger vessels with deeper drafts, ultimately transforming SMPK into a more agile and future-ready port."

## Trade disruptions at Attari-Wagah border leave Afghan dry fruit trucks stranded

GNS News Agency, May 3

The suspension of cross-border trade through the Attari-Wagah land route in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack has left over 150 trucks carrying perishable goods from Afghanistan stranded between Lahore and Wagah. The stranded trucks are reported to be mostly carrying dry fruits. The Attari Integrated Check Post (ICP), once a symbol of regional connectivity and economic opportunity, now lies underutilised. Opened in 2012 to facilitate fast and cost-effective trade, it had seen peak trade volumes of over Rs 4,370 crore in 2018-19. However, trade has faced persistent setbacks since the 2019 Pulwama terror attack, when India halted trade with Pakistan. Only trade with Afghanistan, routed through Pakistan, was continued — until now.

Mukesh Sidhwani, a leading dry fruit trader, said, "Our trucks with perishable and semi-perishable commodities have been stranded on the way between Lahore and Wagah. Afghan and Indian traders will have to bear the losses for the perishable items that are in these trucks." Sidhwani emphasised the strategic importance of the Attari route for India-Afghanistan trade, noting that "India's 90 per cent trade

with Afghanistan was via Attari. This was the most viable link." He added that while it took six to seven days for a truck to reach India from Afghanistan, transport from Amritsar to Mumbai took only four days, ensuring efficiency for time-sensitive goods. "Pakistan government has allowed these trucks to enter India. We have also requested the Indian government. Afghan authorities have also been talking to both governments," said Sidhwani, who acknowledged that Indian authorities are being cautious. "We are hopeful that these trucks will be allowed soon. We also understand the national interests," he added. Traders are also concerned about the long-term economic and infrastructural impact. "Thousands of people were employed directly or indirectly through this trade route. There is great infrastructure constructed at ICP. It will deteriorate if not used. It will be a big loss to Punjab, especially Amritsar," Sidhwani remarked. He further cautioned that if the route remains closed, traders may have to explore alternative routes like the Chabahar port in Iran. "But that will not only increase the cost by 15 to 20 per cent but consignments will also take much more time. Time is a crucial element in the trade of perishable and semi-perishable items," Sidhwani added

## Delhi High Court directs CAG to take instructions regarding audit proposals for Ajmer Dargah



GNS News Agency, May 3

The petitioners highlighted before the court that a committee has been formed for the audit, and is making the pending petition infructuous, despite receiving no presidential assent before issuance of notice. The petitioners highlighted before the court that a committee has been formed for the audit, and is making the pending petition infructuous, despite receiving no presidential assent before issuance of notice. The Delhi High Court Monday asked the Comptroller and Auditor General to "take instructions" while orally expressing that the court is "inclined to stay the audit" initiated by CAG of a registered society representative of the khadims or hereditary priests at Ajmer Dargah.

Justice Sachin Datta was dealing with a request for an early hearing of a petition moved by Anjuman Moinia Fakhria Chishtiya Khuddam Khwaja Sahib Syedzadgan and Shakhzadgan, two registered societies and representative bodies of hereditary priests who carry out traditional and religious activities at the Ajmer dargah. The petitioners said they are not the administrators of the properties, assets or funds of the dargah estate. The dargah already has a committee under the Dargah Khwaja Saheb Act, constituted by the Centre, for the management of the estate. The petitioners said they only receive charitable contributions and do not receive any grant or fund from the government, and thus there is no ground for CAG to audit their accounts,

which is otherwise a private registered society.

The petition was moved for an early hearing where the petitioners sought that CAG be restrained from conducting an audit of the society, highlighting that it would be in utter contravention of the provisions of the Comptroller and Auditor General's (Duties, Powers and Conditions of Service) Act, 1971.

As per the petitioners, the mandatory statutory procedure for such audits, as set out in Section 20 of the CAG Act, stipulates that the ministry concerned should send a communication to CAG. The communication should seek to have the petitioner society audited by CAG, the terms and conditions based on which the audit should be conducted, be agreed upon between CAG and the ministry concerned, and subsequently the said terms and conditions be served on the petitioner, following which the petitioner is entitled to make a representation to ministry concerned. It also requires, first, the President's or Governor's assent before the terms of audit are agreed to. While considering the early hearing application, and addressing CAG's counsel, Justice Datta orally remarked, "I'm inclined to stay the audit. You'd better clarify your stand and take instructions on what you're doing. His point is very clear. He has a right to representation. First, you have to agree to the terms otherwise [Section] 20C (of the CAG Act) is very difficult. The occasion has not arisen. He hasn't been served even with the order." The petitioners highlighted before the court that a committee has been formed for the audit, and is making the pending petition infructuous, despite receiving no presidential assent before issuance of notice. A notice was issued on March 15, 2024, by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, upon instructions from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), notifying the khadims of the audit, "to improve the administration and management of Dargah affairs at Ajmer". The notice was challenged before the Delhi High Court, and during its pendency, CAG moved on with the audit, with the Ministry of Finance notifying that it had received presidential assent for the audit, and a committee had been formed for the same.

## Horse trading during Rajya Sabha polls | Himachal HC junks plea: 'collected material show bribe was accepted for voting'

GNS News Agency, May 3

Observing that material collected by the prosecution "show that bribe was accepted for voting in the Rajya Sabha elections", the Himachal Pradesh High Court has dismissed a petition seeking quashing of FIR registered against retired IAS officer Rakesh Sharma, and Independent MLA Ashish Sharma, who are facing allegations of alleged horse-trading during the polls to the lone Upper House seat from state last year. A bench of Justice Rakesh Kainthala observed that the FIR was registered based on the commission of a cognizable offence and could not be quashed at this stage.

Rakesh Sharma, a former chief secretary of Uttarakhand, is also the father of former Gagret MLA Chaitanya Sharma who was disqualified along with five other MLAs by the Congress soon after the Rajya Sabha election for defying a party whip. Rakesh Sharma and Ashish were booked on March 10 last year under the Prevention of Corruption Act with the accusations against the two revolving around alleged horse-trading during the Rajya Sabha elections and a purported conspiracy to destabilise the state government. The FIR, registered on the complaint of Congress MLA Bhuvneshwar Gaur at Boileauganj police station shortly after the polls, alleged that votes were cast not according to conscience but in return for extraneous considerations such as money and other favours. "In the present case, the information disclosed the misuse of money and other resources to purchase the vote under illegal influence and casting of votes in favour of the rival candidates. It was laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Sita Soren v. Union of India, (2024) that taking a bribe for casting a vote in a particular manner is not protected under the privileges of Parliament," the bench said.

"The allegations in the FIR and the material collected by the prosecution show that the bribe was accepted for voting in the Rajya Sabha elections. Therefore, the FIR cannot be quashed," the bench added. Ashish and Chaitanya were among the nine MLAs — six Congress rebels and three independents — who had voted in favour of BJP nominee Harsh Mahajan in the Rajya Sabha election. Congress candidate Abhishek Manu Singhvi lost the election through draw of lots despite the Congress at that time having 40 MLAs in the 68-member House. Chaitanya unsuccessfully contested the bypolls to Gagret Assembly seat in May last year while Ashish won the byelection from Hamirpur seat in July 2024. The high court also dismissed arguments that the FIR's swift registration suggested political vendetta. Citing Supreme Court rulings, the bench held that political motives alone do not warrant quashing criminal proceedings. It also rejected the plea that Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, which requires prior sanction for investigating public servants, was applicable in the present case.

"In the present case, the allegations against the appellant pertain to the abuse of official position and corrupt practices while holding public office. Such allegations fall squarely within the category of cognizable offences, and there exists no legal requirement for a preliminary inquiry before the registration of an FIR in such cases. The appellant's contention that successive FIRs have been registered against him with an ulterior motive is a matter that can be examined during the investigation and trial. The appellant has adequate remedies under the law, including the right to seek quashing of frivolous FIRs under Section 482 CrPC, the right to apply for bail, and the right to challenge any illegal actions of the investigating authorities before the appropriate forum," the bench observed. Rakesh Sharma and Ashish in their plea had also contended that there was no direct evidence of bribery and that the FIR only mentioned rumours. However, the court pointed out that the rest of the FIR contained specific allegations regarding the exchange of money and resources to influence votes. "It is impermissible to quash the FIR on the ground of political vendetta. The FIR was registered for taking bribes under the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act. It was laid down by the supreme court in State of Chhattisgarh v. Aman Kumar Singh, that corruption is eroding public life, and it is the constitutional duty of the Courts to show zero tolerance to corruption," the bench said. The court also observed that the absence of the bribe-giver's name in the FIR did not invalidate it, noting that an FIR can be lodged against unknown persons, and investigations could reveal identities later.

Also dismissing the petitioners argument that the case



lacked evidence, the court held that there was sufficient evidence to support ongoing investigation into a case of possible criminal conspiracy and illegal gratification during the election process. The judgment also relied on the apex court's observation in Kuldeep Nayar v. Union of India, warning that cross-voting under the guise of "conscience voting" undermines party discipline and the parliamentary system. "This would weaken the party discipline over the errant legislators," the bench said quoting from the judgement. Further, the Court emphasized that while enthusiasm in registering FIRs must be curbed, the presence of prima facie material justifying investigation cannot be ignored. The court ruled that since the FIR discloses the commission of a cognizable offence and the investigation is ongoing, the petition seeking to quash the FIR is premature and thus liable to be dismissed. The petition was accordingly dismissed, with the court clarifying that its observations were limited to the disposal of the present petition and would not affect the merits of the case. Senior Advocate Randeep Singh Rai represented the petitioners while Advocate General Anup Rattan represented the State.

## 50 Pakistan nationals with NORI visa allowed to cross over to India

India to Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals who have close relatives holding Indian citizenship. A total of 50 Pakistani nationals, who hold the NORI (No Obligation to Return to India) visa, crossed over to India through the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at the Attari border. Until recently, Pakistani authorities were not permitting NORI visa holders to travel to India, citing their Pakistani passports. However,



following discussions, an exception has been made, officials said. In total, 240 people from Pakistan, including the 50 NORI visa holders, entered India. Meanwhile, 140 others from India returned to Pakistan via Attari. A NORI visa is issued by India to Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals who have close relatives holding Indian citizenship. They include men and women who are married to Indian nationals. While revoking all visas issued to the nationals of the neighbouring country following the Pahalgam terror attack, in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed on April 22, India had made an exemption for NORI visa holders, allowing them to cross over to Pakistan. There, however, was no clarity on the issue from Pakistan side. Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC) president Ramesh Singh Arora, who is also a Member of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab, said he raised the issue with the Pakistan government. Speaking to The Indian Express, Arora said, "I was approached by three Sikh families whose members holding NORI visas wanted to return to India." The recent suspension of normal cross-border movement had caused disruptions for families with members holding different nationalities. Several families, where one spouse holds an Indian passport and the other a Pakistani passport, have suddenly been separated. Officials said the current easing of rules for NORI visa holders is a step toward addressing the hardship faced by such families.

## 4 held with 211 grams of heroin, Rs 8.10 lakh drug money, 2 pistols in Mohali



GNS News Agency, May 3

In a significant success in the ongoing campaign against drug trafficking and organised crime, the Mohali police arrested four individuals and recovered a major cache of narcotics, illegal weapons, and vehicles. Addressing a press conference, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Deepak Pareek said that the police seized 211 grams of heroin, Rs 8.10 lakh in drug money, two illegal .32 bore pistols with 11 cartridges, five cartridges of .30 bore, and two vehicles from the accused.

The SSP said that on April 25, under the supervision of Inspector Harminder Singh, incharge of CIA Staff, a CIA team was conducting surveillance near CP-67 Mall, Mohali, targeting suspicious individuals. Acting on specific intelli-

gence, the team learned that Satnam Singh, alias Nikku, resident of Phase-1 Mohali; Suraj Kumar, alias Pehalwan, resident of Sohana; and Sukhwinder Singh alias Sukh, resident of Gura village, Jalandhar district, were carrying illegal firearms. The information indicated they were moving around in a white Swift car (HR13-L-7069) in the Mauli Baidwan area under Sohana police station, allegedly planning to commit a crime. Based on the tip-off, an FIR (No. 103 dated 25-04-2025) under sections 25-54-59 of the Arms Act was registered at Sohana police station. According to SSP Pareek, the CIA team apprehended the trio near Mauli Baidwan. A search of their vehicle led to the recovery of a .32 bore pistol, an extra magazine, five live cartridges, and 201 grams of heroin. Following this, additional charges under sections 21/29-61-85 of the NDPS Act were invoked, and the accused were taken into custody. During interrogation, Satnam Singh, alias Nikku, confessed that he sourced heroin from Suhail, son of Mohammad Shabbir, resident of Sai Enclave, Jhampur village, Mohali. Acting swiftly, the police arrested Suhail from his residence. A search led to the recovery of another .32 bore pistol with six cartridges, five cartridges of .30 bore, Rs 8.10 lakh drug money, and 10 grams of heroin from his black Thar vehicle (CH01-CQ-3251). According to SSP Pareek, Satnam Singh, alias Nikku, and Suhail were already booked in various police cases. SSP Pareek added that the accused were produced before the court on April 26 and were remanded in four days of police custody.

## Pakistan-backed drug syndicate busted; kingpin among 9 held in Chandigarh

GNS News Agency, May 3

The Chandigarh Police has claimed to have dismantled a Pakistan-backed international drug syndicate, arresting its alleged kingpin Gurmeet Singh along with his eight associates, including a woman. The seizures include 312.71 grams of heroin, Rs 5.12 lakh worth drug money, 2 cars (Ertiga), and one scooter (electric), according to the police. Acting on a tip-off, a team from the Crime Branch Police Station launched a targeted operation on April 14. During the initial raid, two drug peddlers, Balkar Singh and Navneet Kaur, were apprehended with 35.17 grams of heroin, leading to the registration of an FIR under the NDPS Act. Further investigations and disclosures by the arrested individuals led to a series of coordinated raids across Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan. Police said that Gurmeet Singh, who is from Jalalabad, Punjab, was found to be in direct contact with Pakistan-based smugglers Riyaz Sarvar and Aabid Ali from the Kasur area of Pakistan, and was facilitated initially by notorious drug peddler Mahinder Singh. During the probe, the police learnt that over a span of five years, the syndicate is suspected to have smuggled more than 100 kilograms of heroin into India, using sophisticated methods such as 4-inch pipes to push the contraband through the border fencing under the cover of fog and weather disturbances. According to the police, among the arrested accused, Balkar Singh, 42, a resident of Sadar Fazilka, was supplying heroin in the Tricity area along with his associate Navneet Kaur (28).

Balkar, who had previously served jail time in a rape case, used his network of local customers to distribute heroin procured from Navneet's maternal uncle, Satnam Singh. Navneet, a B.Tech graduate from Mohali, was unemployed and involved in procuring heroin through family links and distributing it with Balkar's help, police claimed. Both are currently in judicial custody. The UT police further said that Chamkor Singh, 30, played a key role in aiding cross-border smuggling operations. He, along with Gurmeet, Chotu, and Gurjant, conducted reconnaissance along the Pakistan border and helped smuggle 18 kilograms of heroin, which he also hid at his residence. He provided supplies to



his sister Navneet for distribution within the Tricity, police said. Gurmeet, 33, has been identified by the police as the mastermind of the syndicate. With two prior cases under the NDPS Act registered against him, Gurmeet had been in direct and longstanding contact with Pakistan-based smuggler Riyaz Sarvar, even maintaining connections over Facebook. He orchestrated the cross-border smuggling operations, managed logistics, and distributed large consignments of heroin to peddlers across India, according to the police. At the time of his arrest, police recovered 51.53 grams of heroin, two Ertiga cars, and an electric scooter from his possession. Kuldeep Singh, 30, and Gurmeet's younger brother, supported the syndicate by facilitating the movement of heroin packets to associates of Sarvar, police claimed. He was apprehended with 26.02 grams of heroin and Rs 12,000 in drug money. Notably, Kuldeep was previously arrested in a rape case. The Chandigarh Police also revealed that another arrest was of Satnam Singh, 60, the father of Gurmeet, who has a long history in drug smuggling operations and has been actively involved with Pakistan-based networks for years. He played a crucial role in smuggling a 70-kilogram consignment of heroin in 2019 in partnership with drug peddler Mahinder Singh and continued aiding cross-border operations with his son and other associates. Sona, alias Chotu, a 25-year-old resident of Jalalabad, was another key member of the network. He provided crucial support in smuggling operations across the Pakistan border and Rs 5 lakh in drug proceeds were recovered from him at the time of arrest, police claimed.

