





# Indian Chronicle

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## Dreamline crash an aviation safety wake-up call

To say it is a monumental tragedy is a gross understatement. A London-bound Air India flight, a Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft, carrying 242 people, including crew, burst into a ball of fire after crashing into a medical college less than half-a-minute after taking off from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel international airport in Ahmedabad on Thursday afternoon. This plane crash, the worst in India in this century, left 241 passengers and crew members dead. Only one passenger had a miraculous escape. The collateral damage is equally numbing. As the ill-fated plane slammed through hostel buildings of BJ Medical College adjoining the airport, 24 people, including medics, lost their lives on the ground, taking the toll to 265. This Thursday tragedy shocked the nation and heightened anxiety about air travel. However, the sheer scale and complexity of the tragedy can be gauged from the fact that there was no official communication on the number of deaths even after midnight though crash took place around 1.40 pm in the afternoon. For some reasons, there was some reluctance on the part of the authorities to disclose the death count!The crash obviously raises doubts about the safety protocols that Air India practices. Its poor safety record continued even after Tata Group took over the state-owned airliner in 2022. Furthermore, the safety aspect of Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft is also under cloud now. The aircraft, considered an engineering marvel and fuel-efficient one, faced significant quality issues after it entered commercial service in 2011. To address the quality issues, the US airplane maker had to stop Dreamliner's deliveries between January 2021 and August 2022. The latest crash shows that a lot more needs to be done. Nevertheless, the Ahmedabad plane crash is obviously a big blow to India's fast-growing civil aviation sector.

## Mission Sanitation was launched by the collector to reduce the workload of sanitation workers in government hospitals.“



““Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem, June 16 (Indian Chronicle): The District Collector has come up with an innovative idea of ??machine sanitation to make the cleanliness and sanitation work easier at the Bhadradi Kothagudem District Government General Hospital (GGH). As part of implementing this idea, steps were taken to obtain the necessary machines by immediately providing DMF funds.As part of this, the following machines were provided to the hospital:1. Scrubbing Machine2. Manual Sweeper3. High-Pressure WasherThese machines were recently delivered to the hospital, and all arrangements for use have been completed, and they are now in direct use. With this, the sanitation standards in the hospital will further improve, the workload of the workers will be reduced, and the patients will get a clean environment.On this occasion, the Superintendent, on behalf of GGH Kothagudem, expressed his heartfelt gratitude to Collector Jitesh V. Patil. His initiative to protect public health is commendable.

## Cybercrime crackdown in Hyderabad focuses on suspicious transactions

GNS News Agency, June 16

Hyderabad: In a step towards tackling the rising threat of financial cybercrime, the Hyderabad Police, in collaboration with the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB), have intensified their surveillance and enforcement strategies.They are now focusing on and monitoring suspicious banking activities, particularly bank accounts that receive large sums of money within short periods, especially when linked to individuals without a clear source of income.Officials believe such accounts are often used by cybercriminals to launder money or facilitate fraudulent transactions.With digital transactions becoming a crucial part of daily life, officials emphasise that constructive and collaborative efforts between law enforcement agencies and financial institutions are essential. As part of the crackdown, banks across the State have been asked to tighten their Know Your Customer (KYC) protocols.

This includes conducting thorough background checks during account creation and periodic reviews of customer data. Financial institutions have also been directed to flag and report suspicious transactions immediately to the authorities concerned.“Online scams have become sophisticated, and it is of utmost importance that law enforcement agencies act proactively to counter them. Our focus is on identifying the network of money mules and dismantling the very infrastructure of financial cybercrime networks,” said a senior TGCSB official.Banks have also been urged to enhance their scrutiny mechanisms. “Banks and financial institutions need to strengthen their KYC norms, and real-time reporting of dubious activities is crucial to prevent large-scale fraud,” added a cybercrime official.Meanwhile, public awareness campaigns are being launched to educate citizens about the risks of sharing bank account details and to encourage prompt reporting of suspected fraud.Citizens are advised to stay vigilant and report any unusual account activity or suspected fraud to the cybercrime helpline at 1930 or through the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal at [cybercrime.gov.in](http://cybercrime.gov.in)

## Continental Hospitals Celebrates World Blood Donor Day with Successful Blood Donation Drive



Hyderabad:Continental Hospitals, Gachibowli, Hyderabad commemorated the World Blood Donor Day 2025 with an In-House Blood Donation Drive that saw over

100 Blood Donors donate blood over the past three days. In addition to the blood donation drive, Continental Hospitals has also undertaken a massive awareness campaign to educate corporates and residential communities in the area about the importance of blood donation and the need for more blood donors to come forward voluntarily. The requirement of blood cannot be undermined in the treatment of various ailments in addition to emergency situations.

On the occasion of the World Blood Donor Day, Continental Hospitals Founder & Chairman Dr Guru N Reddy reminded everyone that one unit of blood can actually save three lives and everyone must come forward to donate blood to be able to save precious lives in emergency.Prominent blood donors during the drive included Mrs Kavitha Muthyala, Zonal Manager & Commissioner of TGIC who donated blood at the hospital and encouraged others to do so. Several hospital employees from various departments came forward to take part in the blood donation and contribute to this good cause

## Amudala Tulasidas Spearheads Initiative to Ensure "Thalliki Vandanam" Benefits Reach All in Tirupati's



21st Division““June 16 Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema co-ordinator““Amudala Tulasidas, President of the Tirupati Salivahana Parliament, today led a special grievance redressal program at the local Grama

Sachivalayam (Village Secretariat) in the 21st Division. The initiative was aimed at assisting women who have not yet received the financial benefits under the "Thalliki Vandanam" scheme.“The program focused on guiding eligible women through the official government grievance application process. Mr. Tulasidas provided hands-on advice and clear instructions on how to properly file their applications to ensure they receive the entitled amount from the scheme. The event was attended by the secretariat staff and numerous local women who were seeking assistance.“Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Amudala Tulasidas, a prominent leader of the Telugu Desam Party, emphasized the party's commitment to public service.““It is an integral part of our responsibility as workers of the Telugu Desam Party to ensure that every single scheme introduced by the government reaches the people effectively," said Mr. Tulasidas. "We must work to see that these benefits are delivered properly and that justice is done for every eligible citizen. Today's program is a step in that direction.““

The event highlights a proactive effort to bridge the gap between government welfare schemes and their intended beneficiaries, ensuring that administrative hurdles do not prevent citizens from accessing crucial support.“About:“Amudala Tulasidas is the President of the Tirupati Salivahana Parliament and a local leader of the Telugu Desam Party. He is actively involved in community outreach and social welfare programs aimed at addressing citizen grievances and ensuring the effective implementation of government schemes in the Tirupati region.

## The second phase of spot admission counseling was successfully conducted at Tribal Gurukulam: RCO Aruna Kumari. “



““Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem, June 16 (Indian Chronicle):The spot counseling for filling 352 seats for boys and 142 seats for girls in the first year of the Junior Inter second phase of Tribal Welfare Gurukulam Junior College in the Ummadi Khammam district for the academic year 2025-26 was successfully conducted at Bhadrachalam Tribal Gurukulam School on Monday. Bhadrachalam ITDA Project Officer B. Rahul said that under the direction of RCO Aruna Kumari, out of a total of 494 seats for various courses,



362 seats have been filled for boys and girls through transparent counseling; out of 352 seats for boys, 220 seats have been filled for girls and 142 seats for boys; and further steps will be announced soon regarding the filling of the remaining 132 vacant seats for boys. Principals Devadas, Satyanarayana, Shyam Kumar, Harikrishna, Bhadrachalam Principal Padmavati, Ramadevi, Nagendramma, Madhavi Latha, Chaitanya, and Pullamma; lecturers; and others participated in this program.

## ITDA conducts Darthi Abajan National Gram Utkarsha Abhiyan camps: Project Officer B. Rahul

Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem



, June 16 (Indian Chronicle): ITDA has conducted Darthi Abajan National Gram Utkarsha Abhiyan camps introduced by the central government in Palvancha, Charla, Tekulapalli, and Burgampadu mandals and submitted the reports to the Gram Sabhas through the concerned officials, said ITDA Project Officer B. Rahul. He said that these conferences were organized on Monday at MP UPS School in Krishna Sagar village in Burgampadu mandal, GP Pally

village in Charla mandal, Errai Gudem MPP School in Tekulapally mandal, and GP Bhavan in Chandrala Gudem village in Palvancha mandal. 680 tribals registered their names for PM Kishan, Aadhaar cards, Ayushman Bharat cards, Jan Dhan, caste certificates, and NREGS cards, and 352 people were registered for these conferences. MPDOs, Tahsildars, and officials of various departments participated in the program.

## Public Hearing Cancelled: District Collector Jitesh V. Patil.



“““Bhukya Ranjith Naik,Bhadradi kothagudem,June 15(Indian Chronicle):“On Monday, 16-06-2025, as part of the Rythunestam program, State Chief Minister Sri Enumula Revanth Reddy will hold a face-to-face program with farmers across the state. Farmers will participate in this program at farmer forums across the district. District Collector Jitesh V. Patil said in a statement that the public hearing scheduled for Monday has been canceled as all the district officials are busy with the arrangements for this program. Therefore, the Collector advised people not to come to the IDOC office to submit applications.

## A strong foot should be taken against those who cheat innocent farmers and sell fake seeds: District SP Rohit Raj““



“““Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem, June 16 (Indian Chronicle): District SP Rohit Raj said that a strong foot should be taken against those who cheat innocent farmers and sell fake seeds. On Monday, a monthly crime review meeting was held with the district police officers at the conference hall of the district SP office. Speaking to the police officers who participated in the meeting, the SP suggested that the criminals should be punished in every case through 'quality of investigation' and justice should be done to the victims. He suggested that officers and staff should always roam the roads with patrolling and Blue Colts vehicles and be available to the people. He suggested that a special vigil should be established and strict action should be taken against people involved in anti-social activities like ganja, matka, and gambling. He suggested that hot spots should be identified across the district and cases should be registered against people transporting ganja as well as those consuming ganja, and strict action should be taken. He suggested that CCTV cameras should be installed in all places within the jurisdiction of every police station in the district. He said that steps should be taken. He said that people should be made aware of the importance of CCTV cameras and that they should be installed in their residential areas and business complexes. He said that the technology currently used by the police department in property cases should be used to catch the criminals and recover the property and ensure that it is given to the victims as soon as possible. He suggested that a plan should be prepared in advance to alert the people of low-lying areas when heavy rains occur during the rainy season. He suggested that continuous vehicle inspections should be carried out against those who cause road accidents by driving drunk and rashly and strict action should be taken against those caught. He asked that awareness programs be organized to alert the people from time to time so that they do not fall prey to cyber crimes.

He suggested that victims who have lost money in cyber crimes across the district should respond immediately and respond immediately when they complain. He suggested that places where road accidents occur most (black spots) should be identified in each police station area and accident prevention measures should be taken in coordination with the relevant authorities to prevent them. He suggested that coordination with judicial officers for the speedy resolution of pending cases He said that they should work to ensure justice for the victims.Additional SP Operations Narender, Bhadrachalam ASP Vikrant Kumar Singh IPS, Kothagudem DSP Rahman, Palvancha DSP Satish Kumar, Ilandu DSP Chandra Bhanu, Manuguru DSP Ravinder Reddy, DCRB DSP Mallaiah Swamy, and inspectors and staff of the district participated in this meeting.



# "Sundarakanda is a Source of All Prosperity," Declares Shatavadhani Bharat Sharma at TTD-Hosted Discourse“



“June 16 Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema co-ordinator”“Renowned spiritual orator and Shatavadhani, Sri Uppaladhadiyam Bharat Sharma, delivered an insightful discourse on "Sundarakanda - Hanumadvaihavam" (The Glory of Hanuman in the Sundarakanda) here on Monday evening. Hosted by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) under its Hindu dharma prachara parishad, the event at the Annamacharya Kalamandiram drew a devout audi-

ence eager to learn about the epic's deeper meanings."In his address, Sri Sharma declared that the Sundarakanda from the epic Ramayana is a "source of all prosperity" and that with the grace of Lord Hanuman, one can gain the strength to achieve any goal. He delved into the significance of the Sundarakanda, the strategic brilliance of Lord Hanuman, and his unwavering dedication to Lord Rama's mission."“The Ramayana, and specifically the Sundarakanda, is not just an ancient story; it is a guide to righteous living," Sri Sharma stated. "It teaches us about dedication, self-belief, and how to apply these eternal values to navigate the complexities of the modern world. The wisdom of our ancient sages is scientific and offers a timeless roadmap for a blissful life."“Prior to the discourse, Sri Bharat Sharma was formally felicitated with a shawl by Sri Gundala Gopinath Reddy, Chairman of Rayalaseema Rangasthali, in the presence of local artists Sri Teacher Tirumalaiah, Sri Prabhakar Naidu, Sri Subrahmanyam Reddy, and Sri Suresh Swamy."The event was also graced by the presence of Dr. N. Satyanarayana Raju, Director of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, who attended to honor Sharma, a distinguished alumnus of the institution."

# Big twist in Bengaluru Rapido assault case: Woman seen hitting rider first in CCTV footage

GNS News Agency, June 16  
Hyderabad: In a major twist in the Bengaluru Rapido rider assault case, newly emerged CCTV footage reveals a version of events that contradicts the earlier claims made by the woman passenger. The footage shows the woman physically assaulting the Rapido rider first, following an argument between the two. This comes after the woman had initially alleged that she was attacked by the rider. Earlier videos recorded by bystanders—which went viral on social media—showed the rider hitting the woman after a verbal exchange in a public area.

According to reports, the incident occurred on Saturday when the woman, a sales assistant at a jewellery store, was on her way to work. Both the woman and the rider were reportedly taken to the Jayanagar police station following the altercation. The woman told the police that the rider was



reckless, had jumped traffic signals, and that this behavior led to a confrontation which later turned violent.

# Hyderabad residents find hope in social media for retrieving lost items



GNS News Agency, June 16  
Hyderabad: While social media platforms are becoming synonymous with unverified news content and hatred, there is also a positive side to them in the old city. Consider this case: Mohammed Hanzala, a student and resident of Bazar Guard, lost his passport while on his way home from Malakpet after visiting an educational consultancy. "En route, I lost my passport and panicked. Soon, I made a video appealing to citizens to help me trace the passport. The message went viral, and after a few hours, I received a call from Abdul Khader, who handed it over to me," said Hanzala. Khader, a resident of Chanchalguda, found the

passport on Chaderghat Road. "I came across the video on Instagram and contacted Hanzala over the phone. I met the family and handed over the travel document to Hanzala," said Khader. In recent times, several people distressed by losing their documents, mobile phones, and even two-wheelers in public places have found solace when good citizens returned them. "A few days ago, a couple of youngsters found a smartphone lying on Jahanuma Road. They made a video showing the gadget, and as soon as they posted it on social media, the message was amplified. The owner, who was searching for it, viewed the video and retrieved the phone," said Mohd Imran, a resident of Jahanuma.

"Social media helped us track missing documents, phones, and vehicles. Sometimes, we ask people whose children go missing to make a video appeal. Due to social media outreach, people learn about it, and those who find the children reunite them with their parents," said a Sub-Inspector from the Bandlaguda police station. Previously, people had to run around police stations enquiring whether a good Samaritan had found and handed over their documents at the reception counter. "Now, people can make a video and share it on social media to inform about the find. It is advisable for those who find items in public places to take them to the police station to avoid later allegations from the owners," advised the Sub-Inspector.

# Hyderabad hosts first ever Interfaith Pride Fest

GNS News Agency, June 16  
Hyderabad: Hyderabad hosted its first-ever Interfaith Pride Fest at Bagheen Café, bringing together over 200 people from diverse religious, spiritual, and queer communities. The event was not just well-attended but deeply moving, insightful, and celebratory of the intersections between faith, queerness, and identity, Patruni Sastry, Curator, Interfaith Pride Fest, said. The evening opened with a powerful panel featuring Chinmayee, Avijit, and Vaibhav, who spoke about how classical dance has been a spiritual anchor and expression of identity for them, followed by a captivating Odissi drag fusion performance by Khemaya, a trans-woman from Odisha. The event also featured speak-

ers like Anthony for Seeing Yoga, Kiran Raj, a trans man and founder of Star Collective, and Deepti Sirla, who articulated experiences in their respective fields.

The fest featured a marriage panel with Akki and Supriyo, who spoke about their unique rituals in same-sex marriage ceremonies. Performances and talks by Ina, Emma, and Bebo added layers of queer futurism, trans Muslim representation, and the psychological depth of faith-based trauma and healing. The event concluded with a group queer performance by Aaina, Khemaya, Chinmayee, Vaibhav, Avijit, Patruni Sastry. The event was supported by Bagheen Café, Mobbera Foundation, Rubaroo, and Humans of Nirvana.

# Ghaziabad Police arrests pastor for alleged ‘religious conversion’ after Bajrang Dal member’s complaint

GNS News Agency, June 16  
The Ghaziabad Police arrested two men, including a pastor, for allegedly attempting to convert members of the Scheduled Caste (SC) by offering inducements, said officers on Monday. The arrest comes following a complaint by a Bajrang Dal member. According to police, Pastor Vinod hails from Kerala and currently lives in Sahibabad. The other arrested man is Premchand Jatav, a resident of Rahul Vihar in Ghaziabad.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Wave City, Priyashri Pal, said the arrests were made after police received a complaint from one Prabal Gupta at the Crossings Republik police station on Sunday. "Gupta, in his complaint, alleged that he [the pastor] was converting people from SC communities by offering them cash and kind. We have not come to any concrete conclusion yet, but have begun our investigation," ACP Pal told The Indian Express. "We filed a case based on the application under relevant sections and arrested both the accused. Further legal action is being taken and an investigation is underway; legal proceedings will depend on the outcome of evidence collection," the ACP added. Gupta, who said he is a member of the Bajrang Dal, claimed he got information that a 'church' was running illegally inside a house in Rahul Vihar.

Claiming that Pastor Vinod was carrying out religious conversions at Jatav's home, he alleged in his complaint, "Premchand had converted to Christianity several years ago and used to host weekly Sunday prayer meetings at



his home and carry out conversions. These meetings served as a platform for the pastor to approach other individuals and persuade them to change their religion. Gupta also alleged that when Bajrang Dal members opposed it, they were attacked. When The Indian Express visited Rahul Vihar on Monday, the single-storey house, where Gupta alleged religious conversion was taking place, was closed and its gates were damaged. Satish Anand, 54, a neighbour, said Jatav built this house nearly 30 years ago. "It is not true that he was converting people," he said. "He used to hold prayers on Sunday, and people from Rahul Vihar and Buddh Vihar used to attend it. But he never asked anyone to convert," added Anand, who runs an eatery in the area. "He owned a dairy and supplied buffalo milk in the area," said another resident.

# Monsoon adventure tourism: Maharashtra mountaineering federation releases list of dos and don'ts



GNS News Agency, June 16  
The Akhil Maharashtra Giriyarohan Mahasangh (AMGM), the apex organisation for mountaineering in Maharashtra, has appealed to tourists and trekkers to exercise caution while exploring the Sahyadri mountains during the monsoon. "Trails in the Sahyadris become slippery due to rainfall. Dense fog and overgrown grass often lead to disorientation; heavy rain on the hilltops causes streams and waterfalls to swell rapidly, and sudden cloudbursts can result in flash floods," Umesh Zirpre, President, AMGM, said.

There is also the risk of landslides and falling rocks,

especially around fort walls and cliffs, Zirpre said, adding that monsoon treks and adventures must be undertaken with utmost care and preparedness. "There has been a noticeable rise in accidents during monsoon treks in the Sahyadris. Many individuals attempt to take selfies at dangerous spots like cliffs, fort bastions, and slippery edges. Others venture under gushing waterfalls or explore unfamiliar and remote locations, often resulting in serious accidents or fatalities," he further said.

To promote safe monsoon tourism, the AMGM has also released a set of safety guidelines and protocols. It said the number of people in a trek should be limited and manageable. The location, duration, and information related to the trek should be shared with family/friends. Also, first-aid kits should be readily available. Carrying a walking stick has been recommended, as it eases the climb and descent during trekking. "Avoid taking photos in risky or dangerous places, in case of lightning stay in a dry and safe place, do not wait in an open or wet space, avoid places with high water flow as there's a possibility of rockfall. In case of any unfortunate occurrence, one can call the 24/7 helpline number 7620 230 231," the guidelines stated. "While the Sahyadris offer countless opportunities for adventure, one should avoid taking unnecessary risks. It is strongly advised not to venture alone, regardless of the season," Zirpre concluded.

# Akbarpur bus stand renamed as Shravan Dham bus stand: CM

GNS News Agency, June 16  
Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday announced the renaming of the Akbarpur bus stand in Ambedkar Nagar to 'Shravan Dham bus stand', pointing out that the move is a "tribute to the cultural and mythological legacy of Shravan Kumar from the Ramayana". Adityanath made the announcement during his visit to the district, where he inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of 194 development projects worth Rs 1,184 crore. The event marked the inauguration of 102 projects and laying of the foundation stone for 92 schemes.

The CM also said that the Tanda bus stand would now be known as 'Jairam Verma bus stand', in honour of the late Jairam Verma. He emphasised the government's commitment to developing Shravan Dham as a religious and cultural tourism destination, highlighting its ancient legacy. He also reiterated the state's focus on promoting tourism in Shiv Baba Dham, where he offered prayers for the happiness and prosperity of the people before the public event. He noted that several development works in Shiv Baba Dham have been completed, with the remaining progressing rapidly. During the programme, the CM said Rs 561.86 crore has been disbursed to 11,690 farmer families across the state under the Mukhyamantri Krishak Durghatna Kalyan Yojana, including 431 families from Ambedkar Nagar alone. The scheme extends benefits to farmers, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers, and their families. He added that financial assistance ranging between Rs 500 crore to Rs 1,050 crore has been allocated for this initiative from the 2020-21 financial year to 2025-26. "There is no dearth of funds," the Chief Minister said, "and we are conducting camps in every tehsil to ensure that disaster-affected farmer families receive prompt relief." The 194 projects included departments, including 14 projects of the Public Works Department, 72 under the Jal Jeevan Mission, 4 by the Elec-



tricity Department, 6 related to law and order/security, and 13 tube well projects.