## At WAVES 2025, experts call for unified action against piracy, blending technology, law, and awareness



Mumbai, 3 May 2025: At WAVES 2025, a panel discussion on "Piracy: Safeguarding Content through Technology" brought together global leaders in media, law, and cybersecurity to address one of the most pressing challenges facing the digital content economy. Moderated by Neil Gane, Vice President and Head of Asia Pacific at IP House, the conversation reflected the growing consensus that piracy is no longer a fringe concern but a mainstream threat demanding coordinated, multi-dimensional responses. Vivek Couto, Managing & Executive Director of Media Partners Asia, underlined the economic cost of unchecked piracy. "Online piracy is expected to cost the industry over 10% in lost revenue between 2025 and 2029," he said. "But effective anti-piracy enforcement could drive a 25% increase in legal video service users and unlock a US\$ 0.5 billion boost in content investment, raising the total value to US\$ 3.8 billion by 2029." He urged stakeholders to reframe the piracy discussion from protection to potential, especially as India's digital video economy scales. Dr. Shrutu Mantri, Associate Director at ISB Institute of Data Science, highlighted the intersection of digital piracy and cybercrime. "Piracy often involves malicious tools like trojans, ransomware, and spyware. Users between 18-24 years old are particularly vulnerable," she said. She called for comprehensive public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives, noting that prevention must begin with informed consumers. She also announced a Digital Piracy Summit being organized by ISB in collaboration with CBI and Interpol on July 9-10.

Speaking on anti-piracy operations in the sports sector, Anurag Kashyap, Head of Anti-Piracy Operations at DAZN, explained the preventive approach. "Our strategy is built around the three Ds: detection, disruption, and deterrence. We start enforcement even before the event goes live," he said. Invisible watermarking, he added, plays a pivotal role in tracking leaks.

## Harish Rao slams Congress government over delay in Rythu Bima premium payment

Hyderabad: Voicing concern over the failure of the Congress government to pay the insurance premium for Rythu Bima Scheme, BRS senior leader and former Minister T Harish Rao stated that the government should have cleared the Rs 775 crore premium in February. However, three months had already passed without payment.

The Rythu Bima scheme, originally introduced by former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, was designed to provide financial security to families of deceased farmers, ensuring they do not face financial ruin. Concerns were mounting over the delay in payment of premium to continue the programme.

## One-man band lends music to protest against Mula riverfront project



GNS News Agency, May 3

These are the lines of a protest song that a Pune-based musician quietly recited to the Mula river on Sunday. Hundreds had braved the morning heat to participate in a protest march at Pimple Nilakh against the Riverfront Development on the Mula. Many had got creative with posters, costumes and face paint — but one protester stood out. Swapnil Thakur aka Indian One Man Symphony, was a veritable orchestra on the move. He had a drum kit strapped to his back, operated by a pulley with his legs, a mouth organ and a guitar. He walked with measured steps as the instruments played simultaneously and added music to the protesting chants. "As an artist, I feel that the river is very, very close to my heart. The river is my source of inspiration. I am a nature lover," says Thakur, who plays 10-12 instruments including guitar, saxophone and flute. Search the internet and one gets a sense of awe and admiration that one-man bands generate the world over. One-man

bands are musicians who operate different instruments by themselves and can offer a complete bouquet of sounds. In India, one of the most famous is Gladson Peter of Mumbai.

Thakur was inspired by a European musician to create his own one-man band. "I did some trial and error for three to four months and came up with my arrangement," he says. Sometimes the welding was wrong and, at other times, the arrangement of instruments needed tweaking. Finally, Thakur had it all figured out. Soon, he was being invited to open mics and shows. It helped that his early interest in music was nurtured by his family and he can play a range of instruments. He had trained in the tabla but the rest, including the guitar, was picked up from YouTube, among others.

Thakur is an engineer who was born and raised in Madhya Pradesh and first arrived in Pune to join a major company. "In 2019, I met with a horrible accident in which nine bones of my body were broken and I had to get three metal implants, in my humerus from shoulder to elbow and collar bones. It was because I was wearing a helmet that my life was spared," he says. Thakur never returned to work. Instead he set up a business of wood-pressed oil in Wakad and devoted the rest of his time to honing his musical skills. He talks passionately about the pain of watching the river being polluted with sewage. "The river has made its own path over the period of thousands of years. It has raised warriors like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. The authorities are not giving a chance to nature, the natural biodiversity is being threatened and, though it can never be restored to its original form, we can try to halt future damage," he says.

## Massive fire at Cromia showroom in Mumbai's Bandra; NDRF mobilised, nearby building evacuated

GNS News Agency, May 3

Mumbai Bandra Fire News: A major fire was reported at a showroom in Mumbai's Bandra West early Tuesday, prompting the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to mobilise the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to aid the Mumbai Fire Brigade (MFB) in dousing the flames. According to officials, no injuries have been reported so far in the Level IV or serious blaze at the Cromia showroom, which later engulfed the entire commercial building. They said several shops as well as restaurants inside the commercial complex were gutted in the fire, causing significant financial losses. They said the fire was reported at 4.11 am at the Cromia showroom inside the basement of the Link Square building along Linking Road Number 33 in Bandra West.

According to preliminary information, the fire was initially confined to the basement, housing the Cromia showroom, of the basement-plus-three-storey structure, but smoke engulfed the entire building soon. The blaze escalated rapidly with the fire brigade declaring the blaze as Level I at 4.17 am, followed by a Level II upgrade at 4.28 am, Level III at 4.49 am, and then as Level IV at 6.25 am. MFB categorises a small blaze as Level I, medium fire as Level II, major flames at Level III, and a 'serious' fire is declared



Level IV. The Mumbai Fire Brigade evacuated the adjacent building as plumes of smoke spread across the neighbourhood. NDRF teams reached the spot at 7.50 am. MFB also pressed at least 13 jumbo tankers, eight fire engines, and other equipment on the site to put out the fire. The firefighting operations are still underway with the fire personnel using 12 lines of 15 motor pumps, of which nine are small hose lines and two high pressure. While the flames have been controlled, the fire brigade is carrying out cooling operations at the site. According to officials, they are conducting a ventilation process by shattering the glass facade of the structure.

## Severed thumb, smartwatch and a threat letter: 2 arrested, minor held for demanding Rs 5 crore from Delhi businessman

GNS News Agency, May 3

A smartwatch, a severed thumb, and a letter with a threat — a 44-year-old garment merchant living in East Delhi's Shahdara was shocked when he received a package with these items at his home on April 16. The sender had made a demand of Rs 5 crore "to feed starving people of Gaza." "Brother, you don't know us, but we know you very well. You must know that there is a war going on in Gaza... Lakhs of our people are dying of hunger there. We have to send food to those people, for which you have to help us... You just understand that Allah has chosen you... We are giving you 10 days," the letter read. While reporting the matter to police, the man recalled the chilling words of a young girl who delivered the letter to him: "They killed my father too."

Scared for his life, the man filed a complaint, and an FIR was registered under sections of extortion. A police team traced the route undertaken by the girl by analysing footage from over 600 CCTV cameras. On April 18, the police apprehended the minor girl. She told police that her uncle, the key accused in the extortion case, had asked her to deliver the package. He had told the girl to help him out of a tough financial spot he had found himself in. When the police came to arrest the girl's uncle, he allegedly admitted that he and the victim were childhood friends. He had earlier taken a loan of around Rs 15-20 lakh from the victim but failed to return it. He then convinced the victim to invest Rs 1.55 crore in a chain restaurant that he wanted to open, which failed miserably, said police.

Desperate for money, the accused again allegedly hatched a plan to dupe his friend. "He admitted that he had hired a few people and paid them Rs 35,000. He also took help from his niece... and a relative to execute his plan... he then bought a plastic thumb... and a smart watch. He revealed that he picked his niece up from home at about 6.30 am and made her understand the whole plan... Then, the girl visited the house of the complainant and delivered the parcel to... put the fear of death in him," said DCP Shahdara Prashant Gautam. The fake thumb was made to look realistic by allegedly inserting a chicken bone. It was smeared with blood and raw flesh. To make the letter more believable, he had told the victim months back how he'd received a similar threat and negotiated the ransom down to Rs 20 crore to get some "terrorists" off his back. "He hoped that his friend would come to him for help and he'd convince him to pay the money," said DCP Gautam. The key accused told police that the victim owned garment shops and a garment factory, which made him believe that he could easily pay the money. The thumb, the accused told police, was inspired by a Sanjay Dutt film he'd watched. He thought that he'd use the smartwatch to track the victim's movements. "It was a pretty hare-brained plan," admitted a police officer privy to the investigation. The accused and his relative, who helped him, were arrested and sent to judicial



custody after being produced in court, said police. The two have been booked under BNS sections 308(5) (extortion) and 61(2) (criminal conspiracy). The minor girl was sent to an observation home for girls.

## Pahalgam terror attack: NIA officers meet wife of deceased Bengaluru resident, seek details

GNS News Agency, May 3

NIA officers Monday met with the wife of the Bengaluru resident who lost his life in the Pahalgam terror attack. Sources said the officers of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) asked Dr Sujatha, the wife of deceased software engineer Bharath Bhushan, 41, about their travel plans, the sequence of events during the Pahalgam attack, whether the terrorists spoke to her, how she responded, and if she noticed any distinctive features that could help identify the attackers.

Bhushan had travelled to Jammu and Kashmir with his wife and toddler son on April 18, just four days after celebrating his birthday. He was killed during the Pahalgam attack on April 22. Meanwhile, NIA officers are expected to meet the family of Manjunath, the Shivamogga victim of the terror attack, in the next couple of days.

Speaking to reporters, Pallavi Manjunath Rao, the wife of deceased Manjunath, narrated that terrorists did not ask her about their religion. "The terrorists did not ask us anything about our religion. My husband was shot from a short distance. But others shared that the terrorists asked Hindus and Muslims to separate. After confirming that some were Hindus, they shot them dead," Pallavi Manjunath Rao said.

## Gun lover, gang member, and mother of a two-year-old: The making of New Seelampur's 19-year-old 'Lady Don'



GNS News Agency, May 3

Earlier this month, a video of two police personnel escorting a young woman into a police station surfaced on Instagram — she had just been arrested for allegedly brandishing an illegal firearm on social media. Clad in a white salwar-kurta, a white scarf around her neck, she turns around, flashes a gleeful smile and a thumbs up. The video even had a background score, a Haryanvi song "tane reel mein gunde dekhe se, makha real mein gunde hum se..." In February, several photos on the social media platform showed the same young woman striking a pose with a country-made pistol. Her Instagram handle, 'Sher\_ki\_Sherini', has more than 24,000 followers. And her posts and reels sported a common tagline — 'Lady Don'. This young woman is Zikra of Northeast Delhi's New Seelampur. An alleged member of the Mastan gang, she has garnered quite a reputation at the age of 19. Ten days after her arrest and subsequent release on bail in the Arms Act case, Zikra was arrested again on a far more serious charge — allegedly abetting the murder of a 17-year-old boy in the locality where she lives. On April 17, police said the 17-year-old was out buying milk when Zikra's associates — an 18-year-old and two juveniles — cornered him in the market and allegedly stabbed him multiple times. Zikra was there too, watching it unfold, police claimed. 4. Spot where the 17-year-old boy was killed on April 17. Amit Mehra 4. Spot where the 17-year-old boy was killed on April 17. Police have claimed that she was the key conspirator of the crime, which sparked communal tension in the area.

They have since apprehended eight others in the case. DCP (Northeast) Ashish Kumar Mishra had earlier said, "During the probe, evidence was collected against the accused — Zikra, another accused and two juveniles — who conspired to attack the victim. Five suspects aided the main accused in escaping and hiding." Police insisted that the teen was a member of a gang and became a victim of rivalry between two warring groups. His family, however, has flatly denied his gang links.

At the centre of New Seelampur's CPJ Block is a modest square, locally called the chowk or chowki — a busy crossroad where everyday life converges. Vendors line the edges selling groceries. Others serve up samosas and kachoris alongside strong, sweet tea made with buffalo milk sourced fresh from local families, who keep the animals in small sheds behind the temple in the chowk. The Sheelta Mata temple is at one end, its bells occasionally breaking through the chatter. The small, beige two-storeyed house of Zikra's mother, which now sports a lock on its door, sits just beside the temple, while her uncle's home is a few steps away. Her grandmother's house, which has locally earned the moniker "AC wala ghar" — it is the only house in that part of the block that has a split AC — is a 10-minute walk through the winding alleys, where two people can barely pass through without brushing shoulders or bumping into each other. The 17-year-old victim's house is even closer, barely a minute away on foot. Tall trees arch over the narrow streets, offering shade to the busy lanes that thread through J and H Block, all leading inevitably to the chowk. It is here that Zikra and her friends gathered every night before heading out, claimed locals. Zikra is the eldest child of her parents, Heena and Sharvar Khan. Soon after her younger brother, who is now 14, was born, their parents divorced. Heena is now married to Sameer. But how did this young baby-faced woman, with long hair and blonde highlights, gain such notoriety?

Her social media videos provided clues to the tough and cool exterior she attempted to showcase. In one reel, mouthing lyrics and dialogues, she swaggers into the frame, wearing a sweatshirt and joggers, with her hands in her pockets. In another reel, she wears a spotless white kurta and pajama while making finger guns at the camera on cue with gunshot sound effects. Her favourite accessory is always a gun. Posing with one casually placed against her temple, cocking it in a video with a cheeky smile, or even

planting a kiss on the barrel — Zikra adores the guns she handles. "Mohabbat, meri rani (My love, she's my queen)," she wrote in the caption of pictures of her manicured and painted hands splayed and stroking a gun with bullets scattered around it.

When The Indian Express spoke to acquaintances and neighbours of Zikra, they said she has always been headstrong, even in school. A former classmate, Manisha (18), said Zikra was expelled in Class X after she allegedly slapped a teacher who reprimanded her. "She would tell other girls not to mess with her or she'd beat them up. She would often start fights as well," she said. A senior police officer said she got married when she was 17. She lived with her husband, who is in the scrap business, for over a year at his home in Janta Colony in Welcome. They have a two-year-old son. But she soon returned to her family home in Seelampur, along with the child. She moved in with her mother, her stepfather, and her younger brother. Last year, she got divorced. "She was often in contact with people who had criminal backgrounds, so she divorced her husband," the officer said. Mohammad Atiq, a neighbour, said she was always a wilful child. "But around the time she turned 12-13 years old, she became very stubborn. She'd often talk back to her grandmother and mother, never listening to them... she had a gang of 14-15 friends who she was close to."

Bismillah, who runs a tea stall near the family home, said she became more brazen as she increasingly became embroiled with the police. "After her recent arrest, she found greater admiration and respect among her friends... she started going out with her group more often... All night, they would roam around, shooting bullets in the air and mugging people who dared to cross their path," he claimed. Atiq added that frequent complaints from neighbours only elicited helpless responses from her family. "They'd just say, 'What can we do? She doesn't listen'," he said. The area's pradhan, Vinod Pradhan, tried to shed some light on why Zikra and several young people have taken to crime. "These children... don't see a point in studying... There are no jobs... they see people around them engage in crime and earn money. Most of the children come from violent households... or their parents are neglectful... So they mimic what they see around them." It was around the time of her marriage, police said, that Zikra came in contact with Zoya Khan, the wife of jailed gangster Hashim Baba. Zoya — recently arrested in connection with the murders of a businessman and a gym owner — lived near the home of Zikra's husband. During questioning, police said, Zikra admitted that she was inspired by Zoya, who would also make reels on Instagram. Zikra wanted to join Hashim Baba via Zoya but she had to return to Seelampur after the divorce. She then decided to join the Mastan gang, a recent entrant into the crime world, said police. The Mastan gang is allegedly led by Shoab Mastan (21), who lives in the same locality. His criminal records show he's been involved in thefts and snatchings. He has been in and out of jail several times; he was lodged in Tihar Jail in connection with a robbery case till recently, police said. The gang, which has been around for the past three-four years, counts several juveniles among its members, added the police — some of these young men are Zikra's relatives. Their rivals are the group led by Lala. Police records show that Lala alias Prashant (25), a resident of the same area, faces two criminal cases of causing hurt. Like Mastan, his group also comprises youngsters.

According to police, the 17-year-old's murder appears to be a fallout between these two groups. A police officer claimed the teen was with the Lala group, part of the 'Gyara Samaj' — a collective term for 11 different castes living in the area. The members of the two groups often engaged in fights over supremacy in the locality and frequently posted photos with guns on their social media profiles, challenging each other to showcase their power, an officer said. "She (Zikra), too, would post reels of herself posing with pistols on Instagram," the officer added. During Diwali last year, an officer said members of the two groups had fought over an issue of parking a bike in a lane. After this incident, police said, Lala's group attacked an 18-year-old from the Mastan gang — who is now one of the accused in the 17-year-old's murder — in November 2024. Things came to a head on the evening of April 17. In revenge for the November attack, police said, Zikra's associates allegedly knifed the teen. Before the attack, they asked him about Lala's whereabouts, police added. According to the victim's mother, members of the Mastan gang had often come around demanding to know where Lala was. "They asked my son, too, but he refused to tell them... he knew they'd kill Lala. The Mastan gang cornered several people in the locality and asked them to give up Lala. Zikra even threatened people at knife point," claimed the mother.

## Jamia Millia Islamia staffer arrested for stalking, harassing student



GNS News Agency, May 3

a post-graduate student from Jamia Millia Islamia lodged a complaint against a college staff worker for allegedly assaulting her on night. Police said following the complaint, a 22-year-old man working in the university hostel's mess has been arrested. According to police, they received a distress call on Sunday at 9.30 pm that a woman had been harassed and molested near the college's gates. Purported videos in the aftermath of the incident were shared widely on social media. In the clips, the woman can be seen approaching the man asking, "Why did you do that?". She then said, "He punched me on the chest." Another video showed the man surrounded by university students. He then received a slap across his face. Student organisations of the university alleged that the incident took place in front of the college's security guards. "The student was left visibly shaken and distressed," a statement from one of the organisations read. A representative of the organisation also alleged that the man had been stalking the woman for some time before he took this

action. Sources said at first, the woman, who was concerned for her safety, did not wish to register a complaint. Later, she filed one on Monday morning. Police said they have booked the man under BNS sections 74 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 75 (sexual harassment).

## Woman thrashes three-year-old son in Telangana's Jagtial, video goes viral

Jagtial: The video of a woman thrashing her three-year-old son indiscriminately has gone viral and shocked the public in Jagtial town. The woman is said to have been beating the child regularly, but the abuse came to light only on Monday after neighbours recorded a video of her act and lodged a complaint with the police.

A resident of Thulasinagar, Sripelli Rama is seen thrashing her son and even kicking him in the video. As she was thrashing the boy every day, neighbours recorded her act on a mobile phone and approached the police. Reacting to the incident, Sakhi Centre officials visited the spot and shifted the boy to the centre. Rama's husband Anjaneyulu had migrated to Dubai in search of employment.



## Conclave to elect new Pope to start on May 7: Vatican



GNS News Agency, May 3

Catholic cardinals meeting in Rome on Monday (April 28, 2025) have set May 7 as the start date for the Conclave to elect a successor to Pope Francis, the Vatican spokesman said. The date was decided during a closed-door meeting of cardinals at the Vatican, the first since the funeral of Pope Francis.

The cardinals will take part in a solemn mass at St Peter's Basilica, after which those eligible to vote will gather in the Sistine Chapel for the secretive ballot, spokesman Matteo Bruni said. Some 135 cardinals, all under the age of 80 and from across the world, are eligible to take part in the Conclave and decide who should be the next leader of the 1.4-billion-member Church. The previous two Conclaves, held in 2005 and 2013, lasted just two days. The 16th-century Sistine Chapel, where Conclaves are held, was closed to tourists on Monday to allow for preparations for the

vote. The past two Conclaves, in 2005 and 2013, lasted just two days. But Swedish Cardinal Anders Arborelius said on Monday he expects this Conclave may take longer, as many of the cardinals appointed by Pope Francis have never met each other before.

Pope Francis made a priority of appointing cardinals from places that had never had them, such as Myanmar, Haiti, and Rwanda. "We don't know each other," Arborelius, one of about 135 cardinals under the age of 80 who will enter the Conclave, said. The earliest the Conclave could have begun was May 6. Starting it a day later means cardinals will have slightly more time for their general discussions ahead of the momentous ballot. Francis, Pope since 2013, died aged 88 on April 21. His funeral on Saturday and a procession through Rome to his burial place at the Basilica of St. Mary Major attracted crowds estimated at more than 400,000.

German Cardinal Walter Kasper told La Repubblica newspaper that the outpouring of mourners for Francis indicated that Catholics wanted the next pope to continue with his reforming style of papacy. Francis, the first Pope from Latin America, largely tried to open up the often staid Church to new conversations. He allowed debate on issues such as ordaining women as clergy and outreach to LGBTQ Catholics. "The People of God voted with their feet," said Kasper, who is 92 and will not take part in the Conclave. "I am convinced that we must go ahead in the footsteps of Francis." However, a bloc of conservative cardinals are certain to push back against this and seek a pope who reasserts traditions and restricts Francis' vision of a more inclusive Church.

## Pakistan Defence Minister says 'military incursion' by India is imminent



GNS News Agency, May 3

Pakistan Defence Minister said "a military incursion" by India was imminent in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack. The attack killed 26 people and triggered outrage in India, along with calls for action against Pakistan. "We have reinforced our forces because it is something which is imminent now. So in that situation some strategic decisions have to be taken, so those decisions have been taken," Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif told Reuters in an interview at his office in Islamabad. Mr. Asif said that Pakistan's military had briefed the government on

the possibility of an Indian attack. He did not go into further details on his reasons for thinking an incursion was imminent. The External Affairs and Defence Ministries in New Delhi did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Pakistan was on high alert but would only use its nuclear weapons if "there is a direct threat to our existence", said Mr. Asif. "Act of war" The Minister added that Islamabad had approached friendly countries, including Gulf states and China, and also briefed Britain, the United States and others on the situation. "Some of our friends in the Arabian Gulf have talked to both sides," Mr. Asif said, without naming the countries. China said on Monday (April 28, 2025) it hoped for restraint and welcomed all measures to cool down the situation. Mr. Asif said the United States was thus far "staying away" from intervening in the matter. Delhi and Islamabad have taken a raft of measures against each other since the attack. India has suspended the Indus Waters Treaty. Pakistan has closed its airspace to Indian airlines. Mr. Asif said it was an "act of war" to deprive vulnerable areas of water, and that the treaty, which has weathered past conflicts, was backed by international guarantors. "We have already gone to relevant quarters as far this treaty is concerned," he said, calling on the international community and the World Bank to protect the pact.

## Religious hate has no place in France, says Macron after man killed in mosque

GNS News Agency, May 3

There can never be a place for racism and hate in France, President Emmanuel Macron said after the brutal stabbing to death of a man in a mosque in the south of the country. "Racism and hatred based on religion can have no place in France. Freedom of worship cannot be violated," Mr. Macron wrote on X in his first comments on Friday's killing, extending his support to "our fellow Muslim citizens".

The attacker, who is on the run, stabbed Aboubakar Cisse, a young Malian in his early 20s dozens of times and then filmed him with a mobile phone while shouting insults at Islam in Friday's attack in the village of La Grand-Combe in the Gard region. French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou had already denounced what he described as an "Islamophobic atrocity" although the prosecutor in the case has emphasised that Islamophobia is just one of the motives being considered. Around 1,000 people on Sunday marched through La Grand Combe, which has just 5,000 inhabitants, to remember the victim. The alleged perpetrator sent the video he had filmed with his phone — showing the victim writhing in agony — to another person, who then shared it on a social media platform before deleting it. A source close to the case, who asked not to be named, said the suspected perpetrator, while not apprehended, had been identified as a French citizen of Bosnian origin who is not a Muslim. The victim, a young Malian man in his 20s, and the attacker were alone inside the mosque at the time of the incident. After initially praying alongside the man, the attacker then stabbed the victim up to 50 times before fleeing the scene. The body of the victim was only discovered later in the morning when other worshippers arrived at the mosque for Friday prayers. A protest "against Islamophobia" was due to take place Sunday evening in Paris in response to the killing. "Not neglected"



The French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFM) said it was "horrified" by the "anti-Muslim terrorist attack" and urged Muslims in France to be "extremely vigilant". "The murder of a worshipper in a mosque is a despicable crime that must revolt the hearts of all French people," added the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France (CRIF). The attacker has been named only as Olivier A., born in France in 2004 and unemployed without a criminal record. He is "potentially extremely dangerous" and it is "essential" to arrest him before he claims more victims, said regional prosecutor Abdelkrim Grini. But while the motive of Islamophobia is the lead that the 70 investigators are "working on as a priority... it is not the only one", Grini said. There are "certain elements (which) could suggest that this motive was perhaps not the primary motive... or the only motive," he added, without elaborating. Grini was speaking in the regional centre of Ales alongside Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, a hardline right-winger who takes a tough line on immigration and Islamism. Retailleau emphasised that "the possibility of an anti-Muslim act has not been neglected at all, quite the contrary."

## Palestinian envoy tells International Court of Justice Israel using aid blockage as 'weapon of war'

GNS News Agency, May 3

A Palestinian diplomat told the United Nations' top court on Monday (April 28, 2025) that Israel is killing and displacing civilians and targeting aid workers in Gaza, in a case that Israel criticized as part of its "systematic persecution and delegitimization." Israel denies deliberately targeting civilians and aid staff as part of its war with Hamas and did not attend the hearing at the International Court of Justice. In The Hague, Palestinian Ambassador to the Netherlands Ammar Hijazi accused Israel of breaching international law in the occupied territories.

"Israel is starving, killing and displacing Palestinians while also targeting and blocking humanitarian organizations trying to save their lives," he told the court. The hearings are focused on a request last year from the U.N. General Assembly, which asked the court to weigh in on Israel's legal responsibilities after the country blocked the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees from operating on its territory. In a resolution sponsored by Norway, the General Assembly requested an advisory opinion, a non-binding but legally important decision from the court, on Israel's obligations in the occupied territories to "ensure and facilitate the unhindered provision of urgently needed supplies essential to the survival of the Palestinian civilian population?"

Hearings opened as the humanitarian aid system in Gaza is nearing collapse. Israel has blocked the entry of food, fuel, medicine and other humanitarian supplies since March 2. It renewed its bombardment on March 18, breaking a ceasefire, and seized large parts of the territory, saying it aims to push Hamas to release more hostages. Despite the stepped-up Israeli pressure, ceasefire efforts remain deadlocked. The World Food Program said last week its food stocks in the Gaza Strip have run out, ending a main source of sustenance for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians as many families are struggling to feed their children. The United Nations was the first to address the court on Monday, followed by Palestinian representatives. In total, 40 states and four international organizations are scheduled to participate. The United States, which voted against the U.N. resolution, is scheduled to speak on Wednesday. The court will likely take months to rule. But experts say the decision, though not legally binding, could profoundly impact international jurisprudence, international aid to Israel and public opinion.

"Advisory opinions provide clarity," Juliette McIntyre, an expert on international law at the University of South Australia, told The Associated Press. Governments rely on them in international negotiations and the outcome could be used to pressure Israel into easing restrictions on aid. Whether any ruling will have an effect on Israel, however, is unclear. Israel has long accused the United Nations of being unfairly biased against it and has ignored a 2004 advisory ruling by the ICJ that found its West Bank separation barrier illegal. While Israel was not in court, Foreign Minister Gideon Saar hit back at the case.

"I accuse UNRWA, I accuse the U.N., I accuse the secretary-general and I accuse all those that weaponized international law and its institutions in order to deprive the



most attacked country in the world, Israel, of its most basic right to defend itself," he told a news conference in Jerusalem. On Tuesday, South Africa, a staunch critic of Israel, will present its arguments. In hearings last year in a separate case at the court, the country accused Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza — a charge Israel denies. Those proceedings are still underway. Israel's ban on the agency, known as UNRWA, which provides aid to Gaza, came into effect in January. The organization has faced increased criticism from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right allies, who claim the group is deeply infiltrated by Hamas. UNRWA rejects that claim. On Monday, Amir Weissbrod, a Foreign Ministry official, presented Israel's case against UNRWA. He accused it of failing to act before the war against evidence that Hamas had used its facilities, including by digging tunnels underneath them. The official said UNRWA employed 1,400 Palestinians with militant ties. Israel says some of those employees also took part in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attacks and Weissbrod said at least three of those employees still worked for the U.N. The presentation included videos, documents and pictures of the alleged employees. The Oct. 7, 2023, attack in southern Israel killed about 1,200 people and set off the war in Gaza. UNRWA said it fired nine staffers after an internal U.N. investigation concluded that they could have been involved, although the evidence was not authenticated and corroborated. The Israeli ban doesn't apply directly to Gaza. But it controls all entry to the territory, and its ban on UNRWA from operating inside Israel greatly limits the agency's ability to function. Israeli officials say they are looking for alternative ways to deliver aid to Gaza that would cut out the United Nations.

UNRWA was established by the U.N. General Assembly in 1949 to provide relief for Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes in what is now Israel during the war surrounding Israel's creation the previous year until there is a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The agency has been providing aid and services — including health and education — to some 2.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, as well as 3 million more in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Israel's air and ground war has killed over 51,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were civilians or combatants. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

## T.N. government introduces Bill making original documents necessary for immovable property registration

GNS News Agency, May 3

Within a month of the Supreme Court's judgment striking down Rule 55-A of the Tamil Nadu Registration Rules, 1949, the State government tabled a Bill in the Assembly on Monday (April 28, 2025) that seeks to make the registration of immovable properties possible only with the production of original documents, along with the encumbrance certificate, among other requirements. On April 7 this year, the Supreme Court, in its judgment, held that the rule-making power under Section 69 cannot be exercised to make a rule that was inconsistent with the provisions of the Registration Act, 1908. The apex court had also declared Rule 55-A (i) of the Tamil Nadu Registration Rules, 1949, ultra vires.

The Bill, tabled by Tamil Nadu Registration Minister P. Moorthy in the House, said: "In the said circumstances, in order to achieve the object behind the said rule 55-A by giving legal sanctity thereto and thereby to protect the interests of the public, who may be affected by fraud, forgery, and impersonation in the registration of documents, the government has decided to incorporate suitable provisions in the Registration Act, 1908." The Bill seeks to include a fresh section, '34-C - Production of original documents'. This



section states that the registering officer would register immovable properties on production of the "previous original document by which the right over the subject property was acquired by him along with the encumbrance certificate pertaining to the subject property" by the executant. If the previous original document was lost, the registering officer would not register such document "unless non-traceable certificate issued by the police department along with the advertisement published in the local newspaper giving the notice of loss of the previous original document are produced."

## U.S. in touch with India and Pakistan; urges work toward 'responsible solution'

GNS News Agency, May 3

The U.S. State Department said Washington was in touch with both India and Pakistan while urging them to work towards what it called a "responsible solution" as tensions have risen between the two nations following a recent terrorist attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam. In public, the U.S. government has expressed support for India after the attack but has not criticised Pakistan. Follow Pahalgam terror attack updates on April 28" This is an evolving situation and we are monitoring developments closely. We have been in touch with the governments of India and Pakistan at multiple levels," a U.S. State Department spokesperson told Reuters in an emailed statement. "The United States encourages all parties to work together towards a responsible resolution," the spokesperson added. The State Department spokesperson also said Washington "stands with India and strongly condemns the terrorist attack in Pahalgam," reiterating comments similar to recent ones made by President Donald Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance. India is an increasingly important U.S. partner as Washington aims to counter China's rising influence in Asia while Pakistan remains a U.S. ally even as its importance for Washington has diminished after the 2021 U.S. withdrawal from neighbouring Afghanistan. Michael Kugelman, a Washington-based South Asia analyst and writer for the Foreign Policy magazine, said India is now a much closer U.S. partner than Pakistan. "This may worry Islamabad that if India retaliates militarily, the U.S. may sympathise with its counter-terrorism imperatives and not try to stand in the way," Mr. Kugelman told Reuters.

Mr. Kugelman also said that given Washington's involvement and ongoing diplomatic efforts in Russia's war in Ukraine and Israel's war in Gaza, the Trump administration is "dealing with a lot on its global plate" and may leave India and Pakistan on their own, at least in the early days of the tensions. Hussain Haqqani, a former Pakistan ambassador to the U.S. and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute think tank, also said that there seemed to be no U.S. appetite to calm the situation at this moment. "India has a longstanding grievance about terrorism emanating or supported from across border. Pakistan has a longstanding belief that India wants to dismember it. Both work themselves into a frenzy every few years. This time there is no U.S. interest in calming things down," Mr. Haqqani said. Muslim-majority Kashmir is claimed in full by both Hindu-majority India and Islamic Pakistan who each rule over only parts of it and have previously fought wars over the Himalayan region. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed to pursue the attackers to "the ends of the earth" and said that those who planned and carried out the Kashmir attack "will be punished beyond their imagination". Calls have also grown from Indian politicians and others for military action against Pakistan. After the attack, India and Pakistan unleashed a raft of measures against each other, with Pakistan closing its airspace to Indian airlines and India suspending the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty that regulates water-sharing from the Indus River and its tributaries. The two sides have also exchanged fire across the Line of Control (LoC) after four years of relative calm.