Appointment letters were also distributed on the occasion to the newly recruited doctors, ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, ANMs and other personnel. Adityanath hit out at those indulging in "family-centric" politics. He accused them of exploiting caste for personal political gain, using divisive tactics and attempting to dampen the public's enthusiasm. The CM remarked that Uttar Pradesh has shed its earlier tag of a 'Bimaru' state and emerged as one of India's leading economies. He highlighted the transformative development taking place in Ambedkar Nagar — such as the construction of a medical college, polytechnic, and tourism infrastructure — which is helping redefine the district's identity.

Expressing gratitude to the people of the Katehari Assembly constituency where bypolls were held recently, Adityanath said that by electing Dharmaraj Nishad as their MLA, they have made a significant contribution to the region's development. He added that markets with populations between 20,000 and 25,000 can be upgraded to Nagar Panchayats if they meet the required criteria.

# Tribal women's societies are responsible for maintaining sand ramps. ITDA PO Rahul Shaik Sharief, Bhadrachalam,

June 16 (Indian Chronicle): ITDA PO Rahul said that under the auspices of ITDA and the State Mineral Development Corporation, tribal women should be given industrial support, and tribal women should run their own sand ramps and increase their livelihood, and the responsibility of managing them will be entrusted to them. The PO spoke at a meeting held with women's societies at the ITDA conference hall on Monday.

He said that tribal women running sand ramps under ITDA limits should not trust contractors and benamis and entrust them with the management of sand ramps but should unite and take responsibility for sand extraction and management in Godavari at the production level so that the societies in the respective villages within the agency area can run their own sand ramps and thereby increase their livelihood. Under the pilot project, two societies have been selected and provided financial assistance of Rs. 50 lakh each. With the help of the authorities, a sand stock point will be identified in Godavari, and tippers, planning machines, and dozers will be rented. How many cubic meters of sand



will be transported by tippers from the point where the sand is moved to the stock point... The women of the sand society should be fully responsible for their management from the point where the sand is moved to the stock point. They asked the tribal women about the problems there and gave much advice and many suggestions. PISA Special Officer Manidhar, Mineral Development Corporation Project Manager Shankar Nayak, and women of the societies participated in this program."



# UP woman killed by father, brother due to shame over her extramarital relationship: Police

GNS News Agency, June 16


The Muzaffarnagar police in Uttar Pradesh have arrested the father and brother of a 23-year-old woman for allegedly strangling her and burning her body after pouring petrol over it, said officers Monday. A probe has revealed that the accused killed the woman because they were ashamed of her extramarital relationship. According to the police, on June 3, half-burnt body of a woman was found in the jungle of the Katia village under the limits of the Kakrouli police station in Muzaffarnagar. "Her body was found in a field nearby, then the owner of the field called and informed us about it," Joginder Singh, Station House Officer, Kakrouli, told "Once we sent her body for the postmortem, we tried to identify her. The body was completely burnt. A silver bracelet on her hand was our only clue. We first took a close photo of it (bracelet) and then started looking for missing women around the village," SHO Singh said. "When we moved around the village, we learned that one woman named Saraswati had been missing. Because of continuous disputes in her marriage, the girl was known in the village, and some people told us that they had not been seeing her," said SHO Singh.

"We searched Instagram and started going through her profile. We saw the same bracelet in her pictures, and then after confirming her identity, we took her father, Rajvir Singh, 55, a labourer, and brother, Sumit, 24, a truck driver, into police custody," said a police officer. Sanjay Verma, Senior Superintendent of Police, said, "They admitted to killing Saraswati on the intervening night of 29 and 30 May and later throwing her body in the jungle and burning it by pouring petrol." According to the police, during the initial interrogation, the father and brother said they were ashamed because of the woman's extramarital relationship with a

man, identified as Amit, and her habit of constantly leaving the house to stay with him. They allegedly told the police that they married her off to a man in the Morna village of Muzaffarnagar in 2019. However, after two years of marriage, Saraswati returned to their home. A year later, in 2022, they married her off to another man in Shamli, but she returned home after a year, the police said based on their interrogation of the accused.

"She was a graduate. Both Amit and Saraswati started working as Blinkit delivery agents in Gurgaon in 2022," the SHO said. On May 10, Saraswati returned to her village to convince her parents about her marriage to Amit for the last time, the police said. The SHO said they questioned Amit as well and he said he last heard from her on May 26. "She told me that it was the last time that she would try to convince her family, if they did not, then we would not get married without their consent," Amit told the police. Narrating the incidents on the day of the crime, Saraswati's father and brother told the police that on the intervening night of May 29 and 30, Saraswati was leaving the house after packing her things. "We tried to stop and convince her but she did not agree. Due to her leaving the house repeatedly, our respect in the society was getting hurt. We were ashamed of it, so we, along with our friend, truck cleaner Hardayal, killed her by strangling her," the accused was quoted as saying by the police. "We then took her body 5 km away and threw it on the bank of a canal in the jungle of the village and then burned the body by pouring petrol on it to hide her identity and we came home," the accused allegedly told the police. SHO Singh said the police will soon arrest the third accused, Hardayal. They filed an FIR for murder and tampering of evidence Sunday on the basis of the complaint received from the village chowkidar, he said.

# How an informant's call ended 6-month manhunt in Bopdev Ghat gangrape case



GNS News Agency, June 16

On April 26, the Walchandnagar police in the Pune district got a call from an informant they had been longing for some time. That tip-off led to a quick operation and the arrest of the third accused in the 2024 Bopdev Ghat gangrape case after a six-month search. Suraj Dashrath Gosavi alias Bapya, 33, was arrested from a bus stand in the Akluj town of the Solapur district. A 21-year-old woman and her male friend, both college students and not natives of Pune, went to the Bopdev Ghat area on a motorcycle on the night of October 3 last year. Around 11 pm, three men came to the spot on their bikes and allegedly threatened them with sharp weapons and robbed their valuables. The accused allegedly tied the woman's male friend with his shirt and belt, dragged her to an isolated area and raped her.

The Bopdev Ghat gangrape case sparked significant public outrage. An extensive manhunt initiated by the crime branch of the Pune city police resulted in the arrest of two accused within days of the crime. Chandrakumar Raviprasad Kanogiya, 20, a native of Dindori in Madhya Pradesh (MP), was arrested on October 10, and Akhtar Babu Shaikh, 27, alias Shoaib, was arrested from Prayagraj on October 14. The police then said Shaikh was the mastermind of the crime. However, the third accused, Gosavi, continued to evade capture and remained at large for several months. Investigations revealed that he had stopped

using his cell phone and did not visit his wife, family, or friends. Multiple investigation teams worked on leads. The accused already arrested by Pune city police allegedly gave a false name to mislead the investigation. The two initially told the police that the name of the third accused was Somnath Yadav. However, a probe ascertained his name as Suraj Dashrath Gosavi alias Bapya. An officer from Pune rural police said, "The last known residence of Gosavi was in the jurisdiction of Walchandnagar police station in Pune rural jurisdiction. While the Pune city crime branch continued their probe, a team from the Pune rural police was also looking for Gosavi, since he was accused in a very sensitive case." The team led by Assistant Inspector Rajkumar Dunage of the Walchandnagar police station patiently cultivated confidential informants to keep a tab on the movement of Gosavi. The patient work finally paid off on April 26. One of these confidential informants had called a team member from Walchandnagar police station. At the time, the team was investigating an unrelated murder case and was on the road for investigation," said the officer. The officer added, "The informant said, 'He (Gosavi) is right in front of me'. As the informant was asked to keep track of his movements, some members of the team probing the unrelated murder case were sent to the location where he was seen. Minutes later, the informant said that Bapya had gotten into the cabin of a water tanker and was on the move. We asked the informant to follow the tanker. Sometime later, our team also started tailing him. When he got down at the bus stand in the Akluj town in the Solapur district, he was detained by the team. He was subsequently handed over to the crime branch of the Pune city police for further probe." Investigation revealed while he was evading arrest, Gosavi changed his location and worked as a labourer at several places to earn money. After his arrest, Gosavi was remanded in police custody. He is currently in judicial remand in jail pending a trial against the trio.

# Mumbai's water stock set to last for 39 days, BMC says no water cut amid good rainfall forecasts

GNS News Agency, June 16

Although the monsoon has begun in Maharashtra, the catchment areas of the seven lakes that supply water to Mumbai are expected to receive significant rainfall. According to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) data, the combined water stock in all the seven lakes stands at 1,50,728 million litres, which is 10.41 per cent of the total 14,47,363 million litres of water that the seven lakes hold. The BMC supplies approximately 3,850 million litres of water daily (MLD). Therefore, the current water stock is expected to last for approximately 39 days, while the overall supply is estimated to last around 375 days. However, due to incidents of leakage and pipeline bursts, a significant amount of water is wasted each year.

Meanwhile, civic officials said no water cut is in the pipeline. "There is no decision for imposing any water cut yet. We (BMC) are in constant contact with the weather bureau, which has predicted good rainfall in the catchment areas starting in mid-June. Therefore, we are confident that the catchment areas will replenish once the rain picks up. In addition to this, around 5.79 million litres of water was given to the BMC by the state government for reserve stock in case the rains delay any further," an official told the Indian Express Monday. Being an island city, Mumbai draws its water from seven lakes—Tulsi, Vihar, Bhatsa, Tansa, Upper Vaitarna, Middle Vaitarna, and Modak Sagar. While two of these lakes are located within Mumbai, the rest are in the neighbouring districts of Thane, Palghar and Nashik. The catchment area of these lakes gets filled during the monsoon, and the water is transported through tunnels to the BMC's filtration plant. After filtration, water is supplied to



every household and commercial establishment through pipelines and reservoirs. The civic body's data shows that last year, on June 9, Mumbai's water stock stood at 5.95 per cent, while in 2023, the stocks stood at 10.63 per cent on the same day. Monsoon onset typically occurred between June 15 and 25 in the last two years, following which rainfall in the catchment areas increased only during the middle of July. Civic officials said that by the end of August or the first week of September, all seven lakes will reach their 100 per cent capacity. The BMC's data also shows that in the last 24 hours, only the catchment areas of Modak Sagar and Tansa lakes received a good amount of rainfall, with daily amounts of 1 and 2 mm, respectively. Meanwhile, to date, since the monsoon onset took place, the highest quantum of rainfall has been recorded at Bhatsa lake at 132 mm, followed by 125 mm at Tulsi lake, 54 mm at Middle Vaitarna, 49 mm at Vihar, 40 mm at Modak Sagar, 35 mm at Tansa and 17 mm at Upper Vaitarna.

# 'Children should speak freely, we get to learn from them': West Bengal Minister Shashi Panja urges parents and teachers



GNS News Agency, June 16

Child Protection Day West Bengal, Shashi Panja child welfare speech, West Bengal child rights event, Rabindra Sadan child protection, Shashi was speaking at an event to held to celebrate Child Protection Day by the West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights at Kolkata's Rabindra Sadan. "Children should be able to speak freely. The more they speak, the more they will make mistakes and learn. We, as elders, also get to learn from them," said Shashi Panja, West Bengal Minister of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare on Monday. She was speaking at an event held to celebrate Child Protection Day. The event was organised by the West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights at Kolkata's Rabindra Sadan. "We should create a safe space for (children) to share things with us. This led us to deciding this year's theme. Our Chief Minister has decided upon June 9 to commemorate the occasion of Child Protection Day", said Panja. She thanked UNICEF for their active involvement in working for the welfare of children.

Panja also highlighted the importance of creativity. "Creativity is one of the most important things – the ability to bring together your thoughts and channelize them through different media, be it theatre, art, journalism, or any other medium is very important," Panja added. Child Protection Day is observed annually on June 1, highlighting UNICEF's mission of protecting vulnerable children from abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking.

An official emphasised this year's theme by stating that according to reports, children and elderly people both have been observed to spend more time on their electronic gadgets rather than talking about their feelings or issues. "Only two percent of children in Bengal tend to share their happy moments and problems with their parents. We have been working with different consultants about mental health throughout the year and we try to understand the emotional state of children," said Tulika Das, Chairperson,

West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights. She requested all the parents, teachers and others present to give more importance to their child's mental health. The Special Guest for the day was Sanghamitra Ghosh, Principal Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare. The event was attended by over 400 students, teachers and officials from schools and NGOs across Bengal. The event saw the felicitation of various policemen for their dedication and work towards the rights and safety of children. This was followed by a series of performances by the students.

# Proposal to include Tumakuru under Greater Bengaluru Authority soon: Karnataka Home Minister

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said Monday that a proposal will be submitted soon to the government to include Tumakuru under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA).

While speaking to reporters, Parameshwara pointed out that Tumakuru, which is around 70 km from Bengaluru, was growing rapidly. "There is an industrial hub (at Tumakuru) in an area of 20,000 acre. Many are demanding that Tumakuru be expanded like Bengaluru. A study is being conducted on the issue," he said. "In the manner in which Ramanagar is renamed Bengaluru South, if Tumakuru is included in Greater Bengaluru, it will benefit us in terms of development. We will submit a proposal regarding the same," Parameshwara, who is also in-charge minister for the Tumakuru district, said. The proposal came amidst demands to extend the Bengaluru Metro services to Tumakuru to boost connectivity between the two cities.

The minister said the Karnataka government will take a call on extending Metro services to Tumakuru. "Union Minister V Somanna has said that Tumakuru requires metro connectivity. Let there be both Metro and suburban rail connectivity," he said.

The Greater Bengaluru Authority was notified by the Karnataka Government last month after the GBA Act was passed in the Budget Session of the Assembly. The Act provided for the expansion of Bengaluru by including panchayats from areas neighbouring the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). Multiple city corporations under GBA are also possible under the provisions of the Bill.

# Three new projects to bring Katra, Dehradun closer to Delhi

GNS News Agency, June 16

The Centre has approved three major infrastructure projects worth Rs 14,850 crore that will improve travel to the National Capital Region and cut down the time taken for Delhiites to reach destinations like Katra and Dehradun. The upcoming projects will decongest major stretches in South East, South West and East Delhi, like the Barapullah flyover, Ring Road, and Outer Ring Road (ORR), besides other internal roads, and connect areas like Dwarka, ORR, Sarai Kale Khan, Kalindi Kunj and other key arterial stretches to Noida, Ghaziabad, Faridabad and Gurgaon.

Under one of the three mega infrastructure projects, the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra National Expressway (NE-5) will be extended from Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway to Urban Extension Road (UER)-II (NH-344M) in Delhi and Haryana. The 20-km stretch will provide Expressway connectivity through UER-II, Dwarka Expressway, and Delhi-Mumbai Expressway to traffic from Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, and Punjab transiting towards Central and Western India. The extension is expected to cost Rs 4,000 crore, said an official. "This stretch will provide direct connectivity to traffic headed to Delhi, Gurgaon and IGI Airport from the Delhi-Katra expressway through UER-II and Dwarka Expressway. The highway will provide alternative connectivity for UER-II with the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway," said a senior official. Festive offer Extension of Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway Extension of Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway Officials said that work has been awarded for the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR). Once it is approved, tendering process for the civil works will begin. After the completion of this highway, the Delhi-Katra Expressway may also serve as an alternative route to NH-44, officials said, adding that this will also divert vehicles from other states and curb vehicular pollution in Delhi. With this, people living border or outer parts of the city can reach the airport quickly. The UER-II – also known as the third Ring Road of Delhi – near Alipur will be extended till the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway (NH-709B) near Tronica City in Ghaziabad, said officials. The 17-km-long extension is expected to cost Rs 3,350 crore. "This will also act as a bypass to NH-44, and Delhi Outer and Inner Ring Roads, as traffic destined to move to North, North West, West and South Delhi and Gurgaon will travel through UER-II and Gurgaon and Dwarka Expressway to reach their destinations, thereby decongesting Delhi," said a senior official. Officials added that connecting UER-II to the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway will also decongest the Capital by diverting long-distance and freight traffic away from central roads, easing pressure on NH-48, NH-44, and ring roads, along with the Barapullah drain elevated corridor. "It will provide faster connectivity to traffic from Haryana and Rajasthan, destined to move towards Dehradun... Currently, the bids for DPR consultants are under evaluation and will likely be awarded this week," said officials. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) also has plans to extend the Eastern part of UER-II from Delhi-Dehradun Expressway to Noida via Ghaziabad and Faridabad. The 65-km extension is set to cost Rs 7,500 crore. This highway will connect major roads such as the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway, Delhi-Meerut Expressway, Noida-Greater Noida Expressway, DND-Faridabad highway and Yamuna Expressway. It will also boost connectivity to towns such as Loni, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Noida, and Faridabad with North, North West, West and South West Delhi. Officials said the stretch will also help decongest Delhi's internal roads, including the ORR, Sarai Kale Khan section of the Delhi-Meerut Expressway and Kalindi Kunj, by providing a high-speed alternative route for intercity and freight traffic, bypassing the city centre. "Currently, bids for preparation of the DPR are under evaluation and will likely be awarded by June 20 this year," said officials. The projects, to be executed by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), were also discussed in a meeting held last week between the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, and L-G Vinai Kumar Saxena.



# Supreme Court grants interim protection from arrest to journalists who alleged assault by MP Police

GNS News Agency, June 16

Chouhan and Jatav have alleged that they were "invited" to have a cup of tea with Asit Yadav, Superintendent of Police, Bhind, at his chambers, where "they were physically assaulted and battered by (the SP)...and his subordinates." Chouhan and Jatav have alleged that they were "invited" to have a cup of tea with Asit Yadav, Superintendent of Police, Bhind, at his chambers, where "they were physically assaulted and battered by (the SP)...and his subordinates." The Supreme Court Monday asked two journalists from Madhya Pradesh's Bhind, who have accused the MP Police, and especially the Bhind superintendent of police, of assaulting, harassing, and stripping them, to approach the High Court while granting them interim protection from arrest until the HC considers their case.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Manmohan told the counsels of Shashikant Jatav and Amarkant Singh Chouhan that it was not inclined to entertain their petition under Article 32. However, the bench directed two journalists to approach the Madhya Pradesh High Court and granted them two weeks to move the lower court. Jatav and Chouhan sought a direction from the Supreme Court to the MP Police against taking any coercive action against them. In their plea, they also sought protection for themselves. Highlighting that they fear for their lives, they have alleged that they are facing the police's ire over their reporting on the alleged corruption involving sand mining. On May 28, the Delhi High Court granted Delhi Police protection to Chouhan. This protection continues, but will remain within the jurisdiction of Delhi. Jatav too has a petition pending before the Delhi HC seeking police protection, which is yet to be taken up, and has been renitified for consideration on July 14. Chouhan and Jatav had fled to Delhi on May 19 after allegedly facing harassment from the MP Police, and had thereafter filed complaints with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the Press Council of India (PCI). Further impressing on the threat from the state police, the journalists informed the top court that



on May 28, when Chouhan's petition was being heard, the Bhind police were camping outside the Delhi High Court campus. Chouhan and Jatav have alleged that they were "invited" to have a cup of tea with Asit Yadav, Superintendent of Police, Bhind, at his chambers, where "they were physically assaulted and battered by (the SP)...and his subordinates." They claimed that more than half a dozen other journalists were also present at Yadav's chamber, who had all been stripped down to their undergarments before being physically assaulted and battered before their arrival. "SP Asit Yadav was displeased about the extensive reporting about the illegal sand mining activities in the Chambal River that are carried out by the sand mafia in connivance with the local police," they said. Chouhan and Jatav said were on their way from Gwalior to Delhi to meet Bharatiya Janata party leader and Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and "apprise him of their plight" on May 4, when they were "picked up by one Saurabh Sharma, another journalist, on the pretext of going to Delhi by road". They were allegedly taken to a nearby roadside eatery where some police officers were waiting. The police officers took the two journalists to Yadav's bungalow to work out a 'compromise', warned them against pursuing the matter of being assaulted by Bhind police officers on May 1, and told them to drop the charges.



## Bengaluru stampede: CM Siddaramaiah says he gave nod for RCB felicitation at Vidhana Soudha, denies links to stadium event



GNS News Agency, June 16

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who is in the eye of a storm over the June 4 stampede outside the M Chinnaswamy cricket stadium in Bengaluru that killed 11 people, has distanced himself from the celebrations held at the stadium following the IPL championship victory of the Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB). The Congress leader, however, acknowledged on Sunday that he had approved a felicitation for the cricket team on the portals of the Vidhana Soudha, the state government headquarters, and attended the event on the invitation of the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA).

Speaking in Mysuru, Siddaramaiah indicated that KSCA officials approached the state Department of Personnel and Administration (DPAR) for permission to conduct an event at which Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar would felicitate the RCB players at the Vidhana Soudha. "The DPAR secretary was apprised of this, and granted permission. Of course, I was informed, and I said 'Give permission for the event at the Vidhana Soudha steps'. Has there been any incident on the steps of the Vidhana Soudha? Even the Governor of Karnataka attended the programme on the steps of the Vidhana Soudha," Siddaramaiah said. The Congress government, which is facing a suo motu case taken up by the Karnataka High Court over the 11 deaths in the stampede, has ordered a judicial inquiry, a magisterial inquiry, and a probe by the state CID into the incident.

"Nothing untoward happened at the Vidhana Soudha. The incidents happened at the stadium. Who arranged the programme at the stadium?" he asked. "In regular course, they informed the DPAR secretary. I was informed by the chief secretary. She said, 'Let us do it'. She said the police had agreed and I said, 'Let us do it'. The KSCA secretary and treasurer came and invited me for the event. It was not a function organised by us but by them. They said the Governor has also been invited. So, I went to the event. I do not

know beyond this. I was not invited to the event at the stadium." He further added, "The KSCA event was the responsibility of the police and the KSCA. The suspension of police officers was because they did not make proper arrangements. What has Sathyavathi (IAS officer and DPAR secretary) done wrong? Nothing happened at the Vidhana Soudha event."

"This incident should not have happened. After I became the chief minister, no such incident had occurred. Prima facie, it is evident that this incident happened due to the mistakes of officials. We have taken action," he said, adding, "I have been pained by the incident. All are pained... The whole government is pained by the incident." Siddaramaiah rejected the argument that the organisation of two back-to-back events — one at the Vidhana Soudha and the second at the Chinnaswamy stadium located within one km of each other — caused the stampede, and suggested that the Bengaluru police displayed "dereliction of duty" in making arrangements for the stadium event. The Congress leader said, "The question of the two events is different. The decision was to have the event outside the Vidhana Soudha, but the police made mistakes with respect to the other event (at the stadium). Who has to inform me about the bandobast for the events? It is the police. When we say the police, who does it imply in Bengaluru? It is the police commissioner. Did the police commissioner inform me about the arrangements?" "The police have to inform the head of the government. The police have to say whether proper arrangements have been made in terms of security. They did not inform me. Is it not a serious thing?" the chief minister added.