A little-known militant group, Kashmir Resistance, claimed responsibility for the attack in a social media message. Indian security agencies say Kashmir Resistance, also known as The Resistance Front, is a front for Pakistan-based militant organisations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen. Ned Price, a former U.S. State Department official under the administration of former President Joe Biden, said that while the Trump administration was giving this issue the sensitivity it deserves, a perception that it would back India at any cost may escalate tensions further. "The Trump Administration has made clear it wishes to deepen the U.S.-India partnership — a laudable goal — but that it is willing to do so at almost any cost. If India feels that the Trump Administration will back it to the hilt no matter what, we could be in store for more escalation and more violence between these nuclear-armed neighbors," Mr. Price said.

## Stress in pregnancy affects baby's brain before birth, discovers Israeli researchers

Jerusalem: Israeli researchers have discovered that stress experienced by mothers during pregnancy affects the foetus's brain. The discovery led by researchers from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HU) could pave the way for new treatments or interventions to support a baby's healthy development after birth. Xinhua news agency reported. Published in the journal Molecular Psychiatry, the study revealed that maternal stress during pregnancy could "reprogramme" key molecular pathways in the foetus, particularly the cholinergic system — a network of nerve cells responsible for regulating stress responses and inflammation. The researchers analysed blood samples from 120 newborns and their mothers collected at birth, focusing on small RNA molecules known as tRNA fragments (tRFs), many of which originate from mitochondrial DNA. These molecules play a critical role in regulating cellular functions and responses to stress. "We found that even before babies take their first breath, the stress their mothers experience can shape how their bodies manage stress themselves," said Prof. Hermona Soreq, from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

## World starts waking up to Indian coffee, exports cross \$1 billion first time



largest coffee producer, contributing about 40 per cent of global production. Meanwhile, Vietnam, the second-largest coffee producer, has also reported lower production forecasts. Although Vietnam's coffee production is expected to recover by 2.6 million bags to 30.1 million, it will still remain below the record crop of 2021/22, according to the USDA. Coffee Board data showed that Chikkamagaluru, Kodagu and Hassan in Karnataka with 2,48,020 MTs during 2022-23 is the largest producer of Arabica and Robusta coffee. Kerala comes a distinct second at 72,425 MTs followed by Tamil Nadu at 18,700 MTs.

"The beginning of the rainy season started dry and was followed by below-average precipitation and temperatures in many major growing areas. While similar conditions reduced yields and output in the past two harvests, growers responded to higher coffee prices this year by picking as much as possible, including smaller, less profitable cherries. Bean exports are forecast to rebound by 1.8 million bags to 24.4 million due to higher available supplies," the USDA report stated. Official data revealed that India's top export destination between April and November this year was the European Union, with Italy, Belgium, and Germany accounting for nearly half of total coffee exports. Other significant destinations included Russia, the UAE and the US, which together accounted for about 20 per cent of total exports. The US, Germany, France, Italy are the largest importers of coffee. The European Union's Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), aimed at preventing products sold in the EU from being sourced from deforested land, was scheduled for implementation in December. However, the European Parliament recently decided to extend the regulation's timeline by another year. Traders said that European buyers have been stockpiling coffee ahead of the regulation, which is expected to disrupt trade with several partners, including India. According to the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), the EUDR is expected to impact India's agricultural exports to the EU, valued at \$1.3 billion, more severely than exports from competing countries due to India's higher deforestation rate. "Key products affected include coffee, leather hides and skins, oilcake, paper, paperboard, and wooden furniture," GTRI said. The think tank said that compliance with the EUDR and the EU's Foreign Subsidies Regulation (FSR) will pose challenges for Indian exporters. Even when exporters are certain their products are not grown on deforested land, they must still meet the elaborate compliance requirements. Unlike quality standards, where only the final product's quality matters, the EU's regulations impose complex compliance mechanisms, seemingly designed to increase the cost of imports and protect local producers, GTRI said.

Traditionally a tea exporter, India is making significant inroads into the global coffee export market with total exports during the current financial year up to November crossing the \$1-billion mark for the first time, according to data from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). The sharp growth is partly attributed to a surge in Robusta coffee prices, which account for over 40 per cent of global production, and partly due to stocking ahead of the European Union's new deforestation regulation that could raise the cost of coffee as well as several other agricultural exports to the EU.

India's coffee exports rose to a record high of \$1,146.9 million between April and November in FY24, compared to \$803.8 million during the same period last year, registering a 29 per cent rise. This figure is nearly double the exports during the same period in FY21, which stood at \$460 million. Global Robusta prices have soared to multi-decade highs due to supply issues in major coffee-producing countries like Vietnam and Brazil. According to news agency Reuters, the price of Robusta beans peaked at \$4,667 per metric ton on the London-based ICE Futures Europe market in June, marking a 63 per cent increase this year alone. Notably, India's exports of tea saw little change despite expectations of gaining new markets following the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, one of the largest tea exporters in the world. A government official said that Indian coffee managed to capture the "premium segment" of the export market unlike in the case of tea. World starts waking up to Indian coffee, exports cross \$1 bn first time

A report by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) earlier this month highlighted that drought and high temperatures in Brazil during the fruit development and filling period caused Arabica and Robusta yields to fall below initial projections. With nearly flat output, Brazil's coffee bean exports are forecast to drop by 2.6 million bags to 40.5 million, primarily due to last year's inventory drawdown, which reduced total supplies. Notably, Brazil is the world's

## Pollution markets can power economic growth and improve environmental quality: Michael Greenstone

As toxic air continues to choke Indian cities year after year, researchers at the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) have found promising evidence that market-based solutions like emissions-trading schemes can help industries slash pollution without hampering economic growth. An emissions-trading scheme works by setting a cap on total emissions and allows companies to buy and sell emission permits. This creates a financial incentive for businesses to cut emissions in cost-effective ways, either by upgrading equipment, switching to cleaner fuels, or investing in innovative low-carbon technologies.

In a conversation with Aggam Walia, Michael Greenstone, the Milton Friedman Distinguished Service Professor in Economics at the University of Chicago and Director of EPIC, discussed the success of pollution markets in Gujarat, the political will needed to combat India's air crisis, key takeaways from COP29 in Azerbaijan, and the clean-tech trade with China. Edited excerpts: EPIC India has played a key role in designing an emissions-trading scheme in Surat and Ahmedabad, enabling industries to cut particulate emissions by 20-30 per cent without any rise in operating costs. What made this work? In most settings, the environment and economic growth are pitted against each other. What we found in Gujarat was that you can have a very rare win-win, where you can power economic growth and improve environmental quality through nimbler regulatory approaches like pollution markets. The fact that it is possible to achieve both at once was very appealing to the regulators in Gujarat. That's why it has expanded — the state of Maharashtra has issued a notification to start a sulfur dioxide market. I do not think it's a successful strategy to ask industry to do something in a nice tone. But I think what the government can do is devise policies that allow businesses to flourish. The kind of market-based approaches that worked in Gujarat can work throughout India. Despite potential solutions and success stories, cities across India suffer from toxic pollution year after year. Is it because multiple stakeholders are involved and concerted action is hard to come by? Same thing was true in the US and in China. The centre wanted to move much more quickly than the local governments did. And now, there is a different system. They were able to introduce incentives for the local political people to act, but it wasn't easy. It came from a real commitment to this being a problem and to finding a solution. The lessons from the experiences of the US, the EU, Japan, and China are that air pollution is not a law of nature. It is an outcome of political will, which is often dependent on people demanding change. So, if it becomes a political priority, the problem can be solved. India is developing a mandatory carbon market for energy-intensive industries by enforcing greenhouse gas (GHG)-emission-intensity targets (i.e. GHG emission per unit of output). What lessons can you share with policymakers drawing from EPIC's experience with pollution markets in Gujarat? I think the clear lesson is that the enemy or the problem is either particulates pollution or sulfur dioxide pollution or CO2. The enemy is not that there's not enough of energy efficiency or not enough of renewables. The policies that work most effectively are the ones that target the problem directly. That is why a pollution market works so well. Energy efficiency might be laudable, but the challenge for people is not that they're not being energy efficient enough. The challenge is there's too much pollution. So my hope is that what emerges from the CO2 market would be directed exactly at CO2, not at CO2 divided by energy consumption or something like that.

Carbon pricing often risks burdening low-income households, especially in countries like India. How can policies be designed to mitigate this impact while still reducing emissions?

A challenge with pricing CO2 is that it can be harmful to the poor who have a higher share of their income that comes from energy or their spending devoted to energy. If devised correctly, CO2 markets can produce lots of revenue for the government and it could rebate a high propor-



tion of that to the less well off. India has a very advanced payment system. It wouldn't be hard to do those distributions. I think that might be a way to find a form of carbon pricing that reduces emissions but protects low-income households.

The financing deal reached at COP29 in Baku was expectedly underwhelming. What do you think can be the way forward?

Look, the negotiating process is a disaster. Trying to get 160 people with different views, which are completely legitimate viewpoints that represent their own interests, to agree is like mission impossible. I think starting a complementary process that has a much smaller number of countries focused on the big emitters offers some promise. But that's an organisational point. The substantive point is, it's time to get rid of the era of good feelings and turn it into a very transactional process where money is exchanged for demonstrable reductions in CO2. There is an opportunity for a deal, which can be payments to developing countries from the rich countries that are very quid pro quo and directly tied to emissions reductions. Not to vague goals about renewable installation but to CO2 reductions. The planet doesn't care about how many gigawatts of solar are installed. The planet cares about how much CO2 is there in the atmosphere.

Countries like India and the US are trying to keep Chinese imports at bay, but at the same time cheaper imports can help drive the energy transition faster. How do you view this debate?

The world owes China a giant thank you for sending them a cheque every time they buy a solar panel. I think the climate costs of keeping inexpensive, clean Chinese tech out are very clear. The economic benefits to the country that's keeping them out in terms of building up supply chains and jobs are much less clear. Are Americans better off for not being able to buy BYD electric cars? I would say the couple tens of thousands who work in US auto plants are definitely better off. But the many hundreds of thousands or millions of people who might buy BYD cars are probably not better off.

## Kia India sales register 6% rise in 2024 at 2,55,038 units

New Delhi: South Korean automaker Kia India on Wednesday reported a 6 per cent rise in total sales at 2,55,038 units in 2024 compared to the previous year, recording its highest-ever annual sales. The company had sold 2,40,919 units in 2023, Kia India said in a statement. Kia India Senior Vice-President and Head of Sales and Marketing Hardeep Singh Brar said, "2024 has been a defining one for Kia India. Our focus on ensuring the timely delivery of our vehicles has not only allowed customers to enjoy their favourite Kia models but also strengthened our foundation for future growth." On the outlook, he said, "As we move into 2025, we are excited about the upcoming launch of the Syros, which promises to redefine the Indian automotive landscape. With this, we will set new industry benchmarks and reinforce our leadership position in the market."

## Tillotama Shome on her style mantra: 'I will not punish my body and squeeze into someone's idea of fashion'



Whether it was Alice in Monsoon Wedding, Ratna in Sir, Ishita Sengupta in Lust Stories 2, Pooja Agarwal in Kota Factory, or the menacing Lata in Delhi Crime Season 2, Tillotama Shome's roles have always left a lasting impression. Ask her what drives her choice of films and series, and she is quick to respond: "The script and the script." It's not just her work; Shome's style is equally admirable. Tell her that, and she states that comfort is key and that she would never "punish her body" to be fashionable. In a candid interaction with indianexpress.com, Shome spoke about fitness, mental health, her "cravings," and the career path she would have taken had she not become an actor. Edited excerpts below:

Q. Contrary to glamorous debuts, you made yours as a household help in Monsoon Wedding. Why?

Tillotama Shome: I would ask, why not? Mira Nair is an extraordinary filmmaker. Getting an opportunity to debut in her film and to be on her set was nothing less than magic. It was the most brilliant introduction to cinema; we shot on film, and then the world went digital. That I played the part of Alice, a luminously drawn character dripping with magic realism, was a gift. I hope art can look beyond narrow-minded divisions and structures that divide and control. My beginnings taught me the importance of story over "optics."

Q. Did that decision ever backfire, putting you at risk of being pigeonholed?

Tillotama Shome: First impressions tend to stick. It was only after some 20 years, during the shoot of Goutam Ghosh's Raahgir, where I play a migrant worker, that I began to feel uncomfortable being cast as heart-breakingly poor characters. I welled up and decided to push for diverse roles and break the class-based stereotypes. Thank god for directors like Konkona Sensharma, Puneet Mishra, and Sudip Sharma that I got to transgress and break the curse of playing it "safe." I am an actor, and the best part of this job is to find nuance and not fall into the trap that people think I am best suited to.

Q. What drives your decision to accept or reject projects?

## How to prepare for your bilingual baby

Expecting a baby, especially a first baby, is a lot for any new parent. There are so many unknowns and so much to plan for: where your baby will sleep, how you will organise feeding, changing and bathing arrangements and how you will arrange your work life so you or another caregiver are with the child. If you have the privilege of using more than one language, you may well want your child to know these languages. In the English-speaking world, many people have limited knowledge of any other language, but that is certainly not the case everywhere. Almost 60% of people aged 25-64 in the EU know at least one language other than their first language at a "good" or "proficient" level. Many children are born into families where several languages are used daily and can expect to have more than one first language. You may have grown up with more than one first language, or your parents may have different first languages. The majority language outside the home may not be either parent's first language. Before your baby is born, there is a lot you can do to prepare the ground for them to acquire the languages you want them to know.

Parents can discuss what their linguistic aspirations are for their child. Which language(s) or language varieties should your child develop right from the start as their first? Typically, the first language or languages are developed to a higher level than other languages that are learned later. Due to practical limitations, you may need to prioritise if there are more than three or four languages involved. The key is to ensure that the child has enough regular input and interaction in each language they are developing. Often, parents want to be able to interact with their baby in the language(s) they were raised in. There may be other language(s) used outside your home, and these can wait until your child's world expands to early childhood education or daycare, or sandpit interaction with other children.

Expectant parents can work out the family language policy. Who will speak which language with your child? Will this vary according to time and place? How will your baby get enough input and interaction in each of the languages? Here, my own experience is with the one-person-one-language approach. Right from the beginning, I spoke my first language (English) with my children, and their father spoke his first language (Swedish) with them. The children spoke to us in the languages we used with them. No explicit teaching is needed. In other families, the parents might share a first language or both be proficient speakers of a minority language and mostly use that with the child. Other languages, particularly the majority language spoken in the country the family is living in, may also be used around the child. Expanding your child's world

Get friends and family on board as early as possible. Grandparents and other extended family back in the old country may be concerned about not being able to speak to your child. Once they know that you want your child to know their language, family can be a valuable source of input and interaction. Relatives may have encountered myths about early childhood bilingualism being damaging, and early conversations can allay their fears and show the advantages of bilingualism to your child and your family. There is no evidence that children growing up with more than one language experience delayed language development. It is very difficult to predict what languages your child will need in their future. They may want to migrate to a place you were glad to leave in the past.

The children of migrants are often curious about a side of their ethnicity that will only be open to them if they have the necessary language skills to spend time as an insider. Adult children who grew up without learning a parent's first language report regretting that their parent did not pass on their language to them. Finally, remember you are not alone in planning to raise your child to speak more than one language. There are a lot of resources and advice available. Read about what other families have done. Recruit support

Tillotama Shome: The script and the script. As I grow older, the people helming the project have become important. It's a long engagement. Besides the craft, I want to grow with people who are good human beings.

Q. Tell us about your session at the Spoken Fest.

Tillotama Shome: I've attended the Spoken Fest as an audience many times and have loved every edition. It's a unique audience, open, non-judgemental. They are not glossy and welcome all kinds of families. I love the spirit of this fest and the heart of its founders. In my session with Patralekhaa, we discussed how our upbringing informed our choices as actors.

Q. We love your style. What does fashion mean to you?

Tillotama Shome: Being comfortable. I will not punish my body and squeeze into someone's idea of "fashion".

Q. Fitness, too, is key to feeling good. What does your fitness routine entail?

Tillotama Shome: Daily exercise, eating a fibre and protein-rich diet, taking care of my plants, long walks, and spending time with the people who keep me mentally fit.

Q. Being an actor puts you in constant spotlight. Does it ever affect your mental health?

Tillotama Shome: I am in and out of the spotlight, so that keeps my arrogance in check. The dip in mental health became a thick reality with my perimenopause. Suddenly, strength training daily was no longer optional. I needed my body to show up for me when my mind was lost in some fog. And it works.

Q. Your Instagram bio reveals that you read and cook your way through trouble. Tell us about the bibliophile and home cook in you.

Tillotama Shome: I am full of cravings. As I get older, I am so much better at satisfying those cravings — be it knowing exactly what I want to eat or choosing a world I want to get lost in. Books and food nourish in ways that are inexplicable but certain.

Q. If not an actor, you would have been...

Tillotama Shome: A drama therapist perhaps, a wanderer, a gardener...

Q. The fest gave you an audience with which to interact. As a public personality, how important are such platforms for you?

Tillotama Shome: It was a privilege to meet the people, the poets, and the voices of Shillong. I don't know what they got from me, but I have come back electrified and rejuvenated. In a world where only certain voices get heard and amplified, the Spoken Fest makes space for different voices to tell their stories, and that is a space I would love to protect and grow with.



in your extended family and community. For the first year or two, a child only needs a small number of people around. But for an older child, more adults and children who speak the minority language(s) are valuable. A child also needs to hear parents speaking the languages with other people, as this gives more complex input. Growing up with more than one language has obvious advantages in that a child can communicate with more people who may be important in their life. There may also be cognitive and social advantages. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." While it may seem intimidating, don't shy away from giving your baby the gift of access to all your languages.

## Duchess of Sussex returns to Insta, posts video



New York: Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, is starting the new year with her first Instagram account since 2020. The Associated Press confirmed Wednesday that @meghan belongs to the Duchess of Sussex. Her first post is a black and white video of herself at the beach, wearing white and drawing 2025 in the sand on an overcast day. The account already has more than 200,000 followers. Meghan and Prince Harry, the Duke of Sussex, were married in 2018, and were initially part of @KensingtonRoyal, which also included Harry's brother, Prince William, and his wife, Kate, the Princess of Wales. But a year later, Meghan and Harry launched their account, @SussexRoyal, a sign of their growing distance from the royal family. @SussexRoyal was discontinued in 2020, around the time that Meghan and Harry announced they were stepping back from their official roles.

Meghan, who had a popular Instagram account when she was best known for her role in "Suits", had indicated she would return. In a 2022 interview with New York Magazine's The Cut, she confided: "Do you want to know a secret? I'm getting back... on Instagram." At other times, she sounded reluctant to return to Instagram, citing concerns about harassment. In 2023, Meghan and Harry urged social media platforms to strengthen content-moderation policies, saying that some apps could damage the mental health of young people.

## Memories of the tsunami



It was a close shave with death for Gagandeep Singh Bedi on December 26, 2004, when the Indian Ocean tsunami struck Tamil Nadu. The Cuddalore District Collector was at Hotel Tamil Nadu on the sea front of Mamallapuram to attend an AIDS workshop when he got a call at around 9 a.m. A fisherman told him that the sea had "flooded" and destroyed his village. When Mr. Bedi was about to end the call, he saw a huge wave in front of his hotel and ran out of the room. It was only then that he realised the magnitude of the disaster.

Mr. Bedi rushed to Cuddalore. He travelled through Tindivanam, as it was not safe to travel on Chennai's East Coast Road. "I first visited the government hospital, where I saw a large number of bodies," recalls Mr. Bedi, who is now Additional Chief Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj. Thanks to his team of officers in the district which included Rajendra Ratnoo, who is now Executive Director of the National Institute of Disaster Management, D. Jagannathan, who is Commissioner of Commercial Taxes in the Tamil Nadu government, and Anu George, who is one of the Secretaries to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, he initiated the process of emergency relief. "Within [a] few hours after the tsunami, the district administration had swung into action to rescue the affected people and taken up rehabilitation measures to bring [back] the normalcy of life," states the Cuddalore District Disaster Management Plan, 2024. One of the key decisions Mr. Bedi had to take pertained to the disposal of bodies. Considering the gravity of the situation, the State government acceded to the proposal of the Cuddalore administration for relaxing the stipulation of post mortem before disposing the bodies.

"The then Commissioner of Revenue Administration and State Relief Commissioner, R. Santhanam, got the clearance for my request in no time," recalls Mr. Bedi. After discussions with senior members of the fishing community, mass burials were arranged on the evening of December 26.

The scale of destruction was unprecedented. Mr. Bedi says the loss of lives and cattle was "quite significant": 610 people died in Cuddalore and 38 people went missing. Public infrastructure was affected. Thirty-one coastal villages were affected and some 5,000 fishing vessels were damaged. Cuddalore got a lot of attention nationally and internationally. Film actors such as Vivek Oberoi, Smriti Irani, and Poonam Dhillon, Swiss tennis player Roger Federer, and former U.S. President Bill Clinton either came down to Tamil Nadu or were involved in relief work. Mr. Oberoi was criticised though — the then Chief Minister, Jayalalitha, later blamed him for doing nothing and trying to get publicity. "But celebrities have the potential of generating goodwill. We, the authorities, sought to tap that and succeeded to a large extent. At the same time, we maintained a respectable distance from them," Mr. Bedi says.

The southernmost district of Kanniyakumari suffered the largest death toll (799) after Nagapattinam (6,065). "There were 72 people who could never be traced. As many as 44,000 families in 33 coastal villages were affected," says Sunil Paliwal, who is Chairman of the Chennai Port Trust. He was transferred from Theni to Kanniyakumari as Collector nearly two weeks after the tsunami. Given its location, the district was not in the limelight the way Nagapattinam and Cuddalore were. However, that was not a problem for Mr. Paliwal and his team. "The district administration took up several measures on its own. Mr. Santhanam was extremely responsive and supported us." What he remembers the most is that the delicately balanced religious mix of people in the district (Hindus constitute around 48%, Christians 46% and Muslims 4%, as per the 2011 Census) was no barrier to the district administration for undertaking relief and rehabilitation measures. "I would call Kanniyakumari a place of perfect communal harmony," Mr. Paliwal says, adding that he could see a sense of unity among the people in times of adversity. Both Mr. Bedi and Mr. Paliwal continue to be in touch with the people of the two districts. In their assessment, the people have left behind the trauma of the tsunami.

## What is South Africa cancel coal case explained

Civil society organisations claimed a landmark victory against fossil fuel power in South Africa on December 4 when the High Court in Pretoria turned down the national government's plan to add more coal-fired power stations to the country's power grid. According to the court, the government's plan was "inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa" and thus unlawful. The 'Cancel Coal' case in its Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), the government of South Africa announced in October 2019 that it plans to add 1,500 MW of coal power to the country's national grid — 750 MW by 2023 and another 750 MW by 2027. The Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and the National Energy Regulator of South Africa in 2020 backed the announcement.

In 2021, youth-led civil organisations including the African Climate Alliance, the Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action, and the Groundwork Trust, represented by the Centre for Environmental Rights, brought the case against the government's plan. The group alleged that the plan would harm the environment and cause health issues, especially among children. The case soon acquired the popular monicker "Cancel Coal". South Africa's energy mix

Like most economically developing nations, South Africa is heavily dependent on coal for its energy needs. According to estimates by the International Energy Agency, almost 71% of the country's total energy supply came from coal power in 2022. According to an analysis of global emissions through history by Climate Watch, South Africa is the world's 16th largest emitter of greenhouse gases. South Africa has ratified the Paris Agreement, which means it is legally bound to cut its greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to mitigating global warming. According to the Nationally Determined Contributions South Africa submitted in 2021, the country plans to cut 350-420 million tonnes of carbon-dioxide-equivalent (MtCO<sub>2</sub>e) of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. It has also committed to reaching net-zero by 2050. In July 2024, the country's President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the Climate Change Act into law, which includes a clause to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Details of the judgement

Civil society organisations contended that the government's plan to add more coal power didn't consider the rights of children as granted by the Constitution of South Africa. According to the Constitution, South African citizens have the right "to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations". This is to be ensured through measures that "prevent pollution and ecological degradation, promote conservation, secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development."

The court ruled that the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and the National Energy Regulator couldn't provide enough evidence to show that the ill effects of the coal power on the environment and the health of the people, especially children, had been considered, suggesting they didn't "comply with their constitutional obligations". Speaking to The Hindu, Ritwick Dutta, environmental justice lawyer and associate of Doughty Street Chambers U.K., said the order is a significant development in the field of climate litigation. "Although, at the core, the judgment still follows the basic principles of administrative law — duty to give reasons and non-application of mind to relevant consideration — what is however significant is the fact that the court held that the minister, while according approval, did not take into account the interest of the future generations or the unborn generations."

He also highlighted the fact that "since the Court relied on Section 28 of the South African Constitution, which requires the state to protect the child against 'neglect and degradation' to hold that the governments/ministers decision was not in the 'best interest of the child'. The implication of this judgment as I see it is the requirement that a minister/government decision must not be based on the immediate short-term need but must consider a long-term holistic view," Mr. Dutta said. A 2019 study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health reviewed epidemiological literature to understand the impact of coal-fired power plant emissions on children's health. It concluded that they affect children negatively due to their "developing physiology, anatomy, metabolism, and health behaviours". The review also observed that children who lived near a coal-fired plant exhibited more asthma and respiratory-related conditions. Environmental justice The case



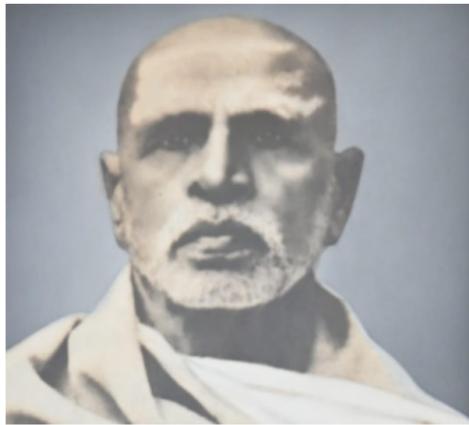
is also an example of environmental justice in the context of transitioning away from coal worldwide. "Even in India, for the first time three ministries — Ministry of Power, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy — jointly filed an affidavit before the Supreme Court in the case of M.K. Ranjitsingh versus Union of India that India will have to move from polluting coal to wind and solar not only to ensure cleaner air but also to meet its commitment under the Paris Agreement," Mr. Dutta said. "Coal will continue to meet the energy requirement in the short run, but it is now accepted that transition is a must if the world has to slow down climate change. The fact that courts globally are recognising this reality is ... only natural." The lawyer also said that even though this case is limited to coal power, combating climate crisis goes beyond it. "Judicial decisions on climate change are a recognition of both the urgency to deal with climate crisis and the fact that civil society groups and citizens have an important role to play in tackling the crisis. It should not be forgotten that the South African judgement is an outcome of litigation undertaken by three civil society groups. It is therefore crucial that the state and the judiciary are more open and receptive towards divergent views on dealing with the crisis of an unparalleled nature," he added.

## Antarctic ice meltdown sparks stormy future for Southern Ocean



Hyderabad: The dramatic decline of Antarctic sea ice in 2023 has left scientists grappling with its cascading effects on the Southern Ocean and global climate systems. New research reveals that reduced ice coverage allowed unprecedented heat to escape from the ocean into the atmosphere, disrupting ocean circulation and fuelling more frequent storms. Key areas like the Bellingshausen and Weddell Seas saw ice levels drop by up to 80 per cent, while the Ross Sea and Enderby Land experienced declines of nearly 50 per cent. This loss has led to denser surface waters, which sink rapidly, potentially destabilising deep ocean currents that regulate global heat and nutrient flow. The findings, published in 'Nature,' highlight an alarming uptick in storm activity, with regions like the northern Weddell Sea witnessing seven additional stormy days per month compared to historical averages. These extreme conditions, once rare, are becoming increasingly common, raising concerns about long-term impacts on the Earth's climate. While 2024 seems to be continuing this troubling trend, scientists stress the importance of advancing climate models to better understand and predict these changes. The Southern Ocean, crucial for carbon storage and global weather regulation, faces unprecedented challenges that could ripple far beyond Antarctica.

## A Sangita Kalanidhi who inspired Ranganna, the music teacher in the novel Mohamul



Among the galaxy of Sangita Kalanidhis adorning the wall of the Music Academy is Umayalpuram Swaminatha Iyer, who won the award in 1936. A disciple of Umayalpuram Krishna Bhagavata and Sundara Bhagavata, who were direct disciples of Saint Tyagaraja, Swaminatha Iyer continues to live on the pages of Mohamul, a novel by T. Janakiraman. According to Janakiraman, Ranganna, the teacher of Babu, the hero of the novel, is a fictional version of Swaminatha Iyer. Janakiraman also learnt music from him. "He was a student of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer. He viewed life as music. I noticed the same in my father. He would not like talking loudly or even listening to anything loud," writes Janakiraman in his essay, Novel Pirantha Kathai (The story of the birth of the novel). "He does not want to show that he knows anything other than music. He does not feel that it was a flaw. He is firm in his conviction that if we do it [music] perfectly, nothing else matters. The way he is sitting lonely on the veranda of the house, in the purple darkness of the bedroom light, expecting nothing. His self-confidence reinforced his conviction. Maybe he is also like my father," Janakiraman narrates the personality of Ranganna in the words of Babu.

The generation that listened to and learnt from Swaminatha Iyer is no more. Janakiraman would be 103 if he was alive and Semmangudi R. Srinivasa Iyer, who learnt from Swaminatha Iyer, who died in 2003, would be 118. Even Srinivasa Iyer's teacher Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer

was a student of Swaminatha Iyer. "The perfect way to learn the basic lessons of music is to be taught by him. Only after ensuring that swara shtanas are perfectly captured as suttha swaras in the throat, will he teach further. He has a soft voice. Oh. What a swarm? He will sing without any unnecessary sangathis. If we sing swaras in a threatening manner and with mathematical calculations, he will say that it was not music, but only noise. He would say, do not spoil your voice by singing in this manner," recalls Srinivasa Iyer in his memoirs Semmangudiyn Kural. The simplicity that was the hallmark of Ranganna could be seen manifested in the photograph of Swaminatha Iyer taken probably in the backyard of his house on the banks of the Cauvery. He remained a repository of knowledge of Saint Thyagaraja and his krithis.

Swaminatha Athreya, the author of Thyagaraja Anubavangal, a collection of stories that trace the incidents that gave birth to various keerthanas, says they were narrated to him by Swaminatha Bhagavata during his student days in Kumbakonam. "I used to wash his clothes out of respect. I also got to listen to many stories while I heard some conversations Swaminatha Iyer had with Yagnaswami Shastri, and from Embar Vijayaraghavachariar," Athreya says in an interview to The Hindu. Janakiraman says it would take Swaminatha Iyer an hour to align in the sruti. "It does not mean that he does not know how to align with the sruti. He delves deep into the sruti. He will continue to adjust the tambura till he is hundred per cent satisfied with the sruti. He has a fantastic ear. When he talks, he would ask us to listen to other sounds. The sounds of birds, the sound of the oil mill, and the crying of a child. The world is full of sound. Even when someone talks, he would tell us about the scale of the sruti. He would ask us how those sounds were away from our basic notes," writes Janakiraman about the sensitive ears of Swaminatha Iyer. In his presidential address to the annual music conference of the Music Academy, Swaminatha Iyer had recalled the time he had spent with Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan at the court of Pudukkottai ruled by Ramachandra Tondaman. "When Veena Subbarayan presented a manuscript to Sivan, he received it with affection. Based on the manuscript, Sivan and his brother Ramasamy Sivan published 73 melaragamaliga, Arupathumooar Charithira Keerthanangal and many other Tamil kritis," says Swaminatha Iyer. Pointing out that Telugu and Sanskrit keerthanas became popular because of special thrust on them, he reiterates the need to know the meaning of the keerthanas. "Otherwise, they will become nonsense when Tamils sing them.

## The lapses in the disaster management Bill



The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, raises serious concerns. Instead of filling in the gaps in the Disaster Management Act (DMA), 2005, the Bill has removed scope for participatory governance, accountability, and efficiency from the Act. The lapses First, the semantics. The Bill uses top-down guarded terminology such as 'monitor' and 'guidelines'. Instead, terms such as 'supervision' and 'direction' could have established greater trust and bonding with communities and local governments. On the other hand, in global legal research documents, such as the Yokohama Strategy, the Hyogo Framework for Action, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, local communities are known as the "first responders" to disasters. It is imperative to build on the capacities and wisdom of local communities. Second, even though the Bill defines a "hazard", "resilience", and "vulnerability", these definitions are mere mechanical words or inconsequential without acknowledging the substantive roles of local communities, panchayats, wards and NGOs in disaster management. Whether during Cyclone Aila in 2009 in the Sundarbans, the Kedarnath glacial lake outburst flood of 2013, or the floods in Kerala in 2018, villagers and fisherfolk began rescuing people before the National Disaster Response Force or Coast Guards could reach the victims.