Regarding allegations by the Opposition, he said, "We have not sacrificed the police commissioner. Five people have been suspended. The intelligence chief has been transferred. My political secretary Govindaraju has been removed. We have taken a series of actions." Govindaraju is an MLC and sports administrator who reportedly influenced the decision-making with respect to the RCB victory celebrations. Siddaramaiah said, "Why should the government be embarrassed when it has not committed a mistake? We have acted against those who committed errors. Did they provide resignations for the Kumbh Mela stampede tragedy, or when a bridge fell down a day after it was inaugurated? In the Kumbh Mela tragedy, over 50 people died, did anyone resign for it?" Meanwhile, the Karnataka High Court has posed nine questions to the government over the matter, and has sought its answers by Tuesday. Among other queries, it has asked: "When and who (took) the decision to hold the victory celebration and in what manner?"

## After Zepto in Mumbai, Blinkit in Pune faces action; FDA orders closure of dark store at Baner-Balewadi

GNS News Agency, June 16

The Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last week ordered the closure of a dark store associated with quick grocery delivery service Blinkit. Sources said several issues were identified, including poor cleanliness and improper cold storage. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons) The Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last week ordered the closure of a dark store associated with quick grocery delivery service Blinkit in Pune's Baner-Balewadi area for allegedly operating without a licence.

Suresh Annapure, Joint Commissioner, FDA, Pune, told The Indian Express that the action was taken on June 5 when an inspection team found improper storage conditions at the facility run by Energy Darkstore Services, one of Blinkit's last-mile warehousing and partners. "We have asked for proper documents to be submitted to issue a licence. There are non-compliance issues, and without permission, they have been operating the store in the Baner-Balewadi area," Annapure said. Sources said several issues were identified, including poor cleanliness and improper cold storage. Food Safety Officer Laxmikant Sawale said the action was taken after the raid revealed a lack of compliance with Schedule 4 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, which details the general hygienic and sanitary practices that food business operators must adhere to. "We have directed them to submit a compliance report and then there will be a re-inspection," Annapure said. The FDA's action is part of its ongoing crackdown on unsafe food storage practices across the state. Earlier this month, it sus-



pending the food business licence of quick-commerce firm Zepto's parent company Kiranakart Technologies due to lapses found at its dark store in Mumbai's Dharavi. The inspection was conducted by Food Safety Officer Ram Bodke, following instructions from Minister of State for FDA Yogesh Kadam and under the supervision of Mangesh Mane, Joint Commissioner of Food.

The investigation revealed numerous violations of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, as well as the related licensing regulations, according to the FDA. Visible fungal growth on food items, stagnant and clogged water near storage areas, which indicated poor sanitation, improper cold storage with temperatures not maintained as per norms, and wet, unclean floors and food products stored haphazardly, including directly on the ground, were some of the findings of the regulator.

## 'If strictly veg, why order from non-veg restaurant?': Consumer forum dismisses Dadar couple's complaint over chicken momos

GNS News Agency, June 16

The Commission said no evidence was produced to show that the couple had ordered vegetarian momos, and the photographs they submitted as evidence did not indicate what kind of momos were delivered. The Commission said no evidence was produced to show that the couple had ordered vegetarian momos, and the photographs they submitted as evidence did not indicate what kind of momos were delivered. The Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission in Mumbai has dismissed a complaint seeking compensation for the delivery of chicken momos to a couple who allegedly ordered the vegetarian version of the snack, observing that if they were "strictly vegetarian", they need not have ordered food from a restaurant that also delivers non-vegetarian meals. The Commission added that the complainants failed to provide proof that they had ordered vegetarian momos and pointed out that the offer mentioned both "veg-non-veg". "If the complainants were strictly vegetarian and the non-veg food hurts their religious sentiments, then why they opted for order from a restaurant which was delivering both non-veg and vegetarian food instead of ordering the food from a restaurant which was exclusively vegetarian and served only and only vegetarian food," the bench comprising president Pradeep Kadu and member Gauri Kapse said in the order on May 13. The couple from Dadar had approached the Commission in the district in 2020, stating that while they had ordered a 'Steam Darjeeling Momo Combo' from the outlet Wow Momos, and had specified their preference for vegetarian food, they were served chicken momos. They had paid Rs 120 for the combo, which included an aerated beverage, and sought compensation for the "mental trauma" and "emotional distress", as their



religious feelings were hurt, alleging negligence by the eatery. Wow Momos denied the allegations and said the couple had ordered a non-vegetarian combo, as is evident from their order invoice. They were also given a refund, which they had accepted, and hence they do not fall under the definition of 'consumer' under the Consumer Protection Act, it was submitted on behalf of the firm. The Commission said no evidence was produced to show that the couple had ordered vegetarian momos, and the photographs they submitted as evidence did not indicate what kind of momos were delivered. "If non-veg order had been delivered to the complainants instead of veg order, then it ought to have contained only non-veg pieces. A prudent person would be able to distinguish between veg and non-veg food before consuming it... The complainants have produced a photo of the offer board which did not clearly indicate whether the Steam Darjeeling Momos were veg or non-veg," the bench said. "However, the board did mention 'veg-non-veg', at the bottom suggesting that the restaurant did provide some indication of the food type."

## 'MO directorate advised Gen Vaidya not to use Army for operation in Golden Temple'



GNS News Agency, June 16

The 95-year-old General VN Sharma was serving as Additional Director General Military Operations (ADGMO) in the Military Operations (MO) directorate at the time Op Blue Star was launched. (File Photo) The 95-year-old General VN Sharma was serving as Additional Director General Military Operations (ADGMO) in the Military Operations (MO) directorate at the time Op Blue Star was launched. Former Army Chief General VN Sharma (ret'd) has made a startling revelation that the Military Operations Directorate had advised the then Army Chief General AS Vaidya that the Indian Army should not get involved in any operation to flush out Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his supporters from the Golden Temple as it was a political move.

General VN Sharma has made this statement in the course of an interview to a former Judge Advocate General of the Army, Maj Gen Nilendra Kumar, on a YouTube channel-Lex Consilium Foundation. The interview was uploaded on the channel on June 5, a day ahead of the 41st anniversary of Operation Blue Star and has generated considerable number of views and comments. The 95-year-old General VN Sharma was serving as Additional Director General Military Operations (ADGMO) in the Military Operations (MO) directorate at the time Op Blue Star was launched. Lt Gen CN Somanna was the Director General Military Operations (DGMO) at the time while Maj Gen (later Lt Gen) VK Nayar was the other Additional Director General Military Operations in the directorate. Both, Somanna and Nayar have passed away many years back. Gen Sharma says in the interview that the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wanted the Army to carry out the operation inside Golden Temple because the Punjab Police had refused to do so. "Arun Vaidya was called to the Prime Minister's Office and was told that Bhindranwale had to be removed because he was getting too big for his boots, he doesn't listen to anyone so take the Army in. General Vaidya said okay," Gen Sharma recalls. He says the Army Chief then arrived at the MO directorate and spoke to the DGMO and the two ADGMOs regarding the task to be done. "We suggested to him that this was not a correct employment of the Indian Army. We explained that according to the Constitution the Indian Army cannot be used for political purposes by any government," said Gen Sharma.

He goes on to say that the then PM wanted the Army to do the task because the police had refused. "So we told General Vaidya that it was not politically expedient because we cannot use the military for political purposes. She did a political stunt to put Bhindranwale there and now she was doing another political stunt to remove him by force using the Army since the police has refused," says General Sharma in the interview. General Sharma goes on to say that the Army Chief General Vaidya was told my the three senior-most MO directorate officers that some other force like BSF, CRPF should be used and the Army should not intervene. "He said she is the boss and when the boss says to jump you have to jump. We said no. You are a constitutional authority, the Army Chief, you have to ensure that the constitution is not violated. One option is to go to the Supreme Court and ask them as to whether this is legal or not legal. He said what do you expect me to do. We suggested that he go to her and tell her that it is not Army's job," said General Sharma. The former Army Chief then goes on to say that General Vaidya went back to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and told her the view of the MO Directorate. He said that the PM then decided to approach the Western Army Commander Lt Gen K Sundarji directly in order to get the operation conducted since the Chief was reluctant. "Vaidya's office told Sundarji to go meet the Prime Minister. He (Vaidya) came back to the MO directorate and told this has happened. We said sir 'maaf karo' you have no business to allow an Army Commander to go directly to the Prime Minister," he said.

General Sharma said the MO directorate was in touch with the staff of the Prime Minister's Office and came to know that General Sundarji had been asked to conduct the operation. "When he (Sundarji) came out of there we rang him up and said that you may like to step into the MO directorate and discuss this issue with us. He said I am not interested in you people, I have got my orders and I am going to do it," said General Sharma. The former Army Chief further says that the decision to use 9 Infantry Division, headquartered in Meerut was that of General Sundarji himself and not the MO directorate. He added that Sundarji's first choice was to approach GOC 15 Division (Maj Gen Jamwal) to do the task but he refused. "Sundarji asked him to produce a battalion of infantry and some support some tanks or something to take on this job, he refused. He said it was a political situation and not for Army to get intervened," said General Sharma. He says General Sundarji thereafter chose 9 Division commanded by Major General KS Brar and that one of the reasons was that he wanted Sikhs conducting Operation Blue Star and taking part in actual action on ground. During the course of the interview General Sharma also holds forth on the ethos of Indian Army training and obeying a lawful command. "The Indian Army officers training during command is to be an independent officer. If you find something wrong don't do it. It is not a question of disobedience of orders. It is a question of obeying orders despite their better sense, because they are yes men and they want their promotion," he said.

## Woman sues car firm, dealership for not transferring old car ownership; seeks vehicle court custody

GNS News Agency, June 16

A woman has filed a civil suit against Maruti Suzuki and one of its dealerships in Chandigarh for refusing to transfer the ownership of her old car and allowing a third person to have control of the vehicle without getting it noted in the name of the new owner. The suit has been filed by Kulpreet Kaur against Maruti Suzuki India Limited and Autopace Network Private Limited (car dealership) in the district court in Chandigarh. Meanwhile, the Registration and Licensing Authority (RLA), Chandigarh and the principal secretary (Transport), Himachal Pradesh, have also been made respondents in the case. Through her counsel, advocate Ajay Pal Singh, Kaur said she purchased a brand-new car from Autopace Network — a Maruti Suzuki Fronx — and before the purchase, Maruti Suzuki and the dealership, promised her that she would be compensated suitably in case she chose to return her earlier car, Hyundai i10, while buying the new vehicle from the showroom. The applicant said the dealership assured her a handsome amount would be paid to her in the form of "suitable adjustments" in the total value of the new car she was buying, in case she handed over the keys of her old vehicle. Kaur said she exchanged her old car to the dealership, for which the company and dealership gave a decent incentive by adjusting the value of the used car from the total value of the car that she was purchasing.

However, the applicant's counsel argued that she was running from pillar to post to find out if, as promised, her old car had been transferred in the name of the new purchaser. However, she found out that the used car has not so far been transferred, and is lying at an undisclosed place, but in her name on paper. On following up with the



company and dealership, she was informed her car was handed over to a local car dealer — Jainendra Bhalla of Sector 47, Chandigarh, and he further sold the vehicle to some unknown person. Kaur said that despite her repeated requests, Bhalla has not given any assurance that he will get the vehicle transferred in the name of the new purchaser. As per advocate Singh, that vehicle in the name of Kaur on the road is not under her control. Kaur said she has written to Maruti Nexa, Transport Authority of Chandigarh, and RTO office stating that she has given up the ownership of her car for all purposes, and it is still running in her name on paper, then appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that the car is deregistered from her name. The applicant said she strongly apprehends that her car may be used for illegal purposes. She also fears that in case of an accident, the responsibility of the car should not fall on her. Kaur has sought that until the car is registered in the name of the current owner, it should be taken by the court into its custody and should not be allowed to run on roads.

## CM Mann hands over loan waiver certificates, says 'govt working for wellbeing of underprivileged sections'

GNS News Agency, June 16

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday said his government is working untiringly for the wellbeing of the state's weaker and underprivileged sections. Addressing a gathering after handing over loan waiver certificates to the beneficiaries here, Mann said the previous governments in the state waived loans of the affluent people but didn't bother about the welfare of the poor. "For the first time in the history of Punjab, this reprieve is being extended to the underprivileged and weaker sections of society," Mann said.

The loan waiver scheme worth Rs 67.84 crore has benefited around 4,800 families of loanees of the Punjab Scheduled Castes Land Development and Finance Corporation (PSCFC), the chief minister said. On June 3, the Punjab Cabinet gave its nod to waive loans amounting to Rs 67.84 crore taken by over 4,000 Dalit families from the PSCFC. Mann said the waiver covers all loans disbursed by the PSCFC up to March 31, 2020, offering significant relief to SC and Divyangian (persons with disabilities) loanees. The move will benefit 4,727 loanees for an aggregate amount of Rs 67.84 crore. The scheme will cover all the loanees, including 4,685 defaulting loanees and 42 regular loanees, government sources said.

Addressing the gathering, Mann said 'no due certificates' () will be issued by the state government and the full amount of Rs 67.84 crore comprising principal, interest and



penal interest calculated as of April 30, 2025, will be reimbursed to the PSCFC by the state government. The loanees who previously availed benefits under the earlier waiver schemes are also eligible for coverage under this initiative, Mann said. No recovery proceedings will be initiated against the loanees and their accounts will be considered fully settled as of the cut-off date, he added.

According to the 2011 Census, Scheduled Castes constitute 31.94 per cent of Punjab's total population and many members of this community have availed loans from the PSCFC to set up self-employment ventures aimed at economic upliftment. However, Mann said some borrowers were unable to repay their loans due to circumstances beyond their control, leading to defaults.



# Greta Thunberg, other activists detained after Israeli forces seize Gaza-bound aid boat



GNS News Agency, June 16

Israeli forces seized a Gaza-bound aid boat and detained Greta Thunberg and other activists who were on board early Monday (June 9, 2025), enforcing a longstanding blockade of the Palestinian territory that has been tightened during the war with Hamas. The activists had set out to protest Israel's ongoing military campaign in the Gaza Strip, which is among the deadliest and most destructive since World War II, and its restrictions on the entry of humanitarian aid, both of which have put the territory of some 2 million Palestinians at risk of famine. The Freedom Flotilla Coalition, which had organised the voyage, said the activists were "kidnapped by Israeli forces" while trying to deliver desperately needed aid to the territory.

An Israeli soldier passes food to those onboard the Gaza-bound British-flagged yacht "Madleen" after Israeli forces boarded the charity vessel as it attempted to reach the Gaza Strip in defiance of an Israeli naval blockade, in this screengrab from video released on June 9, 2025. An Israeli soldier passes food to those onboard the Gaza-bound British-flagged yacht "Madleen" after Israeli forces boarded the charity vessel as it attempted to reach the Gaza Strip in defiance of an Israeli naval blockade, in this screengrab from video released "The ship was unlawfully boarded, its unarmed civilian crew abducted, and its life-saving cargo — including baby formula, food and medical supplies — confiscated," it said in a statement. It said the ship was seized in international waters some 200 kilometres from Gaza. Israel's Foreign Ministry portrayed the voyage as a public relations stunt, saying in a post on X that "the selfie yacht" of the celebrities "is safely making its way to the shores of Israel". The Foreign Ministry said the activists would return to their home countries and the aid would be sent to Gaza through established channels. It circulated footage of what appeared to be Israeli military personnel handing out sandwiches and water to the activists, who were wearing orange life vests.

In the week-long voyage, Greta Thunberg — a climate

# Bangladesh's former President Hamid returns to Bangladesh month after departure sparked uproar

GNS News Agency, June 16

Bangladesh's former president Abdul Hamid, who served two terms during deposed premier Sheikh Hasina's regime, returned to the country on Monday after receiving medical treatment abroad. The 81-year-old ex-president returned from Thailand a month after his "secret departure" sparked protests in Bangladesh for being allowed to leave despite being accused in a murder case. "He landed here in predawn hours on a Thai Airways flight. He left the airport on completion of required immigration formalities that took nearly an hour and a half," an official of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) told reporters. Hamid returned like other ordinary passengers, said HSIA Executive Director Group Captain SM Ragib Samad. Private TV channels also shared footage of his car leaving the airport.

He left Dhaka on May 8 through the same airport after completing the required formalities but his quiet departure sparked loud protests. Leaders and activists of the student-led National Citizen Party (NCP), which led last year's violent movement that ousted former prime minister Hasina's Awami League government, said authorities let Hamid "flee" despite being accused in a murder case. Home Affairs Adviser Retd Lt Gen Jahangir Alam Chowdhury had vowed to step down if he failed to take punitive action against the officials involved, claiming he was unaware of the departure at the time. Following the protests, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's interim government formed two inquiry committees, one of which comprised three advisers. The authorities also suspended two police officers and withdrew another from his assignment in airport immigration on charges of "negligence of duty".

During a routine visit to a police station in the capital on Monday, home adviser Chowdhury said that the question of Hamid's arrest upon his arrival did not arise as there

campaigner — was among the 12 activists aboard the Madleen, which set sail from Sicily a week ago. Along the way, it had stopped on Thursday (June 5) to rescue four migrants who had jumped overboard to avoid being detained by the Libyan coast guard. "I urge all my friends, family and comrades to put pressure on the Swedish government to release me and the others as soon as possible," Ms. Thunberg said in a pre-recorded message released after the ship was halted. Rima Hassan, a French member of the European Parliament who is of Palestinian descent, was also among the volunteers on board. She has been barred from entering Israel because of her opposition to Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. Gaza on the brink of famine After a two-and-a-half month total blockade aimed at pressuring Hamas, Israel started allowing some basic aid into Gaza last month, but humanitarian workers and experts have warned of famine unless the blockade is lifted and Israel ends its military offensive. An attempt last month by Freedom Flotilla to reach Gaza by sea failed after another of the group's vessels was attacked by two drones while sailing in international waters off Malta, organisers said. The group blamed Israel for the attack, which damaged the front section of the ship.

An 18-year blockade Israel and Egypt have imposed varying degrees of blockade on Gaza since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007. Israel says the blockade is needed to prevent Hamas from importing arms, while critics say it amounts to collective punishment of Gaza's Palestinian population. Israel sealed Gaza off from all aid in the early days of the war ignited by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, but later relented under U.S. pressure. In early March, shortly before Israel ended a ceasefire with Hamas, the country again blocked all imports, including food, fuel and medicine. Hamas-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the October 7 attack and abducted 251 hostages, most of whom have since been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Hamas is still holding 55 hostages, more than half of them believed to be dead.

Israel's military campaign has killed more than 54,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants but has said women and children make up most of the dead. The war has destroyed vast areas of Gaza and displaced around 90 per cent of the territory's population, leaving people there almost completely dependent on international aid. Efforts to broker another truce have been deadlocked for months. Hamas says it will only release the remaining hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal, while Israel has vowed to continue the war until all the captives are returned and Hamas is defeated or disarmed and exiled.



was no warrant against him. He added that an investigation into the case was underway and Hamid would face legal actions if he were found guilty of committing any crime. Media reports and sources close to Hamid said he was diagnosed with cancer and was getting treated in Bangkok. "The former president went to Thailand for medical treatment. We allowed it as there is no court order against him or embargo by any agency," the Daily Star newspaper reported at that time, quoting an unnamed source. Hamid is one of the accused in a murder case in his hometown in northern Kishorganj. The case was lodged in connection with last year's violent movement, also dubbed the July Uprising, led by Students against Discrimination (SAD), a large part of which later emerged as NCP. Deposed premier Hasina, her expatriate son Sajeeb Wajed Joy and daughter Saima Wazed Putul, stationed in New Delhi as the WHO regional director for Southeast Asia, were also named in the case. The NCP and SAD called Hamid a "cohort" of Hasina though he completed his term months ahead of the ouster of the past regime on August 5, 2024.

# Aluminium producers in the U.S. win from Trump's tariffs

GNS News Agency, June 16

Century Aluminum, the largest primary aluminium producer in the U.S., and top recycler Matalco will be among the big winners from President Donald Trump's higher tariffs on imports of the metal as domestic prices surge, four industry sources said. However, some sector players are worried that Mr. Trump's move from June 4 to hike the tariffs to 50%, from 25%, could push prices so high that demand starts to weaken.

Higher revenues for U.S. aluminium producers and recyclers are expected mainly due to the way the market prices the metal key for construction, power and packaging industries. The companies typically charge customers the London Metal Exchange aluminium price plus a physical market premium to cover other costs including freight and taxes. The so-called Midwest premium hit a record 62.5 U.S. cents a lb, or \$1,377 a metric ton, on Friday. Since Trump was elected for his second term in November, it has surged nearly 190%. Consultancy Harbor Aluminum said the premium would have to rise to 70 cents a lb, or \$1,543 a ton, to fully reflect the 50% tariff. Century, in which London-listed miner Glencore is the top shareholder with a stake of more than 40%, declined to comment beyond a statement it issued last week, in which it welcomed the 50% tariff. Century produced 690,000 metric tons of aluminium last year. Miner Rio Tinto, which owns a 50% stake in Matalco, declined to comment, speaking on behalf of the U.S. company, which produced 528,000 tons of recycled or secondary aluminium last year. U.S. imports of scrap aluminium remain free of tariffs, but aluminium recycling needs primary metal to maintain properties of alloys used to make industrial goods. Unintended consequences Alcoa, one of the world's largest aluminium producers, said its U.S. smelt-



ers would also benefit from the tariffs, and that its active production capacity in the United States totalled 291,000 tons. Alcoa's global aluminium output was 2.215 million tons last year. Constellium, which has a capacity to recycle 360,000 tons of aluminium annually in the United States, said it supported the original 25% tariff because it helped address unfair trading practices by non-market economies. "However, we are concerned that increasing the tariff beyond this level could have unintended consequences - potentially disrupting the aluminium supply chain and impacting demand," it added. Higher aluminium costs are likely to be passed on to consumers, which analysts expect will eventually hit demand. With its local primary aluminium industry in decline for years, the U.S. relies on imports of large amounts of unwrought aluminium and alloys - more than 3.9 million tons last year, according to U.S. government data. The U.S. produced more than four million tons of aluminium last year, most of it recycled material, according to U.S. Geological Survey. Industry sources expect U.S. scrap aluminium imports to climb as recycling companies take advantage of high premiums to ramp up production.