The Bill is silent on intersectional discrimination. Whenever authorities are open to a just approach to discrimination and vulnerability, the datasets change phenomenally. Ignoring intersectional vulnerability even after 20 years of the Act weakens the Bill's claim to be holistic and inclusive. Women, the disabled, "lower" castes, and LGBTQIA communities may not show the several layers of discrimination they suffer. There is also nothing in the Bill on the performance evaluation of district authorities. If the authorities had failed to be prepared for a disaster and then a disaster strikes, sometimes they try to take attention away from their dereliction of duty and bring focus to individual philanthropy efforts. This makes the ground fertile for political poaching of the electorate. The Bill excludes "law and order" from the Act. It clarifies that, "the expression 'man made causes'

does not include any law and order related matter'. Why then does it bring the State Director Generals of Police into the State Executive Committees (SECs)? Accountability is the next casualty. Sections 12 and 13 of the DMA, which covered the minimum standards of relief for disaster victims and the possibility of loan repayment relief, have been omitted. Similarly, Section 19, which demanded that State governments follow guidelines on minimum standards of relief, has also been dropped. These Sections also carried special provisions for widows, orphans, the homeless, and provided ex gratia assistance on account of loss of life as also assistance on account of damage to houses and for restoration of means of livelihood. There is no replacement for this in the Bill. The DMA had made some mandatory requirements for better enforcement of disaster management provisions by various departments and ministries under the Government of India. Section 35(2b) and Section 35(2d) that ensured integration and preparedness in the plans have been dropped in the Bill. At another place, the SEC no longer has to do basic homework for preparedness; sub clauses (2a) and (2b) of Section 22 are deleted in the Bill. There is little in terms of good governance in the Bill as most of its measurable indices for performance assessment of officials in the field are fuzzy or inaccurately mentioned. The Bill also suffers from speciesism. The thousands of animals which die after every disaster are not even mentioned. The District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMA) seem to have little responsibility in implementing the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023, brought out by the same government. This gap fails the Rules as well as the preparedness for a disaster. The Bill suggests an Urban Disaster Management Authority (UDMA) under Section of 41A. What brought the need for this additional authority? It is unclear.

The Municipal Corporation is the highest revenue generator for any city as it controls land, buildings, builders, and property taxation. But in what way can a Municipal Corporation improve disaster management if it encourages urban flooding by allowing encroachments over aquifers, water bodies, city forests, river beds and markets? Regional collaboration Finally, the world is grappling with zoonotic and epizootic diseases. Given this scenario, a regional plan of action through increased trust, collaboration, and emergency strategies was awaited. The Bill could have mentioned regional groupings such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and BRICS, to be approached in the event of a disaster. The Bill was expected to encourage international collaboration, democratisation, and decentralisation of the role and responsibilities of the National Disaster Management Authority. It could have at least referred to the 2011 SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters. Given the porous boundaries of South Asian countries, to ignore regional collaboration is a serious lapse.

## Brain chemicals work together in controlling eating, says study

New Delhi: A study has found that brain chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin work together in controlling hunger and food intake, a finding which can possibly help in developing improved anti-obesity drugs. Working with animal models, researchers, including those at the Baylor College of Medicine, US, found that two brain chemicals — the excitement-causing dopamine and calm-inducing GABA, or gamma-aminobutyric acid — arrest the production of serotonin when one initiates a meal. Serotonin, known to act as a 'mood stabiliser' and produce calming effects, is created mainly in the dorsal Raphe nucleus, located in the midbrain — the topmost part of the brain stem that connects the brain to the spinal cord. "Working with animal models, we found that when animals are hungry, serotonin-producing neurons in the (dorsal Raphe nucleus) are inhibited by GABA and dopamine. This reduces the levels of seroto-

nin in the brain, which allows the initiation of a meal," Yong Xu, a professor of pediatrics-nutrition and corresponding author of the study published in the journal Metabolism, said. As the animals feed and reach satiety, more serotonin is produced, which then travels to the 'arcuate of the hypothalamus', or ARH, thereby conveying a message to 'slow down on eating', Xu explained. The ARH region monitors energy in the body and regulates metabolic responses. "What's unique about this is that GABA and dopamine act synergistically (together) — when both are present, serotonin neurons appear to be more inhibited than when only one of the neurotransmitters is present," the author said. The work helps improve our understanding of how the brain manages body weight and feeding, specifically the roles of brain chemicals while feeding, the researchers said. This knowledge can inform the development of improved obesity drugs, they added.

## ChatGPT gets a shopping update: Why it's a major challenge to Google



ChatGPT creator OpenAI has launched a new shopping option on its popular artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot, in what could be a major challenge to Google, which also enables a similar function. However, there is a key difference, at least for the time being: OpenAI has said that the products which will be shown following a user's query are selected by ChatGPT independently and are not advertisements.

"Users come to ChatGPT with all kinds of questions, and one common topic is researching and buying products. Now, when a user query suggests shopping intent (e.g., 'I'm looking to buy costumes for my two dogs'), ChatGPT can display relevant product options in visually rich carousels, provide additional product details, and link users to websites where they can learn more or make a purchase — available in GPT-4o and 4o-mini," OpenAI said in a blog. This feature is starting to roll out to Plus, Pro, Free, and logged-out users everywhere ChatGPT is available. While right now the system works on information ChatGPT receives from third-party providers, it is exploring ways for merchants to provide their product feeds directly to the company.

There are some questions this launch raises: Could it become a potential source of revenue for the company going forward? If that is the case, how will affiliate revenue sharing, a concept well understood in the Google-led web, work? For now, the company has said that the products it showcases are not ads. But will that be the case forever? Could it lead to a world where AI chatbots become market-

ing platforms? And what would that do to the whole "productivity" narrative these companies have tried creating, if they become yet another online classifieds platform? How ChatGPT will select shopping options

A product appears in the visual carousel when ChatGPT perceives it's relevant to the user's intent. "ChatGPT assesses intent based on the user's query and other available context, such as memories or custom instructions," OpenAI said in its blog. For example, if a user asks ChatGPT for help finding goofy costumes for their two large dogs, ChatGPT will consider general factors, such as price, customer ratings, and ease of use, as well as specific criteria provided by the user, like sizing and the desired costume vibe. If the user had previously indicated a dislike for clowns, the model might also consider that and leave out clown costumes, the company explained. When determining which products to surface, ChatGPT considers: Model responses generated by ChatGPT before it considers any new search results. The company, however, cautioned that there could be mistakes. "Since the model interprets user intent, it can occasionally make mistakes—for example, maybe the user would have been open to clown costumes after all. Users can clarify their preferences and ask ChatGPT to adjust its response." Product listings shown by ChatGPT may include prices, which it receives from third-party providers. After clicking on that price, users may see additional pricing options from other merchants who also offer that product. Google has also started using AI to show users products it thinks might be relevant to them. ChatGPT's feature bears many similarities to how Google now shows product listings in Search. However, there is one major difference between shopping through ChatGPT versus Google, for now: The results ChatGPT searches are not paid placements, but organic results. Some product recommendations in Google Shopping could appear because a retailer paid for an ad spot to the company. But there are other mechanisms that Google relies on as well, as it also relies on websites which thoroughly test products and their reviews and accordingly ranks products. It also shares a portion of the sale with the publishers as affiliate revenue, an option which currently does not exist on ChatGPT.

## Likely 'interconnector failure': Spain, Portugal struggle to restore power as grid managers try to pin down reasons for outage

Spain and Portugal Power Outage Update: An unprecedented power outage left millions of people in Spain, Portugal and parts of France without electricity since mid-afternoon. The outage plunged homes and shops into darkness, leaving people stuck inside lifts for hours and forcing chaos on the roads after traffic lights stopped working and commuters piled up at railway stations and airports. What could be likely causes? The exact cause of the incident is unclear and still a subject of investigations. Early reports suggest a problem with the electricity connection between France and Spain could be one of the contributing factors to the outage, a representative of an industry body that represents Europe's power sector said. The interconnector incident, which likely left the Spanish grid disconnected from the European grid is unlikely to have been the sole trigger, and there is a high possibility of other supplementary triggers as well. Electricity interconnectors are essentially high-voltage land or subsea cables that connect two or more electricity systems. Portugal's grid operator, meanwhile, blamed a "rare atmospheric phenomenon" that caused "anomalous oscillations" in high voltage power lines in Spain, which led to the outage. A "specific incident with an interconnector between France and Spain" occurred on Monday which led to "the Spanish grid (getting) disconnected from the broader European grid," Kristian Ruby of Eurelectric, was quoted as saying on BBC Radio 4's The World Tonight.

Grid balancing, also called frequency regulation, is a complex exercise that entails constantly matching electricity consumption by households, offices, and utilities such as metro networks to the electricity output by power plants. The big challenge in this exercise is that it is difficult to store electricity. So, on a real time basis, supply and demand must be constantly matched. Else, there is a risk of a blackout. "Any interconnected grid is only as strong as its weakest link. Large grids are patched up with interconnectors, which are points of vulnerability. An interconnector failure potentially leads to a localised blackout, which can immediately trigger a frequency mismatch as the demand-supply equilibrium is disbalanced. That can then lead to a wider grid failure, as has happened in earlier instances. A system-wide failure of the kind seen in Spain and Portugal could have more than one trigger, which is perhaps why the grid managers are unable to pin-point the exact cause," a Mumbai-based power consultant with experience in utility management told The latest incident is likely to surpass Europe's largest blackout to date, when over 50 million people in Italy and Switzerland were left without



out electricity for up to 12 hours in 2003. Then a major power line fault had caused a large outage in 2021, when an interconnector between France and Spain failed leaving a million people without power for some hours. An interconnector failure of this kind is the suspect this time around too.

There are two other likely factors that could have triggered this. One, that summer sets in earlier in the western extremities of Europe, starting with Portugal and Spain, leading to higher demand due to air conditioning load. Secondly, countries such as Spain are big on renewables, especially wind energy. To operationally sustain high capacity addition of renewables to the electricity grid is challenging, unless there are viable energy storage options. As electricity grids around the world are increasingly being powered by renewables, this creates the problem of intermittency — a significant challenge from a grid management perspective.

In India, there have been two major grid failures over the last 25 years. In 2002, the northern grid collapsed due to a combination of fog and pollution getting deposited on the power lines and conductors, leading to an outage. Then in the wee hours of July 30, 2012, there was a disturbance in the NEW (north-east-west-north east) Grid, leading to the disconnection of the Northern Regional Grid from the rest that ultimately led to an outage, which plunged eight states into darkness. Around 32 hours later, in the afternoon of July 31, another disturbance of the same kind then triggered the collapse of the northern, north eastern and the eastern grids, together affecting nearly 700 million people. This outage was one of the largest in the history of electric networks anywhere in the world. The incident unfolding in Spain-Portugal would be watched closely by grid operators around the world, including in India.

## Goyal, Reynolds meet to push India-UK free trade agreement beyond finish line

Piyush Goyal in his first engagement, held a productive meeting with the UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds MP to advance Free Trade Agreement negotiations, reinforcing our commitment to deepening India-UK economic ties, Goyal said in his social media post. As radical changes in US trade policy speed up bilateral trade deal-making globally, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal met his counterpart, UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds, in London, for the conclusion of a long-pending trade agreement.

"Arrived in London for two days of engaging discussions aimed at strengthening bilateral trade and investment relations. In my first engagement, held a productive meeting with the UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds to advance Free Trade Agreement negotiations, reinforcing our commitment to deepening India-UK economic ties," Goyal said in social media post. Had earlier this month reported that no new round of talks was being planned, as negotiations had entered their final stages, with only a few thorny issues pending between the two countries. Agreement on rules of origin and short-term service visas were among the remaining issues. Goyal's visit comes within a month of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's visit to the UK amid parallel discussions for a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) alongside the Free Trade Agreement

(FTA) negotiations. Meanwhile, Politico reported that India has accepted that Britain will only offer "minor changes to its visa regime" as negotiations for a trade deal enter their final stages. The new rules will lead to "around 100 new visas" for Indian workers each year, a UK official told Politico.

The UK's visa concession is a long way from New Delhi's opening gambit, the official said, with India originally proposing larger quotas for professionals, particularly in sectors like IT and healthcare. This could be bad news for Indian negotiators, as the services sector was a key area where India could have benefited through greater access to service sector visas. A Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) report stated that the India-UK FTA is expected to yield only limited trade benefits for India, as many of its exports to the UK already enjoy low or zero tariffs. On the contrary, the UK's exports face considerable tariffs in India, particularly on items like cars, Scotch whisky, and wines. The tariff on cars is 100 per cent, and on Scotch whisky and wines, it is 150 per cent. The FTA could lead to tariff reductions on these goods, potentially offering the UK deeper access to Indian markets. While the UK has asked India to reduce duties on cars and whisky among other items, India has sought better access for its service sector workforce in the UK. The deal could see India lower duties to a greater extent, as it is a high-tariff country.

## New cervical cancer test kit: Why this home-grown, affordable tool can change screening, speed up results



A new indigenously developed diagnostic kit for human papilloma virus (HPV) is likely to become available soon, making the test cheaper, easy to use and more accessible. Developed by Molbio Diagnostics — which is known for providing low-cost tests for the country's TB programme — the molecular test will look for eight high-risk HPV strains by amplifying genetic material in the patient samples, similar to an RT-PCR test.

The kit was validated in a large multi-centre study funded by the Department of Biotechnology under its programme Grand Challenges India. "Over 90 per cent of cervical cancer cases — which is one of the most common cancers among women — are caused by persistent HPV infections. In fact, the infection can cause cancers in men too. It is our responsibility to ensure access to vaccination and screening for this preventable cancer," says Union Science Minister Dr Jitendra Singh. While the kit is not part of a national programme yet, its user-friendly and fast-result oriented features make it a good match as a mass screening tool. India is also planning to vaccinate girl children between the ages of 9 and 14 years.

Why is the new kit significant?

One, the test can identify eight high-risk strains of HPV that cause 96 per cent of all cervical cancer cases across the world. Most of the existing test kits can identify only four of the most common strains. As the strains were selected based on global prevalence data, these kits can be used uniformly across the world. Two, the test results can be obtained within an hour. Three, this new test kit can be handled in the remotest areas since it works on a TrueNat machine — a small, portable, cartridge-based molecular testing device. While a molecular test like RT-PCR requires

a full-fledged lab and trained people to mix reagents appropriately and isolate the genetic material of a pathogen, even a minimally trained person can take samples for TrueNat where the reagents already come mixed in the cartridge. The machine is battery-powered and can be operated without electricity. Four, there are already 8,000 TrueNat machines available across India, many of which are being used in the government system under the country's National TB Elimination programme. Five, it is a molecular test and hence requires very little sample to give the result. "There is reasonable evidence available to show that even vaginal swabs can be as effective as cervical swabs for detecting HPV in molecular tests," says Dr Chadrasekhar Nair, chief technology officer, Molbio. This means that samples collected through less invasive methods can also be used.

What is the future direction of research?

The company is now looking at whether they could test for the virus in urine samples of patients. "This will be completely non-invasive. Of course, we have to study the viral load in urine samples and see if they are clinically significant," says Dr Nair. Screening for cervical cancer is usually done either using a pap smear (cells collected from the cervix are tested under microscope) or through visual inspection with acetic acid (a 3–5% solution of acetic acid is applied on the cervix to see if it forms white patches). Both of these methods require opening up the cervix, which many are hesitant about. A urine-based test would solve that problem.

When will it become available and at what cost?

The company has received a manufacturing licence and has started manufacturing the kits already. "We should be able to launch this soon. While I would not be able to give you the cost yet, it will definitely be one of the most affordable tests globally," says Dr Nair.

What is the burden of cervical cancer?

India reported 1.27 lakh cervical cancer cases and 79,979 deaths in 2022, according to data from the World Health Organisation's Global Cancer Observatory. It is the second most common cancer in India among women, after breast cancer. It is also one of the few vaccine-preventable cancers. Evidence from the UK shows that cervical cancer rates dropped by 87% in 20- to 30-year-olds who had received the vaccine by the time they turned 13. A study from Sweden showed that the incidence of cervical cancer was 47 cases per 100,000 among vaccinated women as compared to 94 cases per 100,000 among unvaccinated women.

## 32-year old Bengaluru CEO suffers heart attack; doctor detects unique risk factor: Here's what happened

Recently, we had a 32-year-old CEO of a company being wheeled into the emergency room with a heart attack. What was surprising was that he was a fit man, who ran marathons, with no alarming medical history. Still he had collapsed. Something in his blood work alerted me. His haemoglobin count was 18g/dL, 17.2 g/dL being considered to be the upper threshold. It meant his blood had become too sticky because of dehydration. That sticky blood of his had clogged his arteries, triggering a heart attack. We used blood thinners to dissolve the clot. He didn't need a stent (a mesh device to widen the arteries) and was put on intravenous (IV) hydration, a method of delivering fluids and electrolytes directly into the bloodstream, bypassing the digestive system. His haemoglobin then fell to a normal range of 13g/dL.

We found that he would go for morning runs and while he sweated profusely, he didn't drink enough water to restore the fluid balance in his body. Instead he relied on caffeine-infused energy drinks and sodas. How dehydration leads to clotting

Dehydration decreases the total volume of blood circulating in the body. With less volume and a higher sodium content, blood thickens and doesn't flow as freely as it does when you drink plenty of water. This makes the heart work harder to keep the blood moving. That's why the heart rate increases as does blood pressure. The viscous blood has a tendency to clot faster. These blobs then block arteries, restricting the flow of oxygenated blood to the heart and leading to a heart attack. Dehydration can disrupt the balance of essential electrolytes like potassium, sodium and magnesium, which are crucial for the heart's electrical impulses. Electrolyte imbalances can interfere with the electrical signals that control the heart's rhythm, leading to arrhythmias or irregular heartbeats. Dehydration can trig-



ger the release of stress hormones like cortisol, which further elevates heart rate and blood pressure. The thickness of the blood can also trigger lung clots.

How do you know you are dehydrated?

The easiest way is to check your urine colour. Dark urine means you are severely dehydrated and might suffer headaches, dizziness and fatigue. Start drinking water the moment your urine turns yellow and ensure it turns a pale straw. Also make sure that your urine output is 1 to 1.5-litre per day. Anything lesser means you need to drink more fluids.

How do we prevent dehydration following a workout?

Always ensure you have adequate hydration before, during and after the activity. Drink about 1.5 times the amount of fluid you lose during your workout. Don't drink at one go, the fluid pressure would trigger the kidneys into expelling them from the body. Take fluids in small sips over the day. Thirst is a late sign of dehydration, so do not wait to feel it. If you sweat heavily, you may need to drink a bit extra. But without watching your water intake, you could develop complications.

## Paresh Rawal urine therapy: A nephrologist explains why you should stay away from it

Paresh Rawal urine therapy: A nephrologist explains why you should stay away from it. During an interview with Lallantop's Saurabh Dwivedi, Rawal said, "I did this for 15 days," after which he claimed his knee cemented better. Actor Paresh Rawal has said he drank his urine for 15 days to recover from knee pain, making a case for urine therapy, urophagia or urotherapy. During an interview with Lallantop's Saurabh Dwivedi, he said, "I did this for 15 days," after which he claimed his knee cemented better. However, there is no scientific evidence yet of human urine bettering your health.

"Urine therapy, urophagia, or urotherapy, is a traditional practice based on the assumption that there could be good bacteria in the urinary tract. It is almost like the good bug in faeces whose utility has been proved in faecal transplants. This is done to restore a healthy balance of gut bacteria, which can be disrupted by various factors like antibiotic use, certain diseases, or even diet. However, no research has found this efficacy in urine bacteria," says Dr Anil Kumar B T, HOD and Senior Nephrologist and Chief Transplant Physician, at Gleneagles BGS Hospital, Kengeri, Bengaluru. The myth about urine being sterile likely dates back to a study of urinary tract infections (UTIs) conducted back in the 1950s. During this study, samples of urine that showed no signs of UTI were labelled "negative." What many practitioners forget is that urine also contains bad bacteria and waste products that have been filtered out of the bloodstream for a reason.

What research says

According to the American Cancer Society, "available

scientific evidence does not support claims that urine or urea given in any form is helpful for cancer patients." Recent studies have shown that urine does in fact contain bacteria that could be harmful if ingested.

How can drinking your own urine impact the body?

"What we must understand is that urine is excreted because the body doesn't need it. Drinking urine reintroduces concentrated waste products into your system which forces the kidneys to filter them out again, putting undue pressure on the kidneys," says Dr Kumar. The urine is 95 per cent water, and five per cent of toxins, urea and creatinine. "Now your kidney is filtering creatinine but you add that expelled creatinine back into your body. It can be more harmful than useful," he explains.

On practitioners claiming that they are consuming very small amounts of urine, sometimes as low as 5 ml, which is safe, Dr Kumar argues that drinking even small amounts regularly only ends up raising toxins in your body. "Urine is refuse and contains a lot of bad bacteria too which raises the risk of all kinds of infections in your body," says Dr Kumar. Since health benefits are not proven, why can't this amount be consumed with other beverages and electrolytes? Additionally, drinking your own urine could interact with medicines that you may already be taking for existing health conditions. They generate byproducts which get reintroduced into the system, blunting the edge off the drug use itself. "Also the urine that you are collecting is not sterile once it leaves the body as it can get easily contaminated," he adds.

## Shibani Akhtar on Rhea Chakraborty's media trial post Sushant Singh Rajput's death: 'She survived in the most stunning way'



Shibani Akhtar and Rhea Chakraborty share a deep and enduring bond that transcends age. Despite a significant age difference, the two have grown to become emotional anchors for one another, with Shibani often stepping into the role of an elder sister and confidante. In a recent interview with The Hollywood Reporter India, the duo opened up about their relationship, likening themselves to Monica and Rachel from Friends. Their conversation took a more

emotional turn when Shibani addressed the traumatic period Rhea faced in the wake of Sushant Singh Rajput's death — particularly the intense media scrutiny, the alleged drug case filed against her and her brother and public backlash that followed. Calling Rhea's ordeal painful and life-altering, Shibani said, "It was a journey that nobody could have predicted. It was a journey that was definitely difficult, painful, and she survived it in the most beautifully stunning ways. I don't know how to put it in words but it was tough. And I think that for someone as strong as her, it just added an extra layer of strength that maybe she will have with her for the rest of her life. I don't necessarily know if that's a good thing or not... but now it's just the way it is."

Shibani emphasized that no one should have to endure what Rhea went through, stating it's not an experience she would wish upon anyone. Looking ahead, she expressed a heartfelt wish for Rhea's peace of mind and personal growth. "I would want her to realise her full potential, because when I see her... her growth... the woman she has grown into from the 16-year-old I met... she has so much potential. She is so incredibly smart, she is very practical, emotionally mature... and in fact, I look up to her and live vicariously through her. I just want her to live to her full potential."

## Aamir Khan doesn't care if daughter Ira is not earning at 27: 'I'm there to support you, your parents are well-off'

GNS News Agency, May 3

Actor Aamir Khan placated his daughter Ira when she approached him with her insecurities about not being self-reliant in her 20s. Ira said that she felt useless for not earning for herself even as an adult. Aamir said in an interview that he doesn't judge people on how much money they have, and told Ira that she needn't worry about it. He said that she would not be utilising her full potential if she were working a 9-5 job. "I'm here to support you, why are you worried?" he said. Aamir and Ira participated in a joint interview with Pinkvilla, where they spoke about her foundation, Agatsu. "Main 26-27 saal ki hoon, mere maa baap ne mere upar bahut paise kharch kiye hain, aur main duniya mein bekar insaan hoon, main kuch nahi kar rahi hoon. (My parents have spent a lot of money on me. I am 26-27 years old, and I feel like a useless person in this world. I am not doing anything)," she said in the interview, confessing her fears. Aamir interjected to offer support. He said, "Aap paise kama rahe ho ya nahi, wo mere liye important nahi hai. Aap kaam achha kar rahe ho, ye mere liye important hai (You are helping so many people, and that means a lot to me. Whether you are earning money or not is not important; the good work you are doing is)."

Explaining his stance on money, Aamir said, "Money is actually a promissory note that everyone decides to agree to — or else it's just a piece of paper. It's an imagined concept. Often, we see people who are extremely talented and capable, but they don't know how to make money. They have incredible skills. Does that make them useless? They can't earn because they don't fit inside this system we've created. I've met so many brilliant people." Ira said that she



had a conversation about money around a year ago, and Aamir told her that she must find her purpose and be of help to people. "Some people help others, but charge money for it. But as long as they're helping people, money is a separate issue. I'm so proud, as a father, to see her help so many people. It's not important to me if you're earning or not. Fortunately, your parents are well-off. Instead of putting all your energy into earning money, you can put it into helping people. That's what I advised her. If you're not taking money for helping people, it's your choice, and it's a great thing." Ira, who has spoken publicly about her mental health struggles, admitted that her foundation is in dire need of cash. Aamir said that he never questions people who aren't able to financially support important causes, and cited his own experiences with his Paani Foundation.

## Family Man Season 3 actor Rohit Basfore, 25, found dead in Assam



GNS News Agency, May 3

Up-and-coming actor Rohit Basfore, who worked in the currently under-production third season of the hit streaming series The Family Man, was reportedly found dead in the Garbhanga waterfall near Guwahati, Assam, on Sunday afternoon. Rohit Basfor, a resident of Guwahati, was a

martial arts and gymnastics coach by profession and has been part of the shoot for the upcoming season 3 of the web series The Family Man. According to police, they were alerted of his death at around 4 pm on Sunday. "We received information about a drowning accident in Jalukpham waterfall, Rani. Our team immediately reached the spot and started search and rescue operations with deep divers. After searching the place, the victim was finally recovered successfully by our time and the victim's body was handed over to Rani police station," said an official from the fire and emergency services.

"The death was caused by drowning, and we will wait for the post-mortem report for further details for investigation," said a police official from the Kamrup district. The Family Man, a spy action thriller created by Raj & DK, is one of the most successful Indian original streaming series. Featuring Manoj Bajpayee, Sharib Hashmi, Priyamani and Ashlesha Thakur in the lead roles, two seasons of the show have aired so far. The production of the third season is currently underway. While the first edition featured Neeraj Madhav as the main villain, Samantha Ruth Prabhu played an antagonistic character in season two. Renowned actor Jaideep Ahlawat depicts a key role in the third edition of the show.

## Akshay Kumar's courtroom drama joins Rs 100 cr club, beats Sunny Deol's Jaat and Emraan Hashmi's Ground Zero

Kesari 2 box office collection day 11: Akshay Kumar, R Madhavan and Ananya Panday-starrer Kesari: Chapter 2 has been showing constant growth in its earnings, since it started picking up on its second weekend. The film opened to positive reviews from the critics as well as the audience. While on Sunday, it minted Rs 8.15 crore, second Monday started slow with Rs 3 crore. Kesari 2 is set to become Akshay's second highest-grossing Indian film of 2025, after Sky Force alongside Veer Pahariya.

According to the industry tracker Sacnilk, the film's nett domestic collection now stands at Rs 68.5 crore. As per the makers Dharma Production, the film has joined the Rs 100 crore club in the global market. In 2025, only four films have managed to enter the Rs 100 crore party, including Vicky Kaushal's Chhaava, Sikandar, Sky Force, and Jaat. With the positive response and great word of mouth, Kesari 2 will soon beat the lifetime collections of Salman Khan's Sikandar. On Monday, the film recorded an

overall Hindi occupancy of 11.19% — with morning and afternoon shows at 5.84% and 10.28%, respectively, and an increase in the evening and night shows, reaching 11.38% and 17.25%.

Kesari Chapter 2 is facing tough competition from Sunny Deol and Randeep Hooda's Jaat, with Emraan Hashmi's release Ground Zero struggling between both the films. In the coming week, all the three movies will clash with Rajkumar Gupta's Raid 2, starring Ajay Devgn, Vaani Kapoor, Riteish Deshmukh, and Saurabh Shukla, set to release on May 1. Jaat and Ground Zero couldn't even collect Rs 1 crore, with Jaat earning only Rs 62 lakh, while Ground Zero only minted Rs. 70 lakh on Monday. Directed by Karan Singh Tyagi, Kesari Chapter 2 also features Regina Cassandra, Amit Sial, Simon Paisley Day and Alex O'Neill in pivotal roles. The film showcases the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in a historical courtroom drama. It has been produced by Dharma Productions, Leo Media Collective, and Cape of Good Films.

## Madhuri Dixit felt alone during 'tough' early years of marriage, husband Dr Nene would be away for days: 'When I was sick, you weren't there...'



Madhuri Dixit and her husband, Dr Sriram Nene, often share anecdotes about their personal lives on his YouTube channel. In a past video, Madhuri admitted that there have been 'difficult times' during their marriage, but said that 'overall, it's been a lovely journey'. She said that she held the fort when Dr Nene would be at work, sometimes for days on end, but he made sure to take over domestic responsibilities during his free time. She said that she would've probably been the same way had she been a doctor, and that the hard work they put in perhaps rubs off on their sons. Dr Nene joked, "When heart surgeons retire, their wives kick them out of the house because they'll go and organise every cabinet, make sure the workflow is organised"

Reflecting on the early years of their marriage, she said, "When we got married, you were doing your residency in Florida. It was like calls every other day. And I remember, I wouldn't see you for days. You were working sleepless nights, and by the time you'd come home, you would be so tired, you wouldn't even eat your dinner. You would

just collapse." Dr Nene explained, "Medicine is the ultimate endurance run, because in the US, you have to do four years of undergrad, you have to be the best in your field, do the pre-medical requirements, do the testing and end up on top. You have to then do four years of medical school... We got married when I'd just finished my general surgery chief residency at UCLA, and we were going to Florida... I would say the arduous hours were very challenging... But it creates a soldier, because you can do anything. As hard as I worked during my residency and fellowship, I worked harder as an 'attending', because everything stopped at me." He said that he doesn't regret the work that he put in and the sacrifices that he made, but added, "I do regret the hours lost with family and friends."

He asked Madhuri what it was like for her to be married to someone like him, and she said, "It's tough, because of the kind of times that you guys have to keep. It's hard, because you are the one looking after the kids, taking them to school and bringing them back. Also, the timings. Something important could be happening, but you're not there, because you're at the hospital. Sometimes I might be sick, but you have to take care of someone else. But I always used to feel so proud of you... In your heart of hearts, you're a nice person. And whenever you used to be home, you used to take over. You used to be like, 'Just give me four hours to sleep, and after that, you go out and do whatever you want to, I'll look after the kids'." Before marriage, my life was all about work. It was only after I got married that I lived my life," Madhuri said. Madhuri and Dr Nene tied the knot in 1999. They have two sons, and have now moved base entirely to India.

## Emraan Hashmi says 'questions are being raised about security lapses' after Pahalgam attack, emphasises that terrorism has no religion: 'It's cowardly'

The recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, has left the nation shaken. Citizens and celebrities alike have expressed their grief and outrage over the tragedy, which left over two dozen dead. Among them is actor Emraan Hashmi, who, in a recent interview with Vishal Malhotra, described the attack as "cowardly" and called for decisive action. He expressed hope that the government would ensure justice. "I hope the government sets this right and takes a payback," he said. He also mentioned possible security lapses at such a prominent tourist spot. Speaking about the attack, he said, "I mean obviously humare security agencies aur jo isse theek tarah se jaante hai woh toh... they have a detailed lockdown of this... (Our security agencies and those who understand these things have a detailed understanding of it). Of course, humari intelligence bohut achi hai (our intelligence is very good)... but wahan par bhi ek sawaal uth raha hai ki thoda si wahan par security honi chahiye (questions are being raised about the need for security there too)."

He continued, "But it was a huge meadow... toh kitne aap apne officers ya jawan ko deploy kareng (how many officers or soldiers can you deploy)? But it was a tourist hotspot... woh log jo aaye thay... ek bohut hi well-planned attack tha (those people who came... it was a very well-planned attack)... kyunki it was at the heart of that tourist attraction... wahan pe paas mein koi raste nahi thay (because there were no nearby escape routes)... they just



fled... it's a cowardly attack." He urged that the attack should not be used to stoke religious hatred. "Of course, terrorism never has a religion... ek skewed aur warped ideology hoti hai unki (they have a skewed and warped ideology)... humare religion mein toh kabhi nahi sikhaya jata hai (our religion never teaches such things)," he said. He emphasised unity in the face of tragedy, urging people to stand together as a nation. On the work front, Emraan Hashmi was last seen in the Kashmir-set film Ground Zero, which was released just two days after the Pahalgam attack. The film has made around Rs 5 crore at the box office.

## Ashutosh Gowariker recalls Amitabh Bachchan warning them before joining Lagaan: 'Whenever I give a voiceover to a film, that film fails...'

Few elements are as iconic to Lagaan as Aamir Khan's character Bhuvan's line "Sharat Manzoor Hai," Kachra's mind blowing hat-trick, the winning six, A.R. Rahman's soundtrack — and Amitabh Bachchan's voiceover that frames the story. But not many know that Bachchan was initially hesitant to lend his voice to the film. In a newly released behind-the-scenes video on Aamir Khan's YouTube channel, director Ashutosh Gowariker revealed that convincing Amitabh wasn't easy. "The first time we wanted to approach him, there was this myth that he told us about," Ashutosh said. "He said to Aamir that whenever I give a voiceover to the film, that film doesn't work. The film fails... If you are willing to take that risk... then go ahead but be aware that I did tell you earlier." Ashutosh recalled that Aamir laughed off Amitabh's warning and decided to move forward anyway. "We made him watch the film, he liked the film... he understood the narration style, what kind of narration style was needed." After that, getting Amitabh on board became a smoother process. Ashutosh Gowariker also recalled the first time he heard Amitabh Bachchan's voice layered over the film's opening scenes. "With his voice, I suddenly felt that the aspect of storytelling came alive... his voice became the entry point to the film... it became believable." Indeed, it was his narration that ultimately played a key role in Lagaan's enduring appeal, lending the period drama with a sense of gravity and timelessness.