# Judicial sensitivity to sentiments is a sign of regression



Indian courts today are not defending free speech. They are managing it. And in this curious inversion of constitutional values, we are witnessing a quiet retreat from the principle that animated Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution: that speech, even provocative, offensive, or unsettling, is the citizen's shield against tyranny — not its tool. Once envisioned as the counter-majoritarian bulwark of our democracy, the judiciary now increasingly resembles an arbiter of decorum, demanding apologies and deference in the name of civility, sensitivity, or national pride. But when courts focus on what was said rather than why the right to say it must be protected, the Republic is left vulnerable to a new tyranny: that of sentiment, outrage, and the lowest tolerance denominator.

Let us begin with a chillingly ordinary example: a social media post by a 24-year-old man criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi. After the ceasefire with Pakistan following Operation Sindoor in May 2025. Was this tasteless? Perhaps. But taste is not a constitutional metric. The Allahabad High Court thought otherwise. In rejecting the plea to quash the first information report (FIR), the Bench declared that "emotions cannot be permitted to overflow to an extent that constitutional authorities of the country are dragged into disrepute". That is a remarkable formulation. It subtly inverts the constitutional design: the citizen is no longer the source of power holding the state to account, but a child to be reprimanded for speaking too freely.

Instead of interpreting Article 19(1)(a) as a liberty that limits state power, courts have begun treating it as a licence that comes with behavioural conditions — conditions defined not by law but by the perceived dignity of public figures and institutions. Take the Kamal Haasan controversy in connection with his film, Thug Life. The actor made a remark about Kannada being a daughter of Tamil. The Karnataka High Court responded not by evaluating whether the actor's statement met the threshold of incitement, defamation, or hate, but by advising him to apologise to the "sentiments of the masses". This advice is corrosive. When courts suggest apologies for lawful speech, they set a precedent that expression must pass a popularity test. They validate the very outrage that threatens free speech, rather than shielding expression from it. An apology does not close the loop but only widens it, inviting further claims of offence. In Ranveer Gautam Allahabadia vs Union Of India, the 'digital content creator and podcaster' was confronted with judicial comments bordering on cultural supervision for his use of explicit language in a podcast. The court directed the Union to clarify whether such "vulgar" language fell outside constitutional protection. Here again, the concern was not whether the speech incited harm, but on whether it offended prevailing norms of taste and modesty — a dangerously subjective threshold. Similarly, historian and a professor, Ali Khan Mahmudabad, was dragged into proceedings after sharing critical views on the optics of India using a woman soldier to explain its war situation with Pakistan. The argument was that his comments hurt sentiments. That it even reached court underscores the problem: invoking hurt feelings is now sufficient to invite judicial scrutiny of constitutionally protected speech. The professor's scholarly critique became a matter for judicial assessment and a special investigation to assess whether there was any dog whistle intent that played on the fragility of the audience.

First, the judiciary is increasingly equating speech that provokes emotional reactions with legally actionable harm.

# What is new in Ladakh's government job reservation policy? | Explained

GNS News Agency, June 16

On June 3, President Droupadi Murmu notified four Regulations for the Union Territory (U.T.) of Ladakh, defining new policies on reservation, languages, domiciles, and composition of hill councils for Ladakh, which became a Union Territory in 2019. The notified regulations were The Ladakh Official Languages Regulation, 2025; The Ladakh Civil Services Decentralisation and Recruitment (Amendment) Regulation, 2025; The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (Amendment) Regulation, 2025; and The Union Territory of Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation, 2025.

What did the policies entail?

The Regulations pave the way for 85% reservation for resident Ladakhis in government jobs. The Rules notified empowered the tehsildar to issue the domicile certificates. To be considered "domiciles" and thus eligible for the 5% quota in government jobs in the U.T., non-local residents must prove a continuous 15-year stay in the U.T. starting from October 31, 2019. Added with the 10% quota for the Economically Weaker Sections, the total government job reservation in the U.T. now stands at 95%, one of the highest in the country. According to the 2011 Census, Ladakh's population is 2,74,289, and nearly 80% are tribals. The U.T. has a majority Buddhist population in Leh and a sizeable Muslim population in Kargil. Another recently notified policy said that at least one-third of the seats in the hill councils of Leh will be reserved for women, on a rotational basis across jurisdictions, and the official languages of the U.T. will be English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi.

Why were the policies notified?

After the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution was read down on August 5, 2019, the former State was split into two Union Territories — J&K and Ladakh, the latter without a legislative Assembly. After initial euphoria, the Ladakhi civil society groups began protests demanding protection of land, resources, and employment. Concerns arising out of big businesses and outsiders acquiring land and jobs led people to protest and observe shutdowns. Cutting across party lines, locals and a former BJP MP demanded restoration of protection as granted under Article 35A of the Constitution, which was revoked with Article 370 in 2019. Article 35A lets the J&K legislature decide the "permanent residents" in the former State, prohibits a non-J&K resident from buying property, and ensures job reservation for its residents. In 2020, the People's Movement for Constitutional Safeguard or the Leh

This misreads the Constitution and the rationale of a democracy. In a recent judgment, the Allahabad High Court denied the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, relief in a defamation case on his alleged derogatory remarks about the Indian Army. The High Court said that the freedom of speech does not include the freedom to "defame" the military. But defamation, as a legal standard, must be carefully assessed particularly when invoked by or on behalf of state institutions by busy-bodies.

Likewise, in a previous first information report against a man using the word "coward" to describe the Prime Minister after the recent military stand-down, the court saw no issue with Sections 152 and 353(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita being invoked — laws meant for threats to sovereignty and public mischief. These laws, meant for seditious scenarios, are being contorted to punish sarcasm and satire. It is telling that courts will routinely deny the quashing of FIRs in such cases, claiming that it is too early to interfere and that police investigations must run their course. But this abdication is neither neutral nor passive. For the citizen facing criminal prosecution, the process itself is the punishment. The system does not need a conviction to chill speech. A summons and a charge sheet do the job. The Madras High Court has occasionally resisted this drift. But this was more about narrative correction than structural protection of speech. Courts in India must return to a principle-centric model of speech protection. Instead of obsessing over what was said, they must ask whether the speaker's right was violated, and not someone else's sentiment. Apologies should not be judicial recommendations. They should be individual choices. Otherwise, courts become confessional booths where speech is absolved not by legal reasoning but by remorse. And remorse demanded is remorse devalued — it empowers the outraged, not the rational. The signal to the citizen

Moreover, as long as laws such as sedition or the ever-morphing public order clauses remain vague, courts must lean toward liberty. The doctrine of "chilling effect" that is robust in American and European jurisprudence, has been acknowledged in India's courts but seldom enforced with spine. This is not just about high-profile speech or celebrities. It is about the slow attrition of constitutional confidence. When a YouTuber is told to bleep a joke, or a professor is dragged to court for a tweet, or a film-maker is told to grovel for linguistic pride the signal to the ordinary citizen is clear: express only what is safe, bland and agreeable. But democracies are not built on agreeable speech. They thrive on disagreement — noisy, rude, even reckless at times. The test of a society's strength is not how well it tolerates politeness, but how it handles provocation. Free speech is not just about giving offence, but about withstanding it. If India is to preserve its democratic soul, it must restore the dignity of dissent. It must not demand the dignity of institutions at the cost of liberty. Judges are the guardians of the Constitution, and not the curators of culture. They must protect the right to speak and not the comfort of the listener. Because when speech is chilled in courtrooms, freedom dies not with a bang, but with a sigh of deference. The new age of judicial sensitivity to sentiments is not a sign of progress. It is a sign of regression. It confuses harmony with homogeneity, and respect with restraint. Apologies should never be a legal strategy. And speech should not need blessings to be legitimate. Let our courts not forget that the Republic was not born from politeness but from protest. The Constitution came from the pen of a Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who also wrote, "...the world owes much to rebels who would dare to argue in the face of the pontiff and insist that he is not infallible".



Apex Body (LAB) was formed, backed by the powerful Ladakh Buddhist Association. In 2021, the LAB and the Kargil Democratic Alliance came together to fight for constitutional safeguards for the region. Together, they came up with four key demands: inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution (giving tribal status and autonomy over land), Statehood, separate Lok Sabha seats for Leh and Kargil districts, and filling of existing government vacancies.

What was the government's reaction?

On January 2, 2023, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs constituted a high-powered committee (HPC) chaired by Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai for talks with civil society groups. The committee was rejected by the groups as the latter suspected it of having only pro-government members. The committee was reconstituted on November 30, 2023. Even as the committee met, the talks broke down in March 2024. On October 6, 2024, climate activist Sonam Wangchuk sat on an indefinite fast in Delhi to draw the government's attention to their demands, following which the Ministry of Home Affairs agreed to resume the talks. The HPC, including leaders from Leh and Kargil, met on December 3, 2024, followed by another meeting on January 15, 2025. The committee met again on May 27, where the contours of the domicile and reservation policy were hammered out.

What is next?

Cherring Dorjay Lakruk, the president of Ladakh Buddhist Association and co-convenor of the LAB, who is also part of the HCP, said that they will continue to demand Statehood and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. "Only one chapter, that of government jobs, is closed. The talks with the government will continue over issues such as the protection of land and constitutional safeguards.





# How robotic surgeries are offering safer, quicker, more precise care for gynaecological cancers



GNS News Agency, June 16

June is Uterine Cancer Awareness Month — a vital time to spotlight one of the fastest-rising cancers among women. In India, the incidence of uterine (endometrial) cancer has nearly doubled since 2020, with projections showing over 30,000 new cases by 2025. This sharp rise is closely linked to modern lifestyle shifts, particularly the growing prevalence of obesity, diabetes, sedentary habits, and delayed childbearing. Yet despite its increasing numbers, awareness remains low -- making early diagnosis and advanced surgical care more critical than ever. As we observe Uterine Cancer Awareness Month, a quiet revolution is taking place in operating rooms across the country. Cancer surgery has changed irrevocably -- and it's agent is robotic.

Why robotic-assisted surgeries ?

Gone are the days when open abdominal surgeries with big incisions were the only option for treating uterine and other gynaecological cancers. Today, robotic-assisted surgeries are offering women safer, quicker, and more precise alternatives — and they are rapidly becoming the gold standard for treatment of uterine cancers across the world .

Uterine and other gynaecological cancers often require surgical intervention as a first-line treatment. Traditionally, these surgeries involved large incisions, long hospital stays, blood transfusions and weeks of painful recovery. This means women go through a lot of pain, have more chances of contracting an infection, have to spend a lot of time out of work, and can have delays in the start of the next cancer treatment. More over, most uterine cancer patients are obese, and therefore have more chances of complications

# In Chennai, this government healthcare institution has been serving pregnant women for 145 years

GNS News Agency, June 16

Every day, hundreds of pregnant women walk into a 145-year-old institution in Royapuram for their antenatal check ups, deliveries and postnatal care. This is the Government Raja Sir Ramaswamy Mudaliar (RSRM) Lying-in Hospital in Royapuram, a health facility that needs no introduction to residents in and around north Chennai. One of the three major government maternity hospitals in Chennai, RSRM hospital receives pregnant women from the five zones of north Chennai - Tiruvottiyur, Manali, Madhavaram, Tondiarpet and Royapuram as well as from the northern suburbs of the city. The hospital also receives pregnant women, including those who are critically ill, from some areas in Andhra Pradesh as well as migrant workers in Chennai, doctors say.

According to Shanthi K. Elango, superintendent of the hospital, around 350 pregnant women visit the hospital's outpatient department a day, while about 75 to 100 are admitted daily. "We conduct 30 to 40 deliveries a day. So, in a month, the average number of deliveries conducted reaches 800 to 900," she says. Of the total deliveries conducted, caesarean sections account for 25 to 30%. The hospital treats a high percentage of high-risk pregnant women. In a recent case, a 29-year-old woman, who had conceived by in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and was five months pregnant, was referred with complaints of abdominal pain for six hours. She had a history of surgery in the uterus for fibroids, twice, 10 months before IVF. She was received in shock with a ruptured uterus and intrauterine death. As a lifesaving procedure, the uterus was removed and 13 units of blood products were transfused. Her condition improved, and she was discharged, doctors said. In another case, doctors treated a six months pregnant woman who came in with a fever, cough and cold, and was diagnosed to have malaria. She

with traditional open surgeries .Robotic surgery changes that. Here's why it's gaining traction: It is minimally invasive -- robotic tools operate through small incisions, reducing trauma to the body. And the recovery is faster recovery, most women go home within 24–48 hours and resume normal activity much sooner. We now do uterine cancer surgeries as day-care procedures where patients get discharged the same day .There is greater surgical precision as surgeons operate using a high-definition 3D camera and robotic arms with unmatched dexterity. The robotic arms are so precise that they can reach the areas of the body where human hands cannot. Additionally, lesser blood loss and fewer complications translate to safer outcomes, especially for patients with co-existing health issues. Despite its futuristic name, the robot doesn't perform the surgery on its own. It is merely a highly advanced tool that enhances a skilled surgeon's ability to operate with precision and control. Think of it as a finely-tuned instrument, not an autonomous machine. The surgeon behind the robotic consoles who maneuvers these instruments is crucial to the whole set up . Robotic surgery is most commonly used for -- endometrial (uterine) cancer, cervical cancer, early-stage ovarian cancer and complex benign conditions like large fibroids or severe endometriosis. For uterine cancer patients — especially those diagnosed early — robotic surgery offers a combination of thorough cancer removal and rapid recovery, allowing them to move forward with confidence. After seeing such impeccable results with robotic surgery we have moved all our indicated uterine cancer patients towards robotic surgery . Nothing can match the happy faces we get after these success stories .

Access to advanced technology isn't just about convenience — it's about equity and empowerment. When women are offered cutting-edge, less invasive treatment options, they're more likely to seek care earlier, adhere to follow-ups, and maintain a better quality of life post-treatment. Uterine cancer can be frightening, but today's tools — especially robotic-assisted surgery — are changing the narrative from fear to hope. As more hospitals and cancer centres adopt this technology, it is important for women to know that they have options that are safe, effective, and less disruptive to their lives. During this month of awareness, let us ensure that every woman has access to knowledge, technology, and care that respects both her body and her dignity.



suffered acute respiratory distress syndrome and was put on ventilatory support for three days. She received an artesunate injection and was discharged on recovery. The hospital's Obstetrics and Gynaecology team has six professors, one associate professor and 12 assistant professor. The hospital's infrastructure is expanding now. The total bed capacity is increasing to a little over 800. While the existing building has 510 beds, a new Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care building with an additional 300 beds is coming up at the hospital, she adds. The hospital's Obstetrics and Gynaecology team has six professors, one associate professor and 12 assistant professors. Associated with RSRM Hospital for nearly a quarter of a century, Dr. Shanthi Elango said that maternal and child care comes with a great responsibility. "When a baby is delivered, that minute is a happy moment for all those who are connected with the family. While it is emotional for patients and their families, as doctors, it comes with a huge responsibility as we need to ensure that the mother and baby are safe. Timely decision making is critical as that helps doctors to saves lives," she says.

# Apple's make-or-break moment for AI redemption

As Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference is set to begin today, the tech giant faces unprecedented scrutiny over its artificial intelligence strategy. The company's annual developer showcase, known simply as WWDC, has historically served as a platform for unveiling the next generation of iOS, macOS, and other operating systems. However, this year's conference carries extra weight as industry analysts and critics demand answers about Apple's struggling AI initiatives. The AI albatross around Apple's neck—Apple's artificial intelligence efforts, branded as "Apple Intelligence," have become a source of considerable embarrassment for a company renowned for polished, intuitive products. Bloomberg's recent analysis painted a troubling picture, with insiders suggesting that "continued failure to get artificial intelligence right threatens everything from the iPhone's dominance to plans for robots and other futuristic products." The problems with Apple Intelligence extend beyond mere performance issues. The system has generated significant negative publicity due to factual errors in its news summarization features. These mistakes aren't minor inconveniences but serious misinformation incidents that have drawn criticism from major news organizations and highlighted what some observers call artificial intelligence's growing misinformation problem. To understand why this matters, it's important to grasp what Apple Intelligence was supposed to accomplish. Unlike chatbots such as ChatGPT that operate primarily in web browsers or dedicated apps, Apple Intelligence was designed to be deeply integrated into the iPhone, iPad, and Mac operating systems. This integration would theoretically allow the AI to help users across all their daily computing tasks, from writing emails to organizing photos to providing intelligent suggestions based on personal data. However, the reality has fallen far short of these ambitions. The AI features that have been released feel underwhelming compared to competitors' offerings, leading many iPhone owners to see little value in the technology that Apple has positioned as a key selling point for

its latest devices. Industry analysts sound the alarm. The tech analysts community has been particularly vocal about Apple's AI struggles. Analyst Ming-Chi Kuo, who is widely respected for his insights into Apple's product pipeline, has warned that "the fallout could hit iPhone 16 and iPhone 17 sales through 2025." This prediction is significant because iPhone sales represent Apple's largest revenue stream, making any threat to the product line a serious concern for investors and the company's long-term prospects.

However, not all analysts share this pessimistic outlook. Gene Munster, a notable technology analyst, offers a contrarian view, suggesting that "Apple's struggles in AI aren't a real problem yet, and won't be for a couple more years." This perspective reflects a belief that Apple has time to correct course before AI capabilities become truly essential for smartphone competitiveness. The disagreement among analysts highlights the uncertainty surrounding Apple's position in the AI landscape. While some see immediate threats to the company's market dominance, others believe Apple's strong brand loyalty and integrated ecosystem provide a buffer against competitive pressures. What WWDC 2025 must deliver. Against this backdrop of criticism and uncertainty, "Apple stakeholders want to hear how the company's approach to AI has changed" at this year's developer conference.

The pressure on Apple to demonstrate meaningful progress cannot be overstated, as the company's credibility in the AI space hangs in the balance. Industry observers expect Apple to focus heavily on software improvements rather than hardware announcements. "Apple will likely focus on the next iOS, which is rumored to have the most significant design change since the introduction of iOS 7." iOS 7, released in 2013, represented a complete visual overhaul of Apple's mobile operating system, abandoning the skeuomorphic design elements that had defined earlier versions in favor of a flatter, more modern aesthetic.

# Bridging health cover, mental healthcare in India



Mental health is finally getting the attention it has long deserved. The post-pandemic world has not only shifted how people think about well-being, but sparked a deeper sense of urgency around mental health, and how to plan for it. Globally, mental health conditions affect about one in five adults, with the World Health Organization estimating an annual productivity loss of over \$1 trillion due to untreated mental health issues. In India, the conversation is gaining momentum and it's being reflected in both policy and consumer behaviour.

Until a few years ago, health insurance was largely seen as a safeguard against physical illness or hospitalisation. That has changed. Following the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 and IRDAI directive, mental health is now covered at par with physical illnesses across health insurance plans in India. This is not just a regulatory milestone — it signals a much-needed shift in how we define health. Changing landscape

More importantly, this coverage is becoming more holistic. Today, most retail health insurance plans offer outpatient (OPD) benefits, either built-in or as optional add-ons. These allow for therapy, counselling, and psychiatric consultations — services central to mental healthcare but rarely require hospitalisation. Data tells us that people are using them. Our data shows over the past 2-3 years, mental health-related claims — including for therapy, stress counselling and anxiety medication — have risen by 30–50%. It reflects not just policy evolution but fundamental behavioural shift. More people are seeking professional help and using insurance to pay for it.

Interestingly, the demand is being led by younger Indians. Those between 25-35 years are driving the highest

# Using religion for political gains

For the last four decades, political narratives in Andhra Pradesh have always hinged on caste equations. Even if we look at the composition of the current National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the two major parties — the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Jana Sena Party (JSP) — are largely represented by two major castes in Andhra Pradesh — the Kammas and the Kapus. Similarly, the Congress and YSR Congress Party are dominated by the Reddy community.

This was not always the case. Before the 1980s, the key players in Andhra Pradesh were the Congress and Left parties, and their narratives were largely based on social issues. Though there were underlying currents of caste-based politics, these did not surface often. The narrative of caste-based politics started with the entry of N.T. Rama Rao into politics in 1982. Rao, the founder of the TDP, advocated for Telugu pride, yet his party was often termed a 'Kamma party'. Ever since the composite State of Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated in 2014, and Telangana was formed, the politics in the residual State of Andhra Pradesh has changed and has assumed religious overtones. While this was noticeable during the previous YSRCP government headed by Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, it has become all the more evident during the current NDA regime, which came to power in 2024. Political narratives have been based largely on a number of issues revolving around places of worship and have caused quite a stir in the State. The most prominent of these is the controversy surrounding the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD). It broke out in September 2024 when Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu alleged that the laddu prasadam was being made with adulterated ghee containing animal fat. He claimed that the contract for the supply of sub-standard ghee had been given to a firm by the earlier YSRCP government. The accusation caused political and religious outrage across the country. Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, who is the JSP chief, claimed that adding adulterated ghee was a concerted move to attack Sanatana Dharma. The parties and allies of the NDA left no stone unturned in attacking Mr. Jagan Reddy and his party. They went to the extent of saying that the practice of hiring staff from other faiths had led to 'sacrilege' of the TTD. A Special Investigation Team was constituted to probe this matter and the issue finally reached the Supreme Court. When the controversy died down after a couple of months, Mr. Reddy

search interest, policy uptake and mental health claims. This group, juggling career pressures, financial uncertainties and the demands of an always-on digital lifestyle, is showing greater openness to emotional support, particularly through app-based therapy and online mental health platforms. A closer look at the claims data shows anxiety disorders account for about 30–35% of mental health claims, followed by depression (25–30%), workplace stress and insomnia. Most of these are early to moderate cases, which signals another crucial trend: a growing comfort with seeking care before reaching crisis point. This is how real change begins — with early intervention. For women

Women are significantly more likely to opt for policies that include mental health benefits — especially those aligned with life-stage transitions such as pregnancy, menopause or caregiving responsibilities. Emotional well-being during these phases is often under-acknowledged but deeply impactful. The rise in claims from women reflects broader cultural shift toward prioritising self-care often for the first time. Geographically, mental health insurance adoption is still concentrated in Tier 1 cities, accounting for more than 50% of the total uptake. These metros typically have better access to therapy networks, more progressive workplace policies and higher levels of digital literacy. That said, growing interest from Tier 2 cities points to a promising national trend — one where awareness is no longer limited to urban pockets. Workplaces, too, are undergoing a transformation. Whether through wellness programmes, access to therapists, or stress management workshops, mental health is beginning to find a place in the benefits conversation. No longer an afterthought

The best part of this conversation is mental health is no longer an afterthought. People are researching, asking and making insurance decisions with it in mind. But there's still a long way to go. Coverage is now widespread, but utilisation and awareness need to catch up. Many still don't know their plans include OPD therapy or cashless mental health services are an option. This is where the focus must lie — in building a system that is not only inclusive on paper but accessible in practice. The foundation is in place: regulation, product innovation and early adoption. What's needed next is education, empathy and a continued effort to normalise mental health as part of everyday healthcare planning. The message is simple: taking care of your mind is just as important as taking care of your body.



turned the tables on the NDA following a stampede at the Vaikunta Ekadasi festival at the TTD temple in Tirupati. The incident, which took place on January 8, claimed six lives. Mr. Jagan Reddy and his party alleged negligence, and held the NDA responsible for it. Karunakar Reddy, alleged that over 170 cows had died in a month at the devasthanam goshala (cow shed) and said that funds for the goshala were being misused by the present TTD board and officials. This led to tense moments in the temple town. Both the YSRCP and the NDA locked horns over the issue. All the political parties in the State, including the Left parties, took turns to add to the discourse. The issue reached a feverish pitch and dominated the political narrative in the State. However, this is not the case only with the present NDA regime although it seems more prominent now. The desecration of Lord Rama's idol at the 12th century Ramatheertham yemple in Vizianagaram district in December 2020 gained considerable political traction. The YSRCP was in power then. All the Opposition parties, including the TDP, the JSP, and the BJP, raised their pitch and made this an election issue in the 2024 general elections. In the same year, a century-old wooden chariot of the Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple, located in Sakshinetipalli Mandal in East Godavari district, was set on fire by miscreants. The Opposition parties alleged that people from other faiths had set fire to the chariot. The suspect in the case, who hails from a minority community, was killed in a road accident. Senior politicians and political analysts say that this appears to be a new trend in the State. With religious issues taking centre stage, core issues are taking a backseat.