In fact, Aamir Khan had previously spoken about how



even lyricist Javed Akhtar warned him not to make Lagaan. In a chat with India Today, Aamir shared that Lagaan was a "very scary" film to make. His worries multiplied when Javed called him and asked, "Why are you making this film? This will not work." Javed went on to list everything that would go against Lagaan. "He said sports films never work, cricket films never work. You are talking in Awadhi — who will even understand what you are saying? Everyone is wearing gorgeous outfits and shooting in Switzerland, and you are shooting in a village in a dhoti. One of his points was that you have gotten Amitabh Bachchan to narrate the film. So apparently, whichever film Mr. Bachchan has given a voiceover for, has flopped," he recalled.

## Empuraan sets new benchmark for Malayalam cinema

Hyderabad: Malayalam cinema has witnessed a proud moment with the release of L2: Empuraan, an action-packed drama directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran. Starring Mohanlal in the lead role, the film has been winning hearts ever since it hit theatres. A sequel to the 2019 blockbuster Lucifer, L2E brings together a star-studded cast including Manju Warrier, Tovino Thomas, Suraj Venjaramoodu and Indrajith Sukumaran. Produced by Anthony Perumbavoor in collaboration with Lyca Productions and Gokulam Cinemas, the movie has impressed both critics and audiences alike.

In a bold move, Mohanlal and Prithviraj decided not to take any upfront payment for the project. Instead, they signed a profit-sharing deal, which has now turned out to be a highly rewarding decision. The film's success story does not end there. No controversies could stop the film from collecting what it deserves. Empuraan has now grossed over Rs 260 crore worldwide, becoming the highest-grossing Malayalam film of all time. The makers also revealed that the film was made on a massive budget of Rs 170 crore, making it one of the most expensive productions in the industry.

## Why is Carlo Ancelotti leaving Real Madrid?



GNS News Agency, May 3

Real Madrid, following a turbulent and tumultuous few games in the previous month, has decided to part ways with manager Carlo Ancelotti. The Italian has been in charge of the Los Blancos for two separate stints, one from 2013-2015 and the second starting in 2021. Even though Ancelotti's contract keeps him at the club till 2026, several reports and sources state that the manager has already informed the club of his decision to cut ties.

When is Ancelotti leaving?

Even though Ancelotti's contract stands in his way, the Italian will leave Madrid in June, not staying long enough to manage his side at the FIFA Club World Cup set to be

played in the United States from June 14. The Los Blancos will have to decide between employing an interim boss or calling in a new boss in the summer. It is no secret that Xabi Alonso, former Madrid player and Bayer Leverkusen manager, is the favorite to succeed Ancelotti in the dugout. Leverkusen have also made it clear that the club has a gentleman's agreement in place for Alonso to leave if one of his former teams come knocking.

Why is Ancelotti leaving?

After Madrid's entire season came undone in the space of a month, there has been mounting pressure on the manager and criticism on his tactics. The club's 1-5 humiliation at the hands of Arsenal in the UEFA Champions League quarterfinals made things worse, with questions being asked about the veterans game plan and tactical set-up. In La Liga, Real is four points behind Barcelona with 5 games left to play. On Sunday, the Los Blancos suffered a painful defeat in the Copa del Rey after losing 3-2 in the final.

Which team is Ancelotti joining?

After a prolonged statement of interest from the Brazil National team, it has finally been agreed upon that Carlo Ancelotti will join the team as head coach in June for an initial period of one year. The deal keeps him head coach of the Selecao till the end of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Ancelotti has been a target for Brazil for the past few seasons, with rumors linking him to the job going as back as to 2023.

## Pujara's wife Puja didn't tell him about his father's heart condition when he was making big runs in Australia



GNS News Agency, May 3

A couple of years ago, after India's 2023 World Test Championship final loss to Australia, their perpetual No.3 Cheteshwar Pujara got the call that most cricketers in their mid-30s dread. It was the chief selector on line informing him that they wanted a younger Test side and he wasn't part of it. Despite his 100-plus Tests, unlike other equally out-of-form seniors, he didn't get the long rope. Pujara, a veteran of many setbacks and comebacks, was hurt. True to his temperament, he went silent. But not his wife, Puja, a close witness and sherpa to Cheteshwar's arduous cricketing journey. She was outraged, her anger exploded into pithy rhetorical questions: Why was Cheteshwar expected to shoulder the blame for India's defeat? Why should you put yourself through so much scrutiny? Why don't you call it quits? Both knew, there were no answers. Then Puja said something that would go on to be the theme of a book she would pursue in the days to come: "You are not the only one who is going through these highs and lows. We, as your family, are equally affected by it." Two years later, the one-of-a-kind sports book — "The diary of a cricketer's wife" (HarperCollins) — is out and the scene at the Pujara household when he got dropped finds space on its pages. The cover calls the book "A very unusual memoir" but there is a case for adding 'honest' to the tag line.

Sporting arenas have been insensitive in dismissing the partners of players as mere props. Often the support system and bouncing board of sporting superstars, the Wives and Girlfriends go by a rather reductive and dismissive collective noun — WAGs. On match days, as they sit bunched in VVIP stadium boxes, they are expected to give the game situation appropriate expressions. In the grand cinema called Indian cricket, they have a bit part but no dialogues. Finally, there is a book that records the all-important female voice of men's cricket. The Pujaras are keen to talk about the book. Puja says the role of wives, and other family members, rarely gets discussed in detail. "We are always given this glamorous role when that is not the case. Behind the smiles and cheering in the stadium, there are 20,000 thoughts in our head. They keep switching the cameras to the spouses. And that's where the story ends, right? Nobody follows up or nobody hears from the spouse also much after that," she tells Puja's book introduces readers to a world where the men of the house are perpetually absent. It's a peek into the lives of women who, at times, have a lonely existence with only fear and anxiety for company. While the cricketers get hailed as gladiators, the wives are left to deal with the daily battles of raising kids and being the first, and at times, the only responders, to medical emergencies of elders. Most times, they don't even have the option of sharing their problems with their cricketer partners. What if it disturbs the men burdened with unreasonable expectations of a cricketer-crazy nation?

That was the reason, according to the book, why Puja hid from her husband the news about his father's heart condition while he was in the middle of that 2018-2019 historic series in Australia. She was holding the fort at home when Cheteshwar with three hundreds in four Test matches was conquering Australia — India's first-ever series win Down



Under. With the second Test at Perth to start in a few hours, it was 2.30 am at the Pujara household in Rajkot. At that ungodly hour, Puja's phone rang. Next to her bed was her daughter, in the cradle yet to celebrate her first birthday.

It was her father-in-law calling from the first-floor of their home. He had a heart condition and was now suddenly feeling uneasy. Puja called Cheteshwar's cricketer-friend Kuldeep. She also reached out to his siblings and other relatives to take care of her daughter while she headed to the hospital. The doctor would later recommend "a heart ablation procedure". Sleepless and stressed, she got the usual pre-match call from Cheteshwar — a ritual they had followed for years. Puja had to act normal. The book captures that delicate moment of deception wonderfully. "The second Test was beginning that very morning, so I freshened up, took a short nap and woke up in time to wish Cheteshwar luck for the match. I carefully omitted all mention of the events of the previous night... 'How's the hamstring,' I asked casually. 'Fine,' he answered, insouciantly. 'Best of luck for the match,' I wished him, with a spurious attempt at jollity. 'Thanks,' he replied, distractedly, his mind already on the game ahead," Puja writes. After the game, Cheteshwar was informed about his father's condition and the impending operation in Mumbai. That date clashed with the final Test in Sydney. When Puja was on the flight to Mumbai with her father-in-law, Cheteshwar was fighting the Aussie bowlers. When she reached the hospital, her husband had crossed a hundred. The book says that while in the hospital lift, Puja saw attendants watching the India-Australia game on their mobile phones. Little did they know that the batsman they were following diligently had their hospital on his mind. When the operation ended, the day's play was over. Cheteshwar was unbeaten on 130. Next day, he ended up scoring 193. Cheteshwar had played the path-breaker, the Aussie bastion had fallen. Puja awaited the homecoming of the national hero but was once again stumped by cricket's uncertainties. She describes in the book another of those long-distance conversations with her famous husband. "A vacation? A teeny-weeny break — as a treat for all the sleepless nights I had endured? These dreams lasted till Cheteshwar's next phone call. He had already booked his tickets to travel to Kanpur for Saurashtra's quarter-final game," Puja writes. That wasn't new to Puja. Cheteshwar had missed the birth of his daughter because of another Ranji game previously. Not a regular member of the India team, Cheteshwar tries his best these days to compensate for his long absences. He drops his daughter to school and in the days ahead will take a "back seat" if Puja wants to start a business or any other new venture. Speaking to this newspaper, Puja refers to Cheteshwar's acknowledgment of the role she has played in his career and describes the joy of "being part of someone equally" and how that has made "everything worth it". She goes back to the 2018-19 series in Australia to make her point. "Though I did not travel to Australia, just those raw emotions of fans gives you warmth and love. No matter how small or big a part you have played, it just feels so, so special. I feel like it's my victory as well. The warmth you see everywhere you travel, it just feels there's so much gratitude," she says.

## Vaibhav Suryavanshi story: 'Mom used to wake up at 2 am for me and sleep 3 hours... dad left his job'

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A 14-year-old hitting an IPL century is no small feat. The fact that Vaibhav Suryavanshi exudes a level of confidence and ability far beyond that of his age is an exciting revelation for the Rajasthan Royals and Indian cricket as a whole. At 14 years and 32 days of age, the teenager broke the record for youngest player to score an IPL ton while also being the second fastest in the history of the competition to do it (in 35 balls).

The Indian Premier League 2025's biggest revelation so far has been the 14-year-old RR power hitter, but his rise to fame and the road to an IPL contract has been far from sunshine and rainbows. Speaking to the Indian Premier League, the batsman credited his parents for their dedication and sacrifice in helping him reach where he is today.

"Whoever I am today, it is because of my parents. My mother used to wake up at 2 and go to sleep at 11 (PM) because of my practice and then used to make food for me too. My father left his job for me and now my brother is taking care of things. Things were very difficult at home, but God looks after those who aren't able to succeed despite putting in hard work," said Suryavanshi in a video released on the official IPL account on Instagram.

Despite praise falling on the youngster from all sides, the RR star was quick to deflect the credit to his parents. "Whatever result that I see today, whatever success I at-



tain is all because of my parents". Following his showstopping 101 from 38 against the Gujarat Titans on Sunday, Krishnamachari Srikkanth, former chief selector and World Cup winner with India in 1983 said, "Composure, class and courage beyond his years. We are witnessing the rise of a phenom. Indian cricket's next super star is here". In the video posted on Instagram, Suryavanshi also adds, "I want to do my best and contribute as much as I can to the team. The teenager also expressed his excitement at the opportunity to play under the legendary Rahul Dravid and the unrelenting support and advice from his teammates at RR that fill him with confidence and takes away the nerves and stress ahead of a game.

## 'What were you doing at 14?': Sachin Tendulkar, Rohit Sharma, Yuvraj Singh lead praise for Vaibhav Suryavanshi's IPL century

GNS News Agency, May 3

Vaibhav Suryavanshi achieved the unthinkable on Monday night at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur, waltzing his way into the record books with a blistering 35-ball century against the Gujarat Titans. Aged only 14 years and 32 days, Suryavanshi's rampaging hundred made light work of a 210-run chase and a heap of T20 records were broken along the way. Besides being the youngest male batter ever to record a T20 century, the flamboyant southpaw's 35-ball century was also the second-fastest century ever in IPL history and the quickest among all Indian batters. Leading the praise for Suryavanshi's record-breaking century on social media was none other than the legendary Sachin Tendulkar, who wrote the headlines way back in the 1980s as another teenage prodigy. Tendulkar highlighted Suryavanshi's precocious bat swing and power and wrote: "Vaibhav's fearless approach, bat speed, picking the length early, and transferring the energy behind the ball was the recipe behind a fabulous innings. End result: 101 runs off 38 balls." Vaibhav's fearless approach, bat speed, picking the length early, and transferring the energy behind the ball was the recipe behind a fabulous innings. Team India captain Rohit Sharma, who was incidentally the first teenage batter to record a T20 century way back in 2007, also hailed Suryavanshi's knock on his Instagram story. A dashing left-hander in his heyday, Yuvraj



Singh effused praise on Suryavanshi's fearless stroke-making. "What were you doing at 14?! This kid is taking on the best bowlers in the world without blinking an eyelid! Vaibhav Suryavanshi — remember the name! Playing with a fearless attitude. Proud to see the next generation shine!" Rohit Sharma's reaction on Instagram. Rohit Sharma's reaction on Instagram. "Many congratulations to young #VaibhavSuryavanshi for breaking my record of the fastest IPL hundred by an Indian! Even more special to see it happen while playing for Rajasthan Royals, just like I did. There's truly something magical about this franchise for youngsters. Long way to go, champ!" wrote Yusuf Pathan, whose Indian record for the fastest IPL ton was bettered by Suryavanshi by two balls.

## Vaibhav Suryavanshi's 100: Rahul Dravid, leg still injured, jumps out of wheelchair as 14-year-old scores century in 35 balls

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As 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi (LEFT) got to his century in 35 balls, a pumped up Rajasthan Royals head coach Rahul Dravid (right) jumped out of his wheelchair. (Screenshot via JioHotstar) As 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi (LEFT) got to his century in 35 balls, a pumped up Rajasthan Royals head coach Rahul Dravid (right) jumped out of his wheelchair. (Screenshot via JioHotstar)

Rahul Dravid has always been one of the most measured cricketers around, even during his playing days. Rarely did he give in to exuberant celebrations. But the elder statesman, who is the head coach of the Rajasthan Royals in the ongoing Indian Premier League, could not help himself and jumped out of his wheelchair, even as he recovers from an injury to his leg, as the 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi scored a century in 35 balls on the way to

helping RR chase down Gujarat Titans' target of 210 runs on Monday. In fact, a video from the IPL broadcaster showed Dravid initially stumbling as he got off his wheelchair. After composing himself, Dravid celebrated with gusto — both hands balled into fists and raised in the air — that is uncharacteristic.

Dravid has been wheelchair bound — or has used crutches — for the entirety of the IPL 2025 season after injuring his leg while playing backyard cricket in Bengaluru. During IPL games, he has turned up at stadiums around the country on his wheelchair as he recovers from the injury to his leg. But Vaibhav Suryavanshi's century made him forget all that. At least momentarily. The 14-year-old scored the second fastest century in IPL history, after Chris Gayle's 30-ball 100 in 2013. he also raced away to a 50 in just 17 balls.

## It's tremendous hitting, says Shubman Gill

GNS News Agency, May 3

HYDERABAD: Gujarat Titans captain Shubman Gill felt that Rajasthan Royals took the game away from them in the powerplay. "Credit to them for that. We could have done a couple of things better, but it's easy to say those things when sitting out, some chances came our way and we didn't take them," Gill said in a post-match interaction with host broadcaster JioHotstar. "I sat out because I felt a back spasm, and didn't want to take a chance," he said of Rashid Khan leading when Rajasthan chased the target. "The next match is at Ahmedabad, we've had a good run there. It was Suryavanshi's day, his hitting was tremendous and he made full use of it," Gill said.

For his part, Royals opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who saw the carnage from Vaibhav Suryavanshi from the other end in the middle, said it was an incredible innings. "One of the best I have seen. Hope he will do it for us for a long time. I was telling him to just keep going, incredible today," Jaiswal said. "He just played amazing shots, he practises well, works hard in the hits. He has the game and temperament, wish him all the luck," he said. "We were talking that somebody needs to stay and finish the game after the last three games, I was there luckily today and tried my best. Our coach says one game at a time and we'll give 100% each game," Jaiswal said. Royals captain Riyan Parag said at the presentation that Vaibhav's innings was incredible. "We've spent two months with him, we have seen what he can do. But to see him do this against the world class bowlers GT has, can't express it in words," he said. "We were thinking how we could finish this earlier, but with real intent, it came off. Big confidence booster, we were search-



ing for this win, now taking it one game at a time," Parag said.

## I have no fear, says batting sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi

HYDERABAD: "I just focus on the ball, doesn't look around the ground," was the modest reaction of the latest batting sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi of Rajasthan Royals, after his match-winning century (101, 38b, 7x4, 11x6) against Gujarat Giants in the IPL league match in Jaipur on Monday night.

Speaking to JioHotstar after being named 'player of the match', Vaibhav said he felt really good scoring his first IPL century.