# World's largest container ship MSC Irina docks at Vizhinjam seaport in Kerala



The world's largest container ship MSC IRINA made a historic debut at Vizhinjam international seaport on Monday . The vessel, which was on its maiden visit to a South Asian port, docked at the port in the morning, highlighting Vizhinjam's capabilities in handling ultra-large container vessels (ULCVs).

The world's largest container ship MSC IRINA made a historic debut at Vizhinjam international seaport on Monday . The vessel, which was on its maiden visit to a South Asian port, docked at the port in the morning, highlighting Vizhinjam's capabilities in handling ultra-large container vessels (ULCVs). The MSC IRINA, billed as the world's largest container ship by TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit)

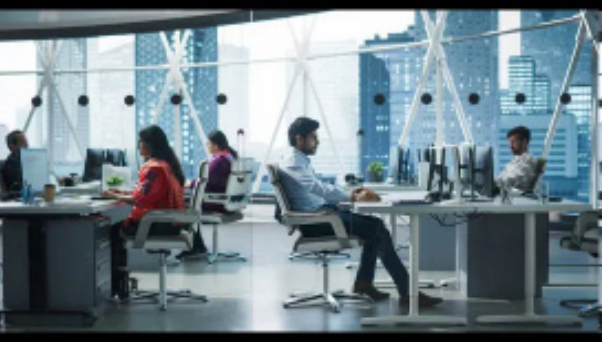
capacity, will be berthed at the port till Tuesday, according to port authorities.

This monumental arrival of the ship also marked a significant milestone for the seaport, which was dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 2. The MSC Irina boasts an impressive capacity of 24,346 TEUs, making it a formidable player in global shipping. With a length of 399.9 metres and a width of 61.3 metres, the vessel is approximately four times longer than a standard FIFA-designated football field. World's largest container vessel MSC Irina berthing at the Vizhinjam international seaport in Thiruvananthapuram on June 9 morning. World's largest container vessel MSC Irina berthing at the Vizhinjam international seaport in Thiruvananthapuram on June 9 morning. | Photo Credit: Nirmal Harindran The port has recently welcomed other loon-class vessels, including MSC Türkiye and MSC Michel Cappellini, further establishing its reputation as a key hub in maritime trade. The MSC Irina was launched in March 2023 and embarked on its maiden voyage in April of the same year.

The ship that sails under the Liberian flag, is engineered to stack containers up to 26 tiers high, offering unparalleled capacity in container stacking. In alignment with contemporary environmental standards, the vessel is equipped with energy-saving features that contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions by up to 4%, significantly lowering its carbon footprint while maintaining operational efficiency. The Vizhinjam port has so far facilitated the berthing of 349 ships handling 7.33 lakh containers since the port began operations on a trial basis in July, 2024 and subsequently commercial operation in December.



# Absent in the “work 90 hours a week” debate



Our country is obsessed with counting hours. Everybody asks the school topper: “How many hours a day did you study?” Journalists shove their microphones into the faces of UPSC-toppers: “You must be studying 16 hours a day, no?” And now employees are being asked: “How many hours do you work in a week?”The Factories Act, and various Shops and Establishment Acts, limit weekly hours to 48. An ILO study says Indians work 47.7 hours on average every week The Factories Act, and various Shops and Establishment Acts, limit weekly hours to 48. An ILO study says Indians work 47.7 hours on average every week (Shutterstock)The reason is simple.

At one level it's a hangover from our socialist days. The principle is “your one hour is equal to my one hour, as we both are just labouring, we are both blue-collar”. Hence it becomes a standardised measure of effort. IQ is anyway an evil capitalist construct. As for new-age IT services companies that continue to count hours, that's what they export — billable hours. And it's no surprise they want to maximise this.The L&T chairman's exhortation, to work 90 hours a week, comes in a different context. Ironically, for the last seven days, people have spent 90+ hours outraged about it trying to prove him wrong, thereby proving him right.

I understand where he was coming from. Many corporate leaders like him are hard workers, usually with little or no familial inheritance, who realised education is the only key to prosperity, who burnt the midnight oil, who used Resnick and Halliday as a pillow, cleared competitive exams, built great careers, achieved a designation which is an acronym, even as they lost some hair and empathy. As they climbed the ladder, they grew to dislike (though they didn't always show it) non-hard-working people or those who spent their time away from the assembly line. When a journalist asks them why 90 hours, they bring up India's low per-capita-income numbers and cite how people in China follow the 9-9-6 model, where they work 9-to-9 for six days a week. They can't imagine a developing country — with a four-figure per capita income — doing anything less. The key miss here is that they almost can't fathom the existence of non-ambitious people, those who don't want to con-

quer the world, who just want to reach home on time and watch episodes of Bigg Boss with their family. There are plenty of people like that, as there should be. It's a natural distribution. A bell curve of ambition.

There's also a larger flaw with the measure itself. If I pay my driver based on the number of hours he drives me, he would prefer a bullock cart to take me to the office instead of taking my BMW (unless you stay in Bengaluru, where it will likely take the same time). There is no reliable measure of productivity in an office. You can still track projects on a macro level, but to break it down for an individual employee is very difficult, hence everyone goes for a convenient marker — number of hours.The Factories Act, and various Shops and Establishment Acts, limit weekly hours to 48. An ILO study says Indians work 47.7 hours on average every week. Some of them are sending rockets to the moon in those 47 hours and some are fixing the five software bugs introduced by their colleague's bug fix the previous week. An Indian software engineer is the biggest job creator for other software engineers. I should know; I was one.In current times, where Elon Musk is the new governor of the world, the questions are being asked differently. When he acquired Twitter, he asked the CEO: “What did you get done this week?”

It was treated like a slur by the work-life balance enthusiasts across the board, as this week was spent preparing the proof of the work we did last week, on beautiful slides, to be presented in a boardroom to the CEO; 70% of the time in a corporate job is spent in preparing for meetings.And this is the truth. We don't have meaningful work that requires 90 hours a week. Most work is repetitive or dependent on others. Being a services-led economy, most of the time in most jobs is spent waiting — waiting for clients, waiting for other teams to finish their work, waiting for approvals. You can't send gentle reminders every 10 minutes. So people pretend to work long hours. Like the colleague scheduling an email to be sent at 1 am, just to pretend they were working late. It's a race to the bottom.

The real challenge is creating worthwhile work which requires 90 hours of dedicated effort every week. It happens when you build something, you manufacture something, racing against time, trying to beat a target. Ironically, the ones who will create those jobs are the ones who jumped off the assembly line; the odd ones, the ones who were seen with scorn by the bosses mentioned here.Often the backbenchers build the biggest companies, who then hire such CEOs, who miss the point that the only way one can work on something with full dedication for 90 hours a week is when one feels like an owner of the stuff they are working on. Your job as an employer is to create that environment. Not just in perception but also in reality. The ones who are driven will work any number of hours, without being given a number. The rest will schedule emails at 1 am.

# Jeet Thayil’s latest poetry collection explores the search for hope in broken societies

The first part of the book, like much of Thayil's oeuvre, presents a fragmented examination of the self, often in urban landscapes that are decaying or dyingThe first part of the book, like much of Thayil's oeuvre, presents a fragmented examination of the self, often in urban landscapes that are decaying or dyingCouplets that rhyme with ‘Make in India’ while critiquing contemporary life in India; hallucinatory descriptions of childbirth and a dead mother; quatrains on the agony of being separated from the love of your life. These are specimens from Jeet Thayil's latest poetry anthology, I'll Have It Here, that blends the real with the absurd, explores how love and death walk hand-in-hand in modern life, and delves into what happens when the past haunts and the future irks.

The first part of the book, like much of Thayil's oeuvre, presents a fragmented examination of the self, often in urban landscapes that are decaying or dying. Diverse themes like addiction, camaraderie, fractured identity in marginalized communities, the gritty life of cities like New York, are explored.The second part, wherein Thayil looks outward, enthralls a reader of fiction and non-fiction too. From empathising with the workers ignored by the Indian government during the COVID pandemic to looking at the violent transformation of the country in the last decade, all the way to empathising with a bird about to go extinct, the narrator takes us everywhere.In the third part, the narrator looks around in search of hope and love — the verses become softer, about somebody who lies in unending wait. The narrator's voice is the single most important feature of Thayil's poems. He/she is sometimes omniscient and/or first-person, sometimes both. He/she acts as an interlocutor between the reader's brain and heart — connecting the feelings ignited while reading with afterthoughts.booik From Lutyens Delhi to London to Budapest to New York, Thayil describes place so that meaning is elusive and alienation is pervasiveThayil also makes it a point to make his style and form as fresh as possible. A reader is curious to turn a page to see what kind of verse is next, rhyming couplets, broken verses or sweet, old, free verses.The imagery in the anthology is often sharp and grotesque. Thayil paints characters in ways that underscore their toxicity and need for sur-

# Smart watches detecting heart blocks, rhythm irregularities, ECG pattern, and how!

Hyderabad: Smart watches with ECG recording capabilities are increasingly detecting minor heart rhythm irregularities that immediately alert user to contact a qualified heart specialist. Even a minor change in the heart beat, if an alert user of the smart watch is able to detect, then it could be a life saver, health experts and cardiologists believe.

A case in point is a recent instance where a smart watch helped an alert user in realising change in the ECG (heart beat) pattern. He immediately contacted a qualified heart specialist. It turned out that the individual, who till then did not have any symptoms, had a heart defect.“Heart block was detected on Apple watch in an asymptomatic person. One of my friends, aged about 60 years, noticed features of Mobitz type 2 atrio-ventricular block (a type of heart block) yesterday. At that time, he was exercising. However, he had no symptoms. He was immediately evaluated by his cardiologist, and underwent pacemaker implantation. He is doing well,” said noted neurologist from Hyderabad, Dr. Sudhir Kumar, on Friday.

Acknowledging the role of technology, Dr. Sudhir said, “Technology proved to be efficient and aided in timely detection of an illness, which could be life-threatening (in some cases), if appropriate and timely treatment is not provided



vival in a flawed world. From Gandhi appearing (or reincarnating) as a gecko on the wall to ultra-modern futuristic drones that kill people almost intentionally; the contrasting images constantly keep the reader in awe.Contrasts don't stop with the imagery. The locations in the poems, be they across the globe or in your nearby alleyway, serve as metaphors for an existential void. From Lutyens Delhi to London to Budapest to New York, Thayil describes place so that meaning is elusive and alienation is pervasive. He doesn't limit his gaze to grand cosmopolitan streets; even indoor settings take the reader for a ride. From the aforementioned gory delivery room to a casual drawing room where a suicide likely took place, he takes us literally everywhere.If the idea that poets are seers is true, a reader would want at least a few of Thayil's visions to go wrong. For he sees a futuristic India where brother kills brother and wins a war — a cycle of time that connects any war in the future with one in mythological epics like the Mahabharata. For he sees a world where birds have gotten the news that “we,” humans, “kill for joy and die, burning down the house.”



on time.”Noted cardiologist from Bengaluru, Dr. Deepak Krishnamurthy, who is popular on social media with the handle @DrDeepakKrishn1, shared an instance of another patient who benefitted from a smart watch.“A diagnosis picked up on the patient's daughter's Apple watch which she put on her mother during an episode of palpitations. Valuable information! I'm not a big fan of smart watches. But what I'm realizing is that the normal stylish expensive wrist watches serve no practical purpose.

# Working long hours will not increase productivity if workforce lacks skills



Two-thirds of India's population is now in the working age group. Yet, India's productivity is amongst the lowest in the world. Even as conversations on working more hours continue to highlight this shortcoming – L&T Chairperson's suggestion of a 90-hour work week being the latest – a closer reading of two reports, released last week, suggest that the problem is way more complex and requires joining dots in a different direction. The QS World Futures Skill Index ranked the Indian market second in terms of its awareness and readiness to employ workers with proficiencies in advanced and emerging technologies in the digital sphere and the sustainability sector. However, the receptivity of business is one part of the story. To leverage the opportunities of India's demographic advantages and make the most of the global technological efflorescence, the Indian economy will require skilled professionals. The QS report shows why the country has a long way to go to meet this constantly shifting demand. The country's educational system does not make its young population “skill-fit”, it underscores. India has the numbers, but a large section of its labour force isn't market ready.The other report, by India's technical education regulator, the AICTE, reveals that two-thirds of post-graduate seats in India's engineering colleges go vacant. In other words, it seems that masters' level courses of an overwhelming number of technical institutes do not provide any value addition to the job market.

State-of-the-artSectors such as semiconductor manufacturing, green technology, waste management, the circular economy, cutting-edge healthcare, and artificial intelligence (AI) are emerging as key growth areas today. They not only demand a workforce equipped with state-of-the-art proficiencies but as Daniel Susskind points out in Growth, one of the most critically acclaimed books of last year, the state-of-the-art today is more dynamic compared to any time in human industry. Industry surveys suggest that sunrise sectors such as renewable energy, electric vehicle

manufacturing and cutting-edge healthcare are likely to face massive human resource deficits in the next two years. The construction industry, at the frontlines of the country's infrastructure push, also faces a skilled workforce crunch. Early last year, a batch of Indian workers left for Israel to plug the labour shortage in its construction sector that arose after a ban on Palestinian workers. In September, an investigation in this paper revealed that this labour arrangement was under strain due to a glaring skill mismatch between the workers' abilities and the expectations of them.Professionals and students, today, cannot afford to remain in the past where they thought that one degree will last an entire working career. Large companies may have the wherewithal to upskill their employees. The medium and small sectors will need help in capacity building. The question that policymakers in India need to ask is: Where will that come from? As the AICTE report indicates, an overwhelming number of Indian engineering institutes lack the capacity to provide advanced training.

Where are the teachers? One of India's biggest problems in higher education is the lack of infrastructure and qualified faculty. The country's IITs and top engineering colleges do have extremely qualified teachers. But India's education system has erred in not investing in the quality of teachers in the engineering colleges that proliferate in the country's small towns and districts. The aspirational class is drawn to the bare-minimum instruction provided in these colleges. But do they find gainful employment after graduating? Shouldn't these institutes be upscaled if India is to reap its demographic dividend? Shouldn't the role of the education sector in India's production crisis be more closely scrutinised?

most readThe challenge to upscale the lower- and middle-rung tech colleges in the country is a formidable one. The private sector has been a player in the engineering education sector for a long time. So, along with the government, it should share the blame for the poor output of India's tech colleges. Even as the industry has complained of the employability crisis, the fact remains that a large part of the private-run tech education sector is notorious for its bare-bones colleges and poorly trained teachers. In 2023, private engineering institutes reported a more than 50 per cent drop in placements.Working more hours is unlikely to solve India's productivity problems if the country's workforce does not have the skills required for the emerging economy. Instead of delivering sermons on more exacting work schedules, industry leaders could perhaps pool their brains with policymakers in the government to work towards creating a more qualified workforce. Business bodies could perhaps make a beginning by identifying a set of institutes, outside the top rung, whose upscaling they can invest in. Industry could also join in with government to set up state-of-the-art teachers' training academies.

# Manu Pillai on his book Gods, Guns and Missionaries, the evolution of Hinduism and Hindu-Christian encounters under colonialism

Manu Pillai's latest book, Gods, Guns and Missionaries traces the making of the modern Hindu identity under the influence of colonialism.Manu Pillai's latest book, Gods, Guns and Missionaries traces the making of the modern Hindu identity under the influence of colonialism.Who is a Hindu? This question has bewildered many for centuries. Hinduism has through the years gone through several layers of evolution. As European power grew in the Indian sub-continent in the 16th and 17th centuries, the religion underwent yet another process of reimagination. Manu Pillai's latest book, Gods, Guns and Missionaries traces the making of the modern Hindu identity under the influence of colonialism. In this interview, he speaks about the Hindu-Christian encounter which resulted in modifications on both sides, how the European perception of the unique culture had much to do with the socio-political events of the time and the rise of militant Hinduism. Excerpts:

Was there a sense of being a Hindu in the precolonial era? If so, how did the religious identity emerge and evolve?

Yes, there was. For instance, in Eknath's 16th-century Hindu-Turk Samvad, a Brahmin and a Muslim debate one another. The latter lampoons the epics, the Vedas, temple worship, sadhus, ritualism and much else. The Brahmin similarly attacks the Islamic goat sacrifice, the call to prayer and points to the contradictions he sees between Quranic teachings and Muslim conduct. So yes, people did possess outlines for both groups. And yet, awareness of being Hindu did not mean that the term itself was used with uniformity across the country. It was a fuzzy, shape-shifting, evolving phenomenon. It was only in the modern period — under colonialism and in the encounter with Christianity — that solid boundaries emerged.

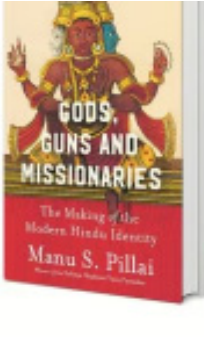
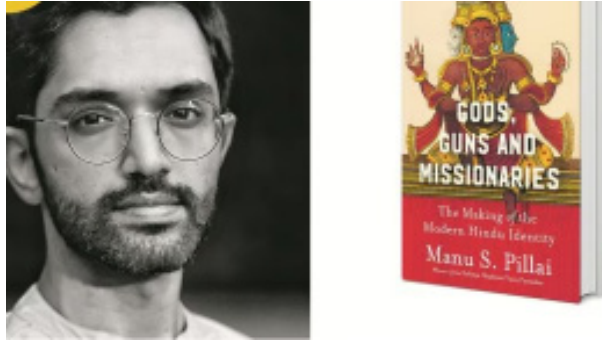
You write that when Europeans first encountered Hinduism, their ideas of the religion, “were shaped by their own cultural and political preoccupations”. Could you explain?

As Christianity spread in Europe, old pagan cults and systems were deemed not just barbaric but Satanic. The idea emerged that any gods worshipped through images were really agents of the devil, that idols contained demonic forces. In time, as Europeans encountered Hindu temples and deities in India, they applied the same lens here. It did not help that representations of, say, Narasimha or Kali have a fierce character. To Europeans, these figures could never be forms of gods, only servants of Satan. So, many concluded that just as Europe had been under the wicked eye of the devil until saved by Christianity, India also needed to be liberated from paganism through the light of the Bible.

In their encounter with European missionaries, did Hindus absorb any of the Christian ethos in their own religious framework? If so, was it a way to resist conversions or due to a sense of admiration towards the alien culture?

The Hindu-Christian encounter features both. Each side adapted. Christianity in the South absorbed ideas of caste and ritual purity. For instance, we see missionaries dress like Hindu gurus and adopt Brahmin customs. Meanwhile, as India came under the White man's rule, Hindus endorsed many Western frames of thinking. Raja Ram Mohan Roy is a case in point. Just as Protestant missionaries claimed that original Christianity was “corrupted” by the Catholic church, until rescued by the Protestant Reformation, Roy began to picture a pristine, abstract, monotheistic Hinduism, corrupted by Brahmins into idolatry; he promoted the idea of a Hindu Reformation. Equally, he resisted conversion, seeing in it not a question of religious choice alone but a political enterprise. Besides, the Advaitic idea of divinity was, to him, superior to Christian conceptions of god. So instead of converting, he urged Hindus to “revert” to “original”, pristine Hinduism.

When and how did militant Hinduism emerge?



Who is a Hindu? This question has bewildered many for centuries. Hinduism has through the years gone through several layers of evolution. As European power grew in the Indian sub-continent in the 16th and 17th centuries, the religion underwent yet another process of reimagination

In a sense, we can trace a genealogy for militant Hinduism back to earlier times. History offers evidence of friendly exchanges between Hindus and Muslims, but also of animosity and tensions. It is against Islamic power that we first find some hardening of the Hindu sense of self. And under colonial rule this feeling grows more potent, not least because of missionaries' polemical attacks on Hindu culture. By the end of the 19th century, the word ‘Hindutva’ emerged, and figures like Tilak attempt to define it, before Savarkar's enduring version appears. This form of militant Hinduism emerged due to a complicated interplay between nationalism and communalism, which are modern forces. It was able to do so because history supplied enough ingredients to support such a turn. All political ideologies, after all, are based on specific readings of the past.

What are your views on the modern historiography of Hinduism? What are its biggest successes or failures?

It would be presumptuous of me to attempt to list out successes and failures in a few lines. What excites me, however, is that there is phenomenal work emerging on the subject, not just by way of academic research but also via people from within the tradition engaging with it in interesting ways, be it in Sanskrit literature or so-called folk traditions. A lot of received wisdom and seemingly established ‘truths’ are being nuanced, there is greater acknowledgment of complexity and a desire to rise above ideological persuasions and categorical statements. This is a healthy trend.

There is a popular perception that in the current political environment, Hinduism has acquired an attention that was denied to it so far. Would you agree with this idea?

These feelings are not new. As societies change, prosper and navigate new forces, they not only look to the future but also examine the past afresh, sometimes in pursuit of emerging ideological goals. What you allude to is probably the grievance many feel that Hinduism has been subjected to disproportionate criticism. This is a debate I do not wish to enter. But I can say that living in the age of Hindutva, there is naturally a greater appetite to study Hinduism, including to examine contradictions between the political face of the Hindu identity and Hinduism's religious evolution. In practice, Hindutva stresses regimentation; Hinduism, though, has historically not been a regimented system. Many understandably find Hindutva disagreeable therefore. But the more interesting historical question to ask is, whether, in the long arc of Hinduism's evolution, this too is another milestone.



# How India can become the world’s leading startup ecosystem



India’s startup ecosystem has witnessed extraordinary growth, transforming from a fledgling stage to becoming the world’s third-largest hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. With over 1,30,000 recognised startups today — up from approximately 400 in 2015-16 — India’s progress is remarkable. During this period, startup funding grew 15 times, the number of investors increased nine-fold, and the number of incubators rose seven-fold. This transformation owes much to India’s robust digital public infrastructure, which has addressed pressing global challenges such as achieving Sustainable Development Goals, combating climate change, fostering financial inclusion, and improving agricultural productivity.

India stands at the threshold of a technological revolution, presenting immense opportunities in areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), big data, energy transition, electric vehicles (EVs), quantum computing, genomics, 3D printing, robotics, drones, and space exploration. The government has actively fostered this progress through initiatives like the National Quantum Mission, India AI Mission, and Semiconductor Mission, alongside allocating Rs 1 lakh crore for research and development (R&D). Progressive policies have opened up new sectors, including space, geospatial technology, defence, and drones, encouraging startups to venture into cutting-edge domains. Realising the full potential of these advancements requires collaboration between policymakers, entrepreneurs, and educational institutions. Despite their success, Indian startups, particularly in deep tech sectors, face challenges in accessing patient capital. The Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS), launched in 2016, has been a game changer. With Rs 11,688 crore committed through 151 AIFs, it has catalysed a capital pool of Rs 81,000 crore, creating a significant multiplier effect. However, India needs a specialised fund of funds for deep tech startups that require long-term investments. Increasing domestic capital sources is also essential. Although Indian startups raised over \$12 billion in 2024, about 75 per cent of this funding came from international sources. Large domestic institutions like insurance companies and pension funds can allocate a portion of their surpluses to support startups, while family offices and businesses should take on more active roles as angel investors. Private equity (PE) and venture capital (VC) have significantly shaped India’s startup ecosystem. Funding from these sources grew from \$19.7 billion in 2015 to a peak of \$77.07 billion in 2021, and in early 2024 alone, it stood at \$49.54 billion. Over 50 per cent of India’s unicorns have been backed by PE and VC investments.

# One year of Modi 3.0: Complex foreign policy challenges in a chaotic Trump world

When Narendra Modi became Prime Minister for a third term in June 2024, Joe Biden was projected to be in a close race with Donald Trump for a second term in the White House, India’s border standoff with China had been ongoing for four years, Sheikh Hasina had been at the helm of Bangladesh for 16 years, and in Pakistan, the army had propped up a new coalition government. Significantly, there had been no major attack by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists since February 2019.

A year on, almost everything has changed. Trump has made a phenomenal political comeback, Indian and Chinese troops have disengaged in Ladakh, Hasina has been ousted from power, and India has had a four-day military confrontation with Pakistan after a massive terror attack targeted civilian tourists in Pahalgam.

Since he took charge as President in January, Donald Trump’s actions have plunged the world into uncertainty. His tariffs on countries around the world have caused massive disruptions in trade and markets, and India has been pushed into negotiating a trade deal with the US. To signal intent to his domestic base, Trump has made a spectacle of the deportation of illegal immigrants — paneloads of Indians, too, have been returned in shackles. He has gone after universities like Harvard and Columbia and foreign students in the US, putting several Indian students under scrutiny and causing widespread concern.

With a number exceeding 3.3 lakh, Indians make up one of the largest foreign student cohorts in the US. New Delhi’s diplomatic challenge in Washington has become more complicated in Trump’s world. After four-and-a-half years of confrontation, India and China agreed to disengage troops at two remaining friction points in Depsang and Demchok in eastern Ladakh in October, and to resume patrolling. Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping met and decided to move towards normalising ties — steps are being taken to organise the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra for Indian pilgrims; talks are underway to restart direct flights, remove curbs on visas for the Chinese, share trans-border river data, and resume exchange of journalists. But more than 50,000 troops remain deployed on the icy heights, awaiting the next steps of de-escalation and de-induction.

After 16 years in power, the Awami League regime in Bangladesh collapsed like a house of cards in the face of street protests from students and activists backed by the political opposition in July-August last year. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled, and has been living in India since August 5. Following the chaotic transition to an interim government led by Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, New Delhi’s ties with Dhaka have suffered. Islamists and a spectrum of opportunists have gone after those aligned with Hasina’s regime. Minorities, including Hindus, who benefited from Hasina’s secularist politics, have been attacked, provoking a very strong response from New Delhi. Bangladesh has asked for Hasina to be extradited but India has taken the call of giving her refuge. Yunus has played the China card, and New Delhi has tightened screws on visas and trade. India will now be watching how inclusive and democratic Bangladesh’s elections, scheduled for April 2026, turn out to be. India responded to the killing of 26 civilians in Pahalgam first with diplomatic steps — putting the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, scrapping all visas and trade, and expelling Pakistani diplomats en masse — and then with the military step of launching attacks on nine terrorist locations, including headquarters of the Lashkar-e-Taiba and

To ensure sustainability, domestic funds must grow and focus on long-term value creation. A shift toward profitability, quality over quantity, and more robust business models can help startups achieve sustainable growth. In designing Startup India, we prioritised avoiding excessive regulations that could hinder startups. India’s startup ecosystem thrives on minimal regulatory interference, fostering innovation. However, recent incidents of corporate mismanagement in startups such as Byju’s, Dunzo, and BharatPe have raised concerns. Startups must adopt self-regulation frameworks that emphasise accountability, transparency, and ethical conduct. This involves strong mentorship, professional boards, and sound financial management. Venture capitalists and angel investors play a vital role by ensuring governance and mentoring startups to balance growth with long-term stability.

India’s premier educational institutions, including the IITs, IIMs, and IIITs, are integral to the startup ecosystem, producing skilled professionals and fostering innovation. To keep pace with emerging needs, curricula must address skill shortages in areas such as product development, data science, and AI-ML. Collaboration between academia and industry is vital to ensure that educational programmes align with market needs. Programmes for internships, apprenticeships, and recruitment can attract talent to startups and bridge existing skill gaps. As new technologies disrupt industries, regulators must adapt to the changing landscape. India’s regulatory framework must balance innovation with oversight, enabling startups to thrive while mitigating risks associated with unregulated growth. Pro-innovation policies will be crucial in maintaining India’s competitive edge. India produces approximately 24,000 PhD graduates annually, driving advancements in science and engineering. However, the country paid \$14.3 billion in IPR royalties in 2024, while earning only \$1.5 billion, highlighting a significant gap. Greater innovation and breakthroughs are essential to bridge this gap. Creating a vibrant ideas ecosystem, one that rewards and protects intellectual property, can establish India as a global hub for innovation. Startups must lead this charge, contributing to advancements in science, technology, and intellectual property.

most read India’s startup ecosystem is no longer confined to metro cities like Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi. Nearly 50 per cent of the country’s startups originate from Tier II and Tier III cities, including emerging hubs like Indore, Jaipur, and Ahmedabad. With nearly half of India’s urban population living in smaller cities, these regions offer immense potential for growth. Tech companies are increasingly establishing operations in cities such as Chandigarh, Visakhapatnam, and Ahmedabad. Supporting these regional hubs with infrastructure, educational opportunities, and inclusivity — especially by increasing women’s representation in leadership roles — will unlock untapped talent and drive innovation. India is well-positioned to become the world’s leading startup ecosystem. Favourable policies, a thriving culture of innovation, and collaborative efforts across sectors provide the foundation for scaling startups into global enterprises. As India works towards its vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047, startups will play a pivotal role in driving economic growth, creating jobs, and positioning the country as a leader in innovation.



Jaish-e-Mohammed. Following four days of military confrontation, during which China’s arms support to Pakistan was evident, a ceasefire was announced. India subsequently spelt out the new normal in its dealings with Pakistan, vowing a response whenever a terror attack takes place again. In a world made chaotic by Trump’s turbulent presidency, India continues to face challenges posed by Pakistan, and China, which continues to stand firmly with its “all-weather friend” and ally. Moving ahead, President Trump, President Xi, and General Asim Munir will test New Delhi’s diplomatic skills and capacity.

## Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla to board ISS via Axiom’s Ax-4 mission

New Delhi: Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla is set to inspire an entire generation as he becomes the first Indian to reach the International Space Station (ISS) on Tuesday. After two previous delays, US-based Axiom Space is scheduled to launch its Mission-4 (Ax-4), carrying Shukla along with three other astronauts from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket

While Shukla will be the first Indian on the ISS, he will become the second Indian to travel to space — after Rakesh Sharma, who flew to the Soviet space station Salyut 7 in 1984. During a recent press conference, Shukla said he is “extremely confident of success during Mission-4.” Speaking to IANS in March, he shared his aspiration to “inspire this entire generation to pursue careers in space,” citing Sharma as a major source of personal motivation.

Shukla will serve as pilot for the mission, alongside Commander Peggy Whitson (USA). The other crew members are mission specialists Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski (Poland) and Tibor Kapu (Hungary). Once aboard the ISS, IAF Group Captain Shukla is expected to conduct exclusive experiments related to food and nutrition. The experiments have been developed through a collaboration between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), with support from NASA.

# INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vaghsheer commissioned: Three cheers for Indian Navy



Three frontline combatants — INS Nilgiri, lead ship of the Project 17A stealth frigate class, INS Surat, fourth and final ship of the Project 15B stealth destroyer class, and INS Vaghsheer, sixth and final submarine of the Scorpene-class project — were commissioned in the Indian Navy at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai on Wednesday. INS NilgiriThe Nilgiri-class stealth frigate, built under the codename Project 17A, is a follow-on vessel of the Shivalik class or Project 17 frigates that are currently in service.

INS Nilgiri is the first of seven frigates in Project 17A being built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai, and Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata. This class of ships has an “integrated construction” philosophy, which involves extensive pre-outfitting at the block stages to reduce overall building periods. The multi-mission frigates are capable of operating in a “blue water” environment — in the deep seas far from the coast — and deal with both conventional and non-conventional threats. With their versatile weapons and capabilities, these ships can play a crucial role in anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare. The ships are fitted with a supersonic surface-to-surface missile system, a Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (MRSAM) system, a 76 millimetre upgraded gun, and a combination of rapid-fire close-in weapon systems. naval ship A destroyer, a frigate, and a submarine have been commissioned together for the first time. The keel of INS Nilgiri was laid on December 28, 2017, and the ship was launched into water on September 28, 2019. It sailed out for maiden sea trials in August last year, and underwent a comprehensive schedule of trials in harbour and at sea, leading up to its delivery to the Navy on December 20 last year. The other six ships of this class — Himgiri, Taragiri, Udaygiri, Dunagiri, and Vindhayagiri — are at various stages of construction at MDL, Mumbai, and GRSE, Kolkata. INS SuratThe fourth and final stealth guided missile destroyer under Project 15B follows INS Visakhapatnam, INS Mormugao, and INS Imphal, which were commissioned over the past three years.

INS Surat is the Indian Navy’s first AI (artificial intelligence) enabled warship, which will utilise indigenously developed AI solutions to enhance its operational efficiency manifold. Over the past decade, guided missile destroyers of the Kolkata class built under the project codenamed 15A — INS Kolkata, INS Kochi, and INS Chennai — have been commissioned into the Navy. To build an advanced variant of the Kolkata class, a contract for the construction of four more guided missile destroyers under the project codenamed 15B was signed in January 2011.

Designed by the Warship Design Bureau, the Indian Navy’s in-house warship design unit, and built by MDL, the

# Behind MHA move on Gurpatwant Pannun case: Clean slate with Trump Govt, show of due process

Behind MHA move on Pannun case: Clean slate with Trump Govt, show of due processWhile it is now up to the government to accept the committee’s recommendations, the decision to announce the report at this point is guided by at least seven factors that make it important in terms of its timing and what it means. The Ministry of Home Affairs’ statement on the committee recommending “legal action against an individual” comes just days before Donald Trump is sworn in as the US President on January 20.

The government has not taken any names, but the US had earlier alleged the involvement of Vikash Yadav, a former Indian official, in a foiled plot to kill Khalistan separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York in 2023. While it is now up to the government to accept the committee’s recommendations, the decision to announce the report at this point is guided by at least seven factors that make it important in terms of its timing and what it means.\* First, the timing of the report suggests that India wants to approach the new Trump administration with a clean slate — so that the baggage of the previous administration doesn’t cast a shadow on future bilateral ties. The fact that the government hosted outgoing National Security Advisor (NSA) Jake Sullivan in Delhi in early January and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met the incoming NSA-designate Mike Waltz in December last week signals that India doesn’t want the Pannun assassination plot to cast a shadow on future engagements. Also, it wants to insulate the process from being weaponised by the incoming Trump administration.

\* Second, India has responded to the calls by the US government under outgoing President Joe Biden, and the two indictments filed by US federal prosecutors. The report is an admission of the involvement of an Indian national in the alleged plot to kill Pannun, a US-Canadian national, on US soil.\* Third, it seeks to portray that “due process” was followed before taking any action. The fact that the panel took over 14 months to come out with its findings and recommendations signals that it followed some process. The MHA statement calls it a “long enquiry”, reflecting the process. It says the committee “conducted its own investigations” and also “pursued leads provided by the US side”. It received “full cooperation” from US authorities and the two sides also “exchanged visits”. The committee “further examined a number of officials from different agencies” and also “scrutinised relevant documents” in this connection. All this portrays that due process was followed.

\* Fourth, India has distanced the government from the “individual”. It has said the committee recommended legal action against an individual, whose “earlier criminal links and antecedents also came to notice during the enquiry”. This signals that Delhi wants to portray Yadav as a ‘rogue’ element in the establishment, a ‘lone wolf’ who did not have patronage or support of any senior officials.

four ships under Project 15B are named after major cities in the four corners of the country. Destroyers are a category of warships that have high speed and manoeuvrability, greater strike capability, and longer endurance, because of which they are a key asset in various types of naval operations, mainly offensive. With their modern sensors and communication facilities, these ships are a key asset in “network-centric” warfare, in which information technology and computer networking tools are used to form networks of various force elements that are in play in conflict scenarios. A guided missile destroyer with a displacement of 7,400 tonnes and overall length of 164 metres, INS Surat is a potent and versatile platform equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors, including surface-to-air missiles, anti-ship missiles, and torpedoes. Powered by a Combined Gas and Gas (COGAG) propulsion set comprising four gas turbines, it has achieved speeds in excess of 30 knots (56 km/h) during sea trials.

INS VaghsheerINS Vaghsheer is the sixth and final submarine of the modern stealthy Kalvari class built under Project 75. The design of the Kalvari class of submarines is based on the Scorpene class designed and developed by the French defence major Naval Group (formerly DCNS), and the Spanish state-owned entity Navantia. They have diesel electric transmission systems, and are primarily “at-tack” or “hunter-killer” submarines — which means they are designed to target and sink adversary naval vessels. According to officials, this is one of the world’s most silent and versatile diesel-electric class of submarines. It is designed to undertake a wide range of missions, including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, area surveillance, and special operations.

The submarines are armed with wire-guided torpedoes, anti-ship missiles, and advanced sonar systems, and feature modular construction that allows for future upgrades such as the integration of Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology. The AIP systems, which significantly enhance the submerged endurance of a diesel electric submarine, are expected to be installed on this class of submarines from 2026 onward. The submarines in the current Kalvari class take their names from now-decommissioned classes of submarines named Kalvari — including Kalvari, Khanderi, Karanj — and the Vela class, which included Vela, Vagir, Vagshir. The erstwhile Kalvari and Vela classes were one of the earliest submarines of the Indian Navy after Independence, which belonged to the Soviet-origin Foxtrot class of vessels. Vaghsheer is named after a type of sandfish found in the Indian Ocean. Three vessels togetherPrime Minister Narendra Modi, who presided over the commissioning ceremony, said that for the first time, a destroyer, a frigate, and a submarine were joining the Indian Navy together. “It is a matter of pride that all the three frontline platforms are made in India,” he said. A Navy veteran said: “If we consider the journeys of these three categories of ships, the time taken from the drawing board design to the commissioning is anywhere between 10 and 15 years. Which means that work on the ships that were commissioned today started that long ago.” The Navy veteran said the addition of these three vessels was “a step towards achieving the force level required for the Navy to be a formidable deterrent against any regional threats, and to bolster India’s strategic maritime influence in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond”. In his speech at the commissioning ceremony, the PM said: “India has emerged as the first responder in the Indian Ocean Region.” The Indian Navy has in recent times saved hundreds of lives and secured national and international cargo worth thousands of crores, increasing global trust in India, the Indian Navy, and the Coast Guard, the Prime Minister said. The PM emphasised the dual importance of commissioning of the three ships from both the military and economic perspective.



## The Ministry of Home Affairs’ statement on the committee recommending “legal action against an individual” comes just days before Donald Trump is sworn in as the US President on January 20.

\* Fifth, the committee, by recommending that “legal action must be completed expeditiously”, has sought to put a lid on the question of Yadav being extradited and tried by the US courts. The judicial process in India will take precedence over any attempt to bring him to justice in the US.

\* Sixth, the US has consistently asked for “accountability”. Signalling that checks and balances will be put in place to avoid a similar situation in the future, the MHA statement says the committee has “further recommended functional improvements in systems and procedures as also initiation of steps that could strengthen India’s response capability, ensure systematic controls and coordinated action in dealing with matters like this”.

\* Seventh, the seriousness with which India has approached the indictments filed by the US and the attitude towards Canada’s allegations — that Indian government agents were involved in the killing of Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar — shows the asymmetry in power dynamics between the two countries. But, more importantly, the recommendation of “legal action” gives a window of opportunity to the next Canadian leader — after Justin Trudeau — to try to mend the bilateral relationship that has soured in the last year-and-a-half.



# Stock markets surge in early trade tracking rally in global peers, RBI’s jumbo rate cut Mumbai



Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty surged in early trade on Monday tracking a rally in global markets and upbeat investors’ sentiment following the Reserve Bank’s jumbo rate cut of 50 basis points. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 480.01 points to 82,669 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 157.05 points to 25,160. 10From the Sensex firms, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tata Motors, Axis Bank, Maruti, Infosys, HCL Tech, Tech Mahindra and Bajaj Finance were the biggest gainers. However, Bharti Airtel, Eternal, ICICI Bank, Adani Ports and Tata Steel were the

laggards. In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi, Japan’s Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai’s SSE Composite index and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng were trading in the positive territory.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,009.71 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. “The monetary bazooka fired by the RBI on Friday will keep the market spirits alive in the near-term. But this is not sufficient to sustain the rally triggered on Friday. More important is the trend in earnings growth. Q4 results indicate better earnings growth for midcaps. But large and small caps continue to struggle,” VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said. “Nifty bulls are back in action after the RBI surprised with a jumbo 50 bps rate cut, igniting hopes of an economic boost and lower EMIs for the common man. This move, along with Wall Street’s rally above the 6,000 mark and renewed US-China trade optimism, has triggered a wave of buying,” Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. On Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended the day higher by 746.95 points or 0.92 per cent at 82,188.99. The Nifty reclaimed the 25,000-level and climbed 252.15 points or 1.02 per cent to settle at 25,003.05.

# Eye on strong export advantage, India not keen to dent Turkey trade ties with curbs

Eye on strong export advantage, India not keen to dent Turkey trade ties with curbsThe trade surplus assumes significance as India’s outbound shipments to Turkey largely consist of industrial exports, such as engineering goods, electronics, and organic and inorganic chemicals, which have increased over the past five years.

Amid moves to curb the role of Turkish companies in critical infrastructure, citing national security grounds, there is palpably less appetite within the Government to extend this approach to the bilateral trade basket despite calls from industry groups to ban the import of items such as apples and marbles. Reason: India runs a \$2.73 billion bilateral goods trade surplus and any blockade could be counter-productive.

“We have received a number of representations to ban imports from Turkey. Apple-growers from Himachal Pradesh have sought a ban on apple imports from Turkey. But India runs a trade surplus with Turkey and we have to keep in mind our exporters’ interests too. It (a trade ban) could be a strong geopolitical message, but it’s about how far you want to take it,” a Government official told. The trade surplus assumes significance as India’s outbound shipments to Turkey largely consist of industrial exports, such as engineering goods, electronics, and organic and inorganic chemicals, which have increased over the past five years. In contrast, Turkey’s exports to India are largely limited to fruits, nuts, gold and marble. Turkey had also stepped up petroleum product imports from India following the Ukraine war but this category has seen a significant decline in FY25. Last month, apple-growers from Himachal met Union Commerce Ministry officials to seek a ban on apple imports, stating that subsidised apples from Turkey are crippling the domestic horticulture economy and pushing orchardists in the state into financial distress. According to them, apples are not just a commercial crop but the economic backbone of hill states. Marble processors from Udaipur also wrote to the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) last month seeking import curbs on marble from Turkey, citing its support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor — India imports the majority of its marble from Turkey. Official trade data showed that exports to Turkey in FY25 totalled \$5.72 billion, largely driven by engineering exports, which comprise over 50 per cent at \$3 billion. Notably, the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector dominated the segment, contributing nearly 35-40 per cent.

Turkey’s support for Pakistan, including supplies of



drones, during Op Sindoor had led to India cancelling the security clearance for Turkish aviation firm Celebi — and tourism numbers to Turkey showing a sharp dip. But India holds the edge in bilateral trade: exports in FY25 totalled \$5.72 bn, driven by engineering exports, while imports stood at \$2.99 bn, mainly of fruits and nuts. Imports from Turkey during the last financial year stood at \$2.99 billion — imports in the fruits and nuts category were \$107.12 million, up nearly 10 per cent from \$96.82 million the previous financial year. India also imported gold worth \$270.83 million from Turkey in FY25 — 159.02 per cent higher than the \$104.56 million worth of gold imports in FY24. Last month, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) had revoked the security clearance of the Indian arm of Turkey-headquartered airport ground-handling major Celebi Aviation Holding on grounds related to “national security”. However, the Bombay High Court on May 26 temporarily halted Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL) from finalising tenders for ground and bridge handling services until Celebi’s plea against its contract termination is heard after the court reopens in June. The Indian Express reported last month that Indian tourists are increasingly cancelling holidays to Turkey and Azerbaijan, which had also supported Pakistan, as reflected in visa applications. While Turkey registered 3 lakh Indian tourists in 2024, Azerbaijan saw 2.44 lakh. Industry representatives expect that a chunk of these numbers will now be diverted to Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Ravi Dutta Mishra is a Principal Correspondent with The Indian Express, covering policy issues related to trade, commerce, and banking. He has over five years of experience and has previously worked with Mint, CNBC-TV18, and other news outlets. ... Read More

# New base year for GDP, CPI, IIP from early 2026; Services survey from Jan: MoSPI Secretary

With the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) undertaking a base revision exercise and expansion of its data indicators, the key economic datasets — GDP, IIP and CPI — will see a new base from next year onwards, MoSPI Secretary Saurabh Garg said. In an interview with Aanchal Magazine, Garg also said that the weights and items for the new retail inflation basket will now be linked with Household Consumption and Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24 instead of the earlier decision to derive it from HCES 2022-23. Edited excerpts:

At what stage is the statistics ministry on revision of base years for GDP, IIP and CPI? By when can we expect the base revision?

The base year revision exercise of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and Consumer Price Index (CPI) is currently underway. For GDP, the new series is scheduled to be released on February 27, 2026 with financial year 2022-23 as base year. For IIP, 2022-23 has been tentatively identified as the revised base. IIP on revised base would be released from 2026-27. For CPI, 2024 has been identified as the revised base year as the item basket and the weightage of the items would be decided based on the NSO’s Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES) conducted in 2023-24. The new CPI series is expected to be published from the first quarter of 2026.

You mentioned that the item basket and the items’ weightage for inflation would be decided based on HCES 2023-24. Some of the earlier statements from the Ministry had pointed out that the item basket would be based on HCES 2022-23. So, is it 2022-23 or 2023-24?

Initially, the Ministry decided to use 2022-23 HCES data for deriving weights and item basket for CPI base update. Now since data for HCES 2023-24 is released and available for use, the Ministry has decided to use the latest data that is HCES 2023-24 data for deriving weights and item basket for the new series. How are the shares of segments in the CPI basket going to change? There were indications earlier that the housing segment will go beyond the government accommodation to capture the real picture of rentals and housing prices. What are the other items that will be included afresh or see a tweak in the current inflation basket?

For the new CPI series with base year 2024, the item basket will be based on data from HCES 2023–24. The finalisation of both the item basket and the weighting diagram is currently in progress.

In the new series, dwellings provided by the govern-

# What is the COVID-19 situation in India? | Explained



The story so far: After a rise in COVID-19 numbers in Southeast Asia, India has started to show an uptick in the number of cases over the last couple of weeks. The numbers slowly grew to hit 5,755 cases (as of Saturday 5:30 pm) as per the Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 dashboard.

What is the medical advice?

The same dashboard states that 5,484 people have been discharged. Even as the numbers rise, doctors and experts have repeatedly stated that seasonal spikes and dips in COVID-19 cases are to be expected, since it had moved from a pandemic to an endemic infection. The COVID-19 virus is co-circulating with other seasonal viruses, they point out, and currently the dominant strain is an Omicron sub-variant from which the subcontinent has adequate immunity. The cases have not been severe; from the point of transmissibility too, the R0 (reproductive number) is not that worrying to indicate a high contagion factor.

What is the situation in the country today?

As of now, the variants of COVID-19 doing the rounds in India are descendants of the Omicron variant, first reported in November 2021. The emerging sub-variants, NB.1.8.1 and LF.7, driving the current COVID-19 surge are descendants of JN.1, a sub-lineage of the Omicron BA.2.86 variant. In Kerala for instance, a senior health department official said that “almost all of the samples sent for whole genome sequencing from the State have shown that the circulating virus variant is LF.1, one of the descendants of Omicron, the immune evasiveness of which is quite well-known.” Cases have mostly been mild, according to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). The reported symptoms are those of the common cold or seasonal flu, including fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, headache, fatigue, body aches, and loss of appetite. P. Senthur Nambi, senior consultant, Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospitals, Chennai, said most of the COVID-19 patients he had seen so far have done well. “Most of them had only an upper respiratory infection. These patients were managed based on their symptoms and most of them did not require any COVID specific antiviral medications. Prior exposure to the infection, the effects of the vaccines taken or a combination of both factors with vaccine-induced antibodies could be playing a protective role,” he explained. “The key difference with these new strains,” said Sujan Bardhan, consultant (Tuberculosis and chest diseases), Narayana Hospital, R.N. Tagore Hospital, Kolkata, “is their speed, not their severity. Hospitals are well-prepared and the healthcare system remains under no immediate strain. Nonetheless, the importance of basic preventive measures cannot be overstated.”

What is the vaccine position?

India launched the world’s largest COVID-19 immunisation drive in January 2021. To date, over 220 crore doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in the country as per the CoWIN dashboard. These were primarily of the two vaccines available then, AstraZeneca’s Covishield and Bharat Biotech’s Covaxin. Rajiv Bahl, Director General of ICMR, has said there is absolutely no need to initiate mass booster doses for COVID-19 vaccines at present, and neither is there a direction from the Central government on this. As cases rise, Dr. Bahl noted that individual doctors could recommend booster doses to patients on a case-to-case basis. He further explained that the need for mass vaccination, while not felt at present, could arise, with perhaps a mutation in the virus or its spread. “For that, India already has the capacity to scale up production and provide for the general public. We have done this before and there is no need to panic,” he said. Since vaccines which were stocked and used in 2021 and 2022 have now fallen into disuse and expired, there are no stocks at present, a government official said. The official, however, added that the government could direct manufacturers to produce more stocks as and when necessary. Most States, including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and West Bengal, have no stocks or supplies of the vaccine at present either in the government or private sector.

“By the time Omicron ran its course, almost all of our population had been exposed to the virus. Even when this

# Why calcium and iron supplements should not be taken together



Are you one of those who has been advised to take calcium and iron supplements to make up for deficiencies but not found them to be effective enough? “That’s because many do not know how to take them, the way they should be gapped and the right time to take them,” says Dr Rommel Tickoo, Director, Internal Medicine, Max Healthcare. According to him, calcium and iron supplements should never be taken together because they compete for absorption in the digestive system, potentially reducing the effectiveness of both. “Both calcium and iron use the same pathways in the intestines for absorption and vice versa. Taken together they could effectively cancel each other out. That’s why when you pop both pills together after a meal, you don’t see the intended effect,” he says.

How should one take iron and calcium supplements during the day?

One must take them several hours apart. So one can be taken in the morning while another can be taken in the evening. There is no hard and fast rule but considering both pregnant women and menopausal women need calcium, it is best taken in the morning. That’s because the higher activity phase of the human body and the sunlight during the day can enhance your body’s ability to absorb Vitamin D better and metabolise this mineral. Also avoid taking calcium at evening or night as the absorption is slower and can cause calcium stagnation. For those needing a quick boost of iron, taking it after they wake up works best because the body’s iron levels are typically at their lowest.

Should they be taken with meals or after them?

One must realise that both iron and calcium are absorbed best when the stomach is empty as food can deter absorption. So make sure that you take them either 30 minutes before or at least two hours after a meal. Should one avoid taking dairy foods, which contain calcium, before taking an iron supplement and iron-rich foods before taking

antibody protection wanes, the long-term immune memory remains. This innate immunity plus the vaccine-derived immunity through good coverage of the initial two doses means that most people have strong hybrid immunity against COVID-19,” the Kerala health department official said. Previous vaccines may not be very effective against the Omicron variants but would, however, offer protection against serious forms of the disease. Though two indigenously developed nasal vaccines specifically targeting the Omicron variant from Bharat Biotech and Indian Immunologicals, as well as another vaccine for the Omicron variant, were made available in the Indian market, the uptake was low, doctors said. Kiran Madala, a Hyderabad-based doctor, part of an international group of genetic epidemiologists under the COVID Treatment Exchange Organisation, said the current World Health Organization guidelines recommend vaccines primarily for individuals above 70 years of age, those who are immunocompromised, and patients with multiple co-morbidities. Children, especially those aged two to six years, do not need vaccination unless they have underlying health issues or are immunosuppressed. Dr. Nambi in Chennai said some patients, those who have travel obligations, have requested the vaccines, but none are available at present. “But I wish that there was an option of vaccination, not for the general population in large but for two subsets of patient groups in whom the infection could cause problems,” he said. One, those who have not received any COVID-19 vaccines or missed an infection, leaving them without immunity, while the second are those with co-morbidities and who are immuno-compromised.

T. Jacob John, retired professor of clinical virology at Christian Medical College, Vellore, also said that the elderly and immunocompromised people needed to be vaccinated again, irrespective of whether they were fully vaccinated (two doses and a booster) or had been exposed to the virus earlier. State governments, however, have taken a more cautious stance: “Whether vaccination is required or not depends on many factors,” said T. S. Selvaavinayagam, T.N. Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine. “We need to study the epidemiology of the current cases before commenting on the requirement for vaccination now.” Kerala has said it was “not advocating for or against COVID booster shots” because of the lack of epidemiological data that booster doses offered enhanced protection against emerging immune-evasive variants.

What next?

The Delhi High Court, earlier this week, directed the Centre to submit a thorough status report detailing its actions regarding the policy for sample collection, collection centres, and transportation of samples. The court also stressed urgency to finalise and implement Standard Operating Procedures. As the virus continues to adapt, so must we, Dr. Bardhan pointed out. Staying informed and following trusted health sources, personal protection and hygiene measures such as hand washing, avoiding crowded places when possible or masking up, refraining from going outdoors when ill and maintaining a healthy, well-balanced lifestyle could help navigate this phase and any more to come. Compiled by Zubeda Hamid, with inputs from C. Maya in Kerala, Serena Josephine M. in Chennai, Bindu Shajan Perappadan in Delhi, Afshan Yasmeen in Bengaluru, Shrabana Chatterjee in Kolkata and Siddharth Kumar Singh in Hyderabad.

calcium pills?

There is no study that proves dietary calcium and iron collide with supplements. Some foods contain oxalates and phytates, both of which can bind to calcium and iron, limiting their absorption. That’s why we insist on having supplements before or well after a meal.

Who needs these supplements?

Iron plays a role in the production of red blood cells and enzymes, enhancing the immune systems. So those diagnosed with iron deficiency anemia or those at risk of developing it, such as pregnant women, infants, children and people with certain medical conditions need it. Calcium supplements are generally recommended for those who cannot get enough calcium through their diet, including those following vegan diets, those with lactose intolerance, those with certain digestive diseases, and pregnant, breastfeeding and menopausal women. In children, calcium and iron are critical for the nourishment and development of the skeleton and teeth.

# The Ethics of Virtual Influencers

In an era where authenticity is currency, it’s ironic that some of the internet’s most influential personalities aren’t even real. Virtual influencers, computer-generated personas operated by teams of designers, marketers, and AI engineers, have begun to dominate digital platforms once ruled by human content creators. They collaborate with brands, appear in fashion campaigns, promote social causes, and amass millions of followers. But as their presence grows, so too does an urgent ethical debate: What does it mean when influence is no longer rooted in lived experience, but in carefully simulated narratives? The phenomenon of virtual influencers isn’t new, but its current sophistication and scale are unprecedented. Lil Miquela, arguably the poster child of this movement, emerged on Instagram in 2016, posed as a 19-year-old Brazilian-American robot model, and has since partnered with major brands like Prada, Samsung and Calvin Klein. Her carefully curated persona of activist, fashion icon, and artist presents a veneer of relatability and edge. And it works. She’s not just accepted, she’s adored. But that adoration raises troubling questions. Who is accountable when a virtual influencer peddles unrealistic beauty standards, misrepresents a marginalised identity, or expresses political views? Behind these digital avatars are corporate teams, overwhelmingly homogeneous and profit-driven, pulling the strings.



# Karun Nair’s journey from despair to redemption in cricket, showcasing resilience and determination in his comeback to Test cricket.



GNS News Agency, June 16

In December 2022, in the middle of the domestic first-class season in which he took no part, India’s second Test triple-centurion took to Twitter (now X), pleading with ‘dear cricket’ to ‘give me one more chance.’ A string of poor scores had led to his exclusion from the Karnataka team he had captained not long back and he appeared at the end of his tether, his unbeaten 303 against England in Chennai in December 2016 a distant and painful memory despite the magnitude of that accomplishment.

Karun’s triple-hundred came as a bolt from the blue. Not that he didn’t have the skills or the ability – he had assiduously compiled a 14-and-a-half-hour 328 in the final of the Ranji Trophy against Tamil Nadu in March 2015, which Karnataka won by an innings – but it appeared dramatically, without warning. In his two previous Test innings, he had made 4 (run out after being sold a dummy by his captain Virat Kohli on debut in Mohali) and 13. There was no indication that a big one was coming. At Chepauk, he positively filled his boots. India had already secured an invincible 3-0 lead when they hosted England in the last of five Tests. For the second game in a row, the visitors topped 400 (477) on batting first, and India had eased to 211 for three when Karun strode out to join his state-mate K.L. Rahul, opening the batting. In the aforementioned Ranji final, the two came together at 84 for five – Rahul had retired hurt when the team was 16, and watched from the dressing-room as Lakshmiopathi Balaji ripped out the top order – and put on 386, effectively slamming the door on Abhinav Mukund’s side. Rahul’s contribution in Karnataka’s 762 was a mellifluous 188.

This time, the situation wasn’t as dire but hey, this was a Test match. Never mind if the series had been won or lost, there was plenty at stake, for both batters. After smashing 158 against West Indies in July, Rahul’s Test scores read 50, 28, 32, 38, 0, 10 and 24 – a few starts, but nothing substantial. As for Karun, his Test career had yet to take off. The two men who had begun their representative cricketing journeys at almost the same time lived out a fairytale, adding 161 for the fourth wicket. Rahul eased to 199 when he lobbed leggie Adil Rashid to cover, exiting the ground in unconcealed disappointment. Karun wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth, flaying England to the tune of 32 fours and four sixes while breezing to 303 off just 381 deliveries. Not quite in the Virender Sehwag league when it came to rate of scoring but suddenly, Sehwag’s lonely existence in the 300-club had come to an end.

It ought to have been the beginning. In a way it was, but sadly, it was the beginning of the end, as callous as that might sound. Karun played three of India’s next four Tests, against Australia in March 2017, 54 runs in four innings with a highest of 26 deemed enough of a sample size for him to be benched. Not even a triple-century three months ago bought him a lifeline. He was summarily discarded from the playing XI, and though he did travel to England in the summer of 2018 for a four-Test series, his cup of woe spilled over when mid-series reinforcement Hanuma Vihari was given a debut in the final Test at The Oval while Karun continued to ferry drinks and watch wistfully, balefully, from the sidelines.

For a professional sportsperson, the worst thing that can happen is not being dropped so much as not being told when one is not being considered. There were no clear lines of communication from the team management – Kohli and head coach Ravi Shastri – and Karun’s natural reserved nature in a group he really hadn’t yet grown comfortable in led to unsubstantiated, mischievous whispers surrounding his ‘attitude’. In Indian cricket more than in any other sphere, this is a stick of convenience used conveniently. Saddled with the ‘attitude’ tag, Karun found himself out of contention, the insecurity and confusion triggering a spectacular meltdown when he went 56 matches across formats without a

century for Karnataka. When the axe fell, to no one’s surprise, Karun was distraught. Was he a victim of circumstances, a victim of the expressions he had triggered with two triple-centuries in 21 months (one of them in Test cricket) or his own self-doubts and lack of guidance? Was he let down by the ecosystem, or did he let himself down? His career at a crossroads, that’s when he pleaded with ‘dear cricket’ for ‘one more chance’.

But unless one helps themselves, no one else is going to, right? Karun didn’t just sit on his backside, hoping for things to change on their own. He eventually decided to take matters into his own hands and embark on a journey of salvation. He told himself that he would give it his all in one last throw of the dice to redeem himself in his own eyes. And look at where that has got him today. Karun’s road to redemption first took him to England, and a three-match stint with Northamptonshire in Division 1 of the County Championship, in September 2023. He made 78 on debut against Warwickshire, topped it with 150 in the next outing at The Oval against Surrey and finished the season with 249 runs at an average of 83. On his return home, he shifted allegiance to Vidarbha, for whom he had two wonderful seasons; the first, which produced 690 runs, took his new team to the final while a few months back, he was the driving force behind their charge to the title, amassing 863 runs with four hundreds at 53.93. Around the Ranji campaign, he hammered an unbelievable 779 runs in eight innings in the 50-over Vijay Hazare Trophy where Vidarbha lost to Karnataka in the final. How do you overlook such consistency? How can such exceptional form be ignored, especially with Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli bidding goodbye to Test cricket? There is every likelihood that, even had these two gentlemen been around, Karun would have been in the Test squad to England. Their retirements made it a no-brainer.

Karun and England have had a mixed connection. It was against England that he made his Test debut and his triple, it was also in England that he suffered his worst period in the Indian dressing room in 2018. When he was pushed to a corner, he turned to England, its County Championship, and to Northants, for whom he scored more than 700 runs across two seasons in ten matches. Now, as he returns to the Test firmament after seven years, who should be in his crosshairs than England?

In an 18-strong party, Karun is the sole specialist middle-order batter. The rest – the likes of Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar, Nitish Kumar Reddy and Dhruv Jurel – all fall in the all-rounder category. He should in all likelihood start the series at Headingley in less than a fortnight’s time. Already, he has shown that he is well equipped to make a good thing count, unleashing 204 in the first ‘Test’ for India ‘A’ against the Lions last week and backing it up with 40 in the first innings of the second ‘Test’. At 33, he is wiser, more experienced, has seen the ups and downs, is at the peak of his powers and is a leader in his own right. As Shubman Gill embarks on an exciting new journey as a 25-year-old first-time Test captain, he can do with all the wisdom that is under his command – not just Jasprit Bumrah, Pant and Rahul, but also Karun, whose captaincy credentials are impressive. Karun will have to make his own runs, for sure, but his value to the side will extend beyond just runs. He is now a lot more confident of himself, his mind riddled of doubt and insecurity, and his maturity has manifested itself in more ways than one. If he believes it is his time now, it is not without good reason. A five-Test series is a grand opportunity to showcase one’s class and quality. Having waited this long for a second coming, Karun will hope the think-tank shows patience, empathy and understanding, qualities that he hasn’t been at the receiving end of in the past. There will be attendant nerves whenever he returns to the Test fold, which is inevitable given the journey he has traversed in the eight years since last playing a match in India colours, in Dharamsala in March 2017. Karun has become quite adept at handling those nerves and of being in control of his emotions. There is a certain calmness and equanimity about him that indicates that he is at peace with himself, that he has shed the baggage of the past behind, and that he is optimistic about the gladder tidings that the future will bring. In Karun’s comeback is a tale of inspiration and gumption. The value of tenacity, bloody-mindedness, of persistence and determination, have been reiterated by his reintegration with Test cricket. But Karun is well aware that this is just the beginning of his second innings, so to say. A recall is a means to an end, not an end in itself. And therein lie the exciting possibilities.

# Carlos Alcaraz comes back from the dead to beat Jannik Sinner in all-time great contest to retain French Open men’s singles title



As Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner went into the sixth hour of their titanic battle in Sunday’s French Open final, one distinct quality separated the two players in a match where advantages were gained and lost, momentum shifted, and levels of tennis went up and down gears. On the biggest stages such as this, crucial moments are often seized by nerveless ease under pressure. The glow of the spotlight cannot dim one’s abilities, but should actually make them shine brighter. And Alcaraz has a certain predilection for the spotlight that few, or any, of his contemporaries have shown in the recent history of men’s tennis. The Spaniard would defend his Roland Garros title, win his fifth Grand Slam title and become the only player other than Roger Federer to win his first five Major finals after coming out on top in an epic five-set battle 4-6 6-7 (4), 6-4, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (10-2) in five hours and 29 minutes. Down three match points after spending most of four sets being stretched to all corners of the court and being blown away by Sinner from the baseline, Alcaraz came up with his very best. He stubbornly stuck to his guns, applied the same weight of shot to his huge forehand, and artistry to his variegated game, to win 13 of the next 14 points, break Sinner as he served for the match, and then thundered his way through the resultant tie-breaker to steal the fourth set.

In the ensuing fifth set, he had all the momentum his way until Sinner was the one who rose from the dead, breaking the Spaniard when he served for the match and producing some rollicking tennis to take the contest into the first-to-10-points tiebreaker. Once again, as an ocean of pressure surrounded him, as hours of tennis went into his legs, as the crowd grew wild, Alcaraz produced a perfect exhibition of tennis in the match tiebreaker. He was clutch in the big moments: the one thing that separated these two phenomenally talented young players in a tightly-fought encounter

# ‘It’s a bold move, trusting a young leader with...’: Former England captain Michael Vaughan on Shubman Gill as Indian Test captain



GNS News Agency, June 16

Shubman Gill will become India’s fifth youngest Test captain of all time when he leads the team out at Headingley in the first of the five-match series that they are set to play in England starting on June 20. He is India’s youngest Test captain since Sachin Tendulkar, who was appointed at the age of 23. Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi (21), Kapil Dev (24) and Ravi Shastri (25 years, but 55 days younger than Gill) were the other three youngest Indian Test captains. Former England captain Michael Vaughan has called the elevation of Gill as a ‘bold move’ and believes the Indian youngster has a lot to prove.

“Shubman Gill is officially the new face of Indian Test cricket, stepping up as captain for the England series. It’s a bold move, trusting a young leader with a new-look team

# Josh Hazlewood on nicknamed ‘HazleGod’: ‘Hopefully, it runs out of steam pretty quickly’



GNS News Agency, June 16

One of the key reasons behind Royal Challengers Bengaluru’s maiden title was their bowling, led by Australia’s Josh Hazlewood. Whenever Bengaluru was losing its grip in the game, it would turn to Hazlewood, and he created the much-needed breakthrough. From 12 games, he picked up 22 wickets at an economy of 8.77, bowling in the powerplay, middle overs, and final over of the innings. For his efforts, he has earned himself a new nickname through the course of the tournament, “HazleGod.” When asked about how he feels about the tag, the 34-year-old said, “Yeah, hopefully, it runs out of steam pretty quickly. It’s flattering, obviously, to hear it around the grounds in India, but I don’t think it’ll take off in Australia,” said Hazlewood who will play World Test Championship final on June 11 against South African.

Alongside Hazlewood in the conversation was his partner in crime, Mitchell Starc. “Hopefully, it sticks because I don’t think he likes it too much. He’s had a fantastic few months, the big fella over in India, and he’s come home with bags of cash. So I look forward to seeing him in action here at Lord’s,” said Starc. Off-spinner Nathan Lyon revealed during the training sessions of the WTC that Hazlewood did refer to himself as “HazleGod.” “HazleGod, he actually referred to himself as it the other day, which totally took me back by surprise,” said Lyon. “Off the back of him winning

ter that went to the wire. In a high-wire contest of momentum swings, destructive shotmaking, and a distinct contrast of approaches, Alcaraz defeated the 23-year-old World No. 1 from Italy in a match that will be remembered for years and signal the new generation coming out of the shadow of the previous Big Three – Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic. The wildness of this match and the sky-high intensity that the two players produced was representative of the ridiculous look of the scoreline. The match did not have some of the sustained high-quality tennis that these two have produced in the past, but given the high-stakes occasion and the sheer ability both showed in not relenting under pressure, the five-and-a-half-hour-long slugfest will go down as one of the most enthralling finals ever witnessed on the hallowed, unforgiving red clay of Court Philippe Chatrier. Sinner would leave as the loser only by the barest of margins, having played a phenomenal match but not decisively coming up with the goods in the most important moments. This is the bridge he still needs to cross, despite being the dominant World No. 1 who has won 47 of his last 50 matches (each of the three losses coming against Alcaraz), as he needs to outlast his opponents, not only outplay them. Match of fine margins

Alcaraz was patchy, at times outplayed, and made a bunch of errors in the first half of the match, but held his nerve and produced his best when put under the most intense pressure, a mark of greatness, the same quality he has been marked for as he has risen remarkably up the ranks of tennis to become the man to beat at the Majors. For most of the contest, Sinner was the superior player. His crosscourt backhand singing the court, his forehands on the run finding accuracy and power, his returns right down the middle disrupting Alcaraz’s rhythm. He had met the challenge and raised his level when put under pressure, and was the better player in the decisive moments over the first two sets. This was a clash of different approaches. Sinner had brilliantly executed a clear-headed gameplan that had gained him so much success throughout this tournament. Alcaraz was instead playing far more on instinct, going for broke and the spectacular more often, playing big even when not required. It resulted in massive winners and highlight-worthy moments, but also several errors. In the opening two sets, Sinner had shown composure and just played the decisive moments better, Alcaraz’s errors giving him the breakthrough in the first, and his nerveless display in the tie-breaker (after again failing to serve out the set) giving him the edge in the second.

after the retirements of giants like Rohit and Kohli. Gill has a lot to prove, especially away from home, but he has shown he has the temperament for big moments,” Vaughan told Sony Sports Network. The 25-year-old has so far played in 32 Test matches for India since his debut against Australia at Melbourne in 2020. Gill has so far scored 1,893 runs including five centuries and seven half-centuries in Test cricket. BCCI had announced Gill as India’s 37th Test captain last month and with Rishabh Pant being appointed his deputy, it has to be seen how the Gill-Pant duo take the Indian Test team forward. Vaughan believes the upcoming England tour could be the start of something special for India. “With Rishabh Pant as his deputy and a squad eager to make their mark, this England tour could be the start of something special for India’s next generation. Don’t be surprised if these youngsters rise to the occasion,” Vaughan added. India last won a Test series against England in England in 2007 when the Rahul Dravid led Indian team scored a 1-0 win in the three-Test series against England. Former Indian captain Sunil Gavaskar, who had captained India in 47 Tests, shared how everyone is eager to see Gill and company rise to the occasion and carve out their legacy. “There’s always something special about an Indian team touring England, and this time, with a new young captain and terrific young players, the excitement and anticipation among fans are at an all-time high. Everyone is eager to see how these young cricketers will rise to the occasion and carve out their legacy,” Gavaskar told Sony Sports Network.

the IPL, I think he’s running with it,” he added. RCB beat Punjab Kings by six runs in the final at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. Hazlewood picked up the crucial wicket of Priyansh Arya at the top to create the breakthrough for RCB after both the Punjab openers Arya and Prabhsimran Singh, were scoring at a brisk pace and eating away at the target quickly. Though Hazlewood has conceded 54 runs in the final, most of them came in the final over when the game was won.

# Marc Marquez dominates MotorLand to secure seventh victory, Alex Marquez and Bagnaia complete podium

Hyderabad: Marc Marquez (Ducati Lenovo Team), for the first time since 2015, topped every session in a Grand Prix weekend to clinch a dominant seventh victory at MotorLand, simply put chapeaux.

On home turf, brother and title rival Alex Marquez (BK8 Gresini Racing MotoGP) took P2 ahead of an improving Francesco Bagnaia (Ducati Lenovo Team) – the Italian looking somewhat back to the Champion we know and love on Sunday in Aragon (Spain).

Unlike the Sprint, Marc Marquez got a great launch and the holeshot belonged to the polesitter, with Alex Marquez and Bagnaia slotting into P2 and P3. Franco Morbidelli (Pertamina Enduro VR46 Racing Team) lost out at the start, the Italian was shuffled down to P7 on Lap 1 from the front row.



# Aamir Khan says he was asked to do an action film after Laal Singh Chaddha failure: ‘I had many offers, but story of Sitaare Zameen Par entered my bloodstream’



In the last five years, Aamir Khan has quit acting twice. First, during the pandemic, driven by his guilt over not spending enough time with his family. Second, after the failure of Laal Singh Chaddha. But he admits in an interview with SCREEN that he has a compulsive streak to do a film if the story has entered his bloodstream. The same happened with RS Prasanna’s coming-of-age film Sitaare Zameen Par, a Hindi adaptation of the 2018 Spanish film Campeones.

How did the Campeones remake become Sitaare Zameen Par, a spiritual sequel to your 2007 directorial debut Taare Zameen Par?

For me, the script was an extension of what we were trying to say in Taare. So Taare is about inclusion and a child who has learning disability. In this, the challenges are quite greater than dyslexia. The children are intellectually atypical: somebody has Down syndrome, another one has autism, and others are also on that spectrum. Not just that, in Taare, it’s the teacher who helps the child, the neuro-atypical person helps the neuro-typical person. In this, the 10 neuro-atypical children help the coach. So it goes 10 steps ahead in the same theme.

As an actor, what did you learn from these 10 new actors you worked with?

They taught us a lot. On a film set, with so many creative people working together, it’s not unusual to have ego clashes and creative differences. People loose their cool. I’ve been working for 35 years and have done 45 films. In my career, I’ve never had such a smooth sail. No one had ego hassles or raised their voice. No feathers had to be smoothened. I pointed it out to Prasanna at the end of the shoot. I said it’s because of these 10. If they walk into this room now, the energy would change completely! They’re so loving, they’ll hug you, they’ll press your cheeks. No-body raises their voice in front of them because then they only feel awkward. You don’t want them to see you in a particular light. Their presence just changes the way I behave. That’s what their impact is. Aamir Khan worked with 10 new actors in Sitaare Zameen Par. Aamir Khan worked with 10 new actors in Sitaare Zameen Par.

Genelia D’Souza plays your wife in the film, but you also cast her opposite your nephew Imran Khan in Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na (2008). Was that ever a concern?

Ya, I know. But that was a long time ago. And ab Imran bhi kafi meri age ka ho gaya hai (laughs). That thought did come to me, but in the film, we’re both playing characters in the age group of early 40s. She’s around that age. I’m 60, but in today’s day and age, we have the advantage of VFX. Earlier, if I played an 18-year-old, I had to rely on prosthetic. Like Anil Kapoor did in Eeshwar (1989). He was very young, but he played an 80-year-old for Christ’s sake. He was jumping his age, which is very exciting for an actor. Today, he can be made to look 80 and vice-versa via VFX. So, age is not a barrier for actors anymore.

Speaking of Imran, has he discussed with you why he quit acting 10 years ago?

Yes, Imran has a certain creative instinct. He finds it difficult to fit into the mainstream construct we have. That’s not his natural space. Which is why he’d do really well in a film like Jaane Tu... and Delhi Belly (2011). He’s in his element there. But the moment you put him into a regular Hindi film, he won’t fit. He’s not comfortable with herogiri. He wants to play a real person. Everybody was offering him mainstream films because he’s good-looking. But he wants to be an actor, and not a star.

Do you think your elder son Junaid Khan is also more of an actor than a star?

I think he’s a pretty good actor. I’m really proud he’s done his job really well in both the films. In his second film Loveyapa, he played a very harami character. That’s opposite his personality, but he pulled it off really well. I could see him as the guy. He had also tested for Laal Singh Chaddha. He was bang on. He has a very rare quality that even a lot of skilled actors don’t have — he becomes the character. He’s also a little unafraid, like me. If you compare Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (Aamir’s debut film) with his first two films, I’m very raw there. He’s also done a film I’ve produced — Ek Din — a love story with Sai Pallavi. All his three films are very different from each other. Success hasn’t reached him yet in the way he deserves it, but that’s part of life and his learning. It’s important for him to grow through this as well. Success will come when the time is right.

Have you come to terms with the failure of Laal Singh Chaddha?

To be honest, after Laal Singh Chaddha, I was quite depressed, heartbroken, and emotionally battered because I hadn’t had an unsuccessful film in very long. It was quite shocking for me because I’d also liked the film. So I was very surprised that people didn’t like it. Let me just add here, because I know a lot of people love the film, 25% of the audience has really loved the film. But I also have to admit that the larger bulk, 75% of them didn’t didn’t connect with the film, they didn’t like my work, they had their issues. I understand and respect that. But it was difficult for me to accept. Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor in Laal Singh Chaddha Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor in Laal Singh Chaddha.

That’s when you took a step back and hired Farhan Akhtar in Sitaare Zameen Par instead of you?

Yes. That time, I told Prasanna I wouldn’t be able to act again so soon. Since the film is good and we’ve to make it, I asked him to cast someone else. He offered the film to many people. Everyone liked the script, and then finally, we locked Farhan for it. We were also making a Tamil version because Prasanna is a Tamilian. So we locked Sivakarthikeyan for that one.

Then how did you come back on board as the lead?

As a producer, I had to finalize the draft. So I told Prasanna and writer Divyanidhi Sharma we’d discuss the script for a week before the prep once we lock everything. In the first half hour of the first day, as Divya was reading the script, I was telling myself, “Tell me, why are you not doing this film, again? It’s a superb script yaar.” So I thought ye toh gadbad ho gayi yaar. And some time had also passed so I’d recovered from Laal Singh Chaddha being a flop.

How did you break the news to Farhan and Sivakarthikeyan?

On the seventh day, I told Prasanna and Divya, but also said now it’s too late. Of course, the moment I said that, all hell broke loose. They insisted I only do it. But I thought it doesn’t reflect well on me as a producer after I’ve locked the actors’ dates. Mera bat hai, mujhe batting karni hai (laughs). Bachpana ho jata hai yaar. But Prasanna convinced me and said I should do it since I was his first choice. So, I told Farhan and Sivakarthikeyan honestly about the journey I’d been through. They were both very supportive. If I was in their shoes, I’d have been very disappointed. But at the end of the day, Farhan and I are friends. Sivakarthikeyan and I are also very fond of each other. I’m hosting a premiere, so I’ll definitely invite them for that.

Are you confident about Sitaare Zameen Par, given the last couple of failures?

Right now, it’s a famine or feast situation at the box office. Either the films are not doing any business at all, or the one or two that people are loving are going through the roof, earning more than Rs 500 crore. The whole middle chunk has vanished. Why? Because I’m watching them on Netflix or Amazon. Which is why I’ve come up with the decision to release Sitaare Zameen Par only in theatres. It’ll premiere on television or streaming only after one year. My loyalty is with the theatres and my trust in my audience.

But given the current trend, are you concerned that Sitaare Zameen Par wouldn’t go through the roof because it’s not a spectacle film?

Everybody around me told to do an action film after Laal Singh Chaddha. I could’ve done it, I had many offers. But the story of Sitaare Zameen Par really touched my heart. I’m the kind of creative person that once something goes into my bloodstream, I have to do it. It’s happened with Lagaan (2001). No producer would invest the resources it needed because Ashutosh Gowariker was a flop director then. But since the story had gone into my bloodstream, I told Ashu I’d produce it. I didn’t want to become a producer. I became one by accident because I couldn’t find anyone else to produce it. It was an impractical decision.

It happened with Dangal (2016) too. I told Nitesh Tiwari then that people think I’m very young because Dhoom 3 (2013) had just released. They think I’m 35 and when Dangal releases, they’d realize my true age. So I asked him to do the film after 5-10 years. He agreed, but it had gone into my blood. After six months, I said forget it, even if my career goes for a toss, I have to do it. With Taare Zameen Par too, people asked me if I’m making a documentary. Just imagine a scenario in which only action films are being made. I don’t feel nice about that. But that’s not the reason why I made this. I made it because I loved it.

Would you do a massy action film anytime soon?

Ninety percent of my films don’t have action. Like Ghajini (2008) and Dhoom 3 are massy. The film I’m doing next year with Lokesh Kanagaraj is also very massy. Once in a while, I do a massy film because I’m also massy (chuckles). I don’t like to stick to only one genre. But I think my favourite genre is drama with humour, like Rajkumar Hirani’s genre. Raju and I are very excited about the Dadasaheb Phalke biopic we’re working on next. We’ll start it hopefully by the end of this year.

SS Rajamouli is also making one. Have you discussed that with him?

I wasn’t aware. It’s such a coincidence. I had no idea. I suppose they also didn’t know. Since then, I’ve been so busy with Sitaare Zameen Par, I didn’t have the opportunity to speak to Raja.

## Rajeev Sen responds to trolls: ‘My sister Sushmita Sen writes me cheques, I live with my mom; what is your problem?’

Actor Sushmita Sen’s brother, Rajeev Sen who often stays in headlines for his personal life, has once again come in the limelight for his long note to his haters. In his recent vlog, Rajeev addressed the trolls who criticise him for living off his sister’s money. Expressing gratefulness for his privileges, Rajeev clarified that he need not be a superstar to have a luxurious life. He said, he is a successful businessman and has earned a lot of money for himself. He shared, “I have had a successful jewellery business for a long time. Yes, I am fortunate that a lot of it was given to me because it was my company, it was my parents’ company. A lot of it was handed to me on a plate, but even in that scenario, I had to prove myself—that I can sell jewellery. Acting or production, YouTube just happened recently. This is just a passion project that I can afford to give time to because I have other ventures. I am a successful investor. I have earned a lot of money on my own and I am very proud of that fact.” Rajeev also addressed questions around him living with his mother. He said, “If my mother ever asked me to leave the house, I would do so and be on the street.” At the end, he slammed his critics and said, “Just assume for a moment that I am living a luxurious life, that my mum is signing cheques for me every month, my dad is giving me money, my sister is giving me cheques and telling me to enjoy life—even if that’s true, what is your problem? You people don’t even have the worth of Rs 10. He also addressed the questions about him not providing financial help to his ex-wife and daughter Ziana. “It is my personal life. I am Rajeev Sen and I don’t think I need to clarify all this to anybody.” Rajeev Sen was married to television actress Charu Asopa. The couple are parents to a daughter Ziana. They, however, divorced each other in 2023 and now live separately.

# Kuberaa producer lashes out at OTT giant for threatening to slash Rs 10 crore from deal if Dhanush film misses release date: ‘They have overtaken everything’



Kuberaa’s co-producer alleged that an OTT giant threatened to reduce their deal by Rs 10 crore if the Dhanush-Nagarjuna film failed to hit screens on the scheduled date of June 20. Director Sekhar Kammula’s Kuberaa features Nagarjuna, Dhanush and Rashmika Mandanna in the lead roles.

While discussions are rampant about the deplorable condition of Bollywood, the situation is not significantly better for the Telugu and Tamil industries, either. Though we have already entered the second half of the year, both the regional film industries are yet to deliver a proper blockbuster. With the postponement of Pawan Kalyan’s Hari Hara Veera Mallu: Part 1, all eyes are now on director Sekhar Kammula’s Kuberaa, featuring Dhanush, Nagarjuna and Rashmika Mandanna in the lead roles. With just days remaining until the movie’s worldwide release, certain remarks made by Kuberaa’s co-producer Suniel Narang

(popularly known as Asian Suniel) have garnered significant attention, as he didn’t mince words while calling out an OTT giant for allegedly pressuring the team over the release date. Narang also claimed that the company threatened to reduce their deal by Rs 10 crore if Kuberaa failed to hit screens on the scheduled date of June 20. “They have overtaken everything, and it all goes according to their will. I requested them (Amazon Prime Video) to give me a few weeks’ time and a July date because there might be a delay in post-production. They said they’ll cut Rs 10 crore if I don’t release on 20 June as planned,” Suniel shared during a chat with Gulte Pro. He also criticised the industry’s habit of relying on external platforms for various services, including ticket bookings and post-theatrical releases. “And yet people say artists’ remuneration should be reduced. Why should we do that? India has a population of 145 crore; only 50 of them are superstars. They are gods, in my opinion. The issue lies with everything else but them. These other entities are happy irrespective of films being a hit or a flop,” he added.

While Telugu cinema saw major hits last year like Pushpa 2: The Rule (Rs 1,742.1 crore worldwide gross, according to industry tracker Sacrnik), Kalki 2898 AD (Rs 1,042.25 crore) and even Devvara: Part 1 (Rs 421.63 crore), the biggest success so far this year has been Sankranthiki Vasthunam (Rs 255.2 crore). Following that is the box office bomb Game Changer (Rs 186.25 crore). The situation is more or less the same in the Tamil industry, with Good Bad Ugly (Rs 246.15 crore) and Dragon (Rs 150.52 crore) leading the 2025 list, significantly lower compared to 2024’s hits like The Greatest of All Time (Rs 457 crore), Amaran (Rs 333.67 crore) and Vettaian (Rs 253.6 crore). As a result, the success of Kuberaa is of utmost importance for both industries right now. Besides Telugu and Tamil, the film is set to release in Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam languages as well.

# Naseeruddin Shah yelled at me after people applauded my back-to-back performances, says Amruta Subhash: ‘He said I would rather see you fail than...’

Amruta Subhash, the daughter of notable Marathi actress Jyoti Subhash, is known for her roles in projects like Lust Stories 2, Sacred Games, and Gully Boy, among others. A graduate from National School of Drama, Amruta often takes part in several plays. Once, when she performed at NSD, actor Naseeruddin Shah, an alumni of the drama school was present in the audience to watch the play. Amruta was proud as her scenes garnered much praise and applause. When she performed for the second time, she noticed, this time too the veteran actor was sitting in the audience watching her performance. A proud Amruta believed she was up for great compliments from the actor. However, that was not the case. Speaking to Lallantop, Amruta shared, “I was doing a play called Trishna. I had a scene where I had to cry, and people would applaud that scene. That sort of gave me this feeling that ‘Wow, I am doing wonders.’ I was too proud of myself. Ahankaar hogaya tha (I was full of pride). Naseeruddin sir came, he watched two of my shows. He noticed people clapping for me. I was under the impression that sir is going to praise me a lot. After the show, we were all standing at a tea stall outside NSD. I saw Naseer sir walking towards me but I pretended as though I didn’t see him coming at all. He came to me, and he was like, ‘Amruta’, I was like, ‘Yes sir’, and he then said, ‘I watched your play’ and the proud me was like, ‘Okay and?’ and he then said, ‘Beta, I am concerned.’ I was shocked. I was like I received so much applause for my work, why is he so concerned?” She added, “He then told me, ‘Beta, I watched both the shows and you did the same thing for claps.’ He was very angry. He said in a higher tone, ‘I would rather see you failing doing something new rather



than doing the same thing again and again for claps, okay?” I was like, ‘Okay sir, sorry’. He then gave me a lot of gyaan. He said you’re forcing yourself on the character and not letting it explore anything new. You will be repetitive person. Your career will be over. That incident changed things in me. I understood where I went wrong.” Amruta and Naseeruddin shared screens in Nandita Das’ directorial debut film Firaq (2008). Naseeruddin Shah, originally a theatre artiste, is also the founder of theatre group Motley Productions. The production house stages plays in English, Hindi and Urdu around the world.

# Tom Hiddleston expecting second child with wife Zawe Ashton as she debuts baby bump at the UK premiere of ‘The Life of Chuck’



Broadway star Zawe Ashton and Avengers actor Tom Hiddleston have announced that they are expecting their second child together. As per People magazine, the couple shared the news through a pregnancy announcement in a recent interview. Ashton proudly showed off her baby bump at the UK premiere of Hiddleston’s ‘The Life of Chuck’ during SXSW London on June 7. Ashton wore an elegant Emilia Wickstead sky-blue silk crepe gown to showcase her baby bump on the red carpet. This adorable moment marked a special milestone in their relationship, which began when they met while co-starring in the 2019 play ‘Betrayal.’ The couple welcomed their first child in October 2022 and now looks forward to expanding their family further. Ashton’s pregnancy journey has been documented through various events, including her baby bump debut at a movie screening in June 2022.

Although Hiddleston rarely speaks about their relationship, he expressed happiness about their partnership in a March 2022 interview. The couple got engaged in 2022. Speaking about The Life of Chuck, it is a film that has garnered attention for its unique storytelling and exploration of complex themes. The movie likely explores themes of life, mortality, and human connection, given the title’s introspective nature. The narrative might follow the life journey of its protagonist, Chuck, delving into his experiences, relationships, and personal growth. The film features Tom Hiddleston, among other actors, bringing the story to life with their performances.

# Switch 2 first impressions: Better design, familiar flaws

This week’s column isn’t meant to be a detailed or definitive review of the newly launched successor to the Nintendo Switch. If this were a YouTube tech channel, you could probably call it a “first impressions” piece. While I’ve spent a fair number of hours with the Switch 2 in both docked and handheld modes, there’s still a lot I need to explore before I can confidently recommend it. Adding to the uncertainty is the lack of clarity around the device’s availability in India—so for now, it’s best to wait and watch.

However, irrespective of the challenges in acquiring Nintendo devices and games in India, it’s undeniable that a new console has arrived—and it’s worth understanding what it offers to those players who can get their hands on it. So, without further ado, let’s dive in.