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## Farmer attempts to set himself ablaze in Hyderabad's Ibrahimpatnam

Hyderabad: A farmer doused himself with fuel and attempted to set himself ablaze at Ranga Reddy district Collector's office in Ibrahimpatnam alleging the officials were forcefully trying to acquire his land for laying a road. The police who were present at the office overpowered the farmer and snatched away the fuel bottle from him. In a representation later submitted to the officials, a group of farmers stated that they own patta land in survey no 13 of Ravirala village and they are eking livelihood by doing agriculture work. They further complained that since a few days, some officials were visiting them and asking them to allow road works in their fields.

## CM Revanth dares Kishan Reddy for an open debate on Central funds



Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has challenged Union Minister Kishan Reddy to engage in a debate regarding the funds allocated by the Union government to Telangana over the past decade. The Chief Minister invited Kishan Reddy to set a date for the debate, stating that both he and Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka are prepared to discuss the issue. In a chat with reporters at the Assembly on Monday, Revanth Reddy mentioned that the Union Budget includes limited allocations for Telangana projects, which is why he is urging the Centre to meet their legitimate demands. He emphasized, "I am reminding everyone of the commitments made to the people of Telangana by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the past. If we need to, we will go to New Delhi not just 39 times, but 99 times. Now, I am reminding the issues." "We would like to remind everyone of the responsibility held by Union Minister Kishan Reddy, who claims himself that he

has played a role in bringing the Metro. Meanwhile, BJP MP Etala Rajender is hindering the land acquisition process. When BJP leaders assert that the responsibility for land acquisition lies with the State government, shouldn't they engage in discussions with us?" Revanth Reddy remarked. "During the visits of Union Ministers to Hyderabad for reviews, why was Kishan Reddy absent? Was he missing because he feared upsetting KCR? If the Urban Development Minister participated in a review, why did Kishan Reddy not attend? Kishan Reddy should be open to discussing state development and the allocation of central funds. Both Bhatti Vikramarka and I are ready to participate in such discussions. If it can be demonstrated that additional funds were allocated, we will honour Kishan Reddy," he said. "Isn't the position of Chief Minister sufficient to critique the leader of the Bharatiya Rashtra Party (BRS), President, and former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao? I have gained power by removing KCR as the TPCC president. Had projects been implemented during the decade of BRS governance, we wouldn't be facing so many issues now," stated Revanth Reddy. Stating that he holds MRPS President Manda Krishna Madiga in high regard, the Chief Minister said the outcomes of competitive exams are unrelated to reservation policies. "How can Manda Krishna express views akin to those of a BJP leader? The Supreme Court classification matter does not pertain to previously issued notifications. Any attempts to take action could result in legal consequences," he said. "I am unsure about what the MLAs who have switched parties are claiming. I am merely observing that BRS working president KT Rama Rao and Kishan Reddy are spending time together," remarked the Chief Minister. (NSS)

## Speaker directs steps for smooth conduct of Assembly sessions

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar has directed the officials to take all measures to ensure the smooth conduct of the Legislative Assembly sessions, which will begin on March 12. Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar, along with Legislative Council Chairman Gutha Sukhender Reddy, Council Deputy Chairman Banda Prakash, Legislative Affairs Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu held a meeting with officials at his chamber in the Assembly on Monday and discussed the facilities and security arrangements for the Assembly and the Council sessions. Speaking on the occasion, the Speaker said the arrangements should be made to enhance the dignity of the Telangana Assembly sessions. This time, the budget sessions will be held for a longer period of time. Officials should provide support to these sessions as in the past," he said. The Speaker said the information requested by the Members should be provided as soon as possible. The House and the Members should be provided with accurate information on all the issues from time to time. If the reply papers to be submitted to the House are sent in advance, the Members will have the opportunity to read them and speak and discuss them in the House, he said. Gaddam Prasad Kumar further stated that it would be helpful to prepare for the Members by printing the information in Telugu, Urdu and English languages in advance. When the discussion related to the department is going on, the officials of the concerned departments should be available and cooperate by providing the Ministers and Members with appropriate information," he said. "Information should be received in advance to prevent any unrest during the session. The intelligence system should work efficiently and actively. Necessary measures should be taken on the roads to ensure that the Members reach the Legislative Assembly on time without any traffic problems," the Speaker said. Legislative Council Chairman Gutha Sukhender Reddy said that officials of all departments should work together to successfully conduct the sessions. He advised that officials of all departments, Ministers and elected representatives should definitely attend the sessions. Legislative Affairs Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu said the State government will provide full support for the smooth conduct of the sessions. We will take steps to provide answers to pending questions quickly. We will appoint a nodal officer for each department. This will make it easier to communicate," he added. Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari, Special Chief Secretary (Finance) - Ramakrishna Rao, GAD Secretary Raghavanand Rao, Home department Special Chief Secretary - Ravi Gupta, DGP Dr. Jitender and other senior officials were also present. (NSS)

## Telangana PSC to shortly release Group-I Main provisional marks

GNS News Agency, March 10

Hyderabad: The Telangana Public Service Commission is set to release the Group - I Main exam provisional marks on Monday. The marks of all candidates who appeared for the exam will be made available on the Commission's website www.tspsc.gov.in. The TGPSC conducted the Group-I Main exam from October 21 to 27, 2024. A total of 31,403 candidates were selected for the Main exam based on the Group - I preliminary test results and 21,093 candidates appeared for all papers. The Commission had notified 563 Group-I vacancies for which 4,03,645 candidates applied and 3,02,172 appeared for the preliminary test.

## Harish Rao blames Revanth Reddy for Telangana's water crisis

GNS News Agency, March 10

Warangal: Former Minister and senior BRS leader T Harish Rao blamed Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for the water crisis in Telangana far ahead of summer season. He said due to inefficiency of the Congress government, crops ready for harvesting were withering away in the absence of irrigation water supply. Instead of owning up his government's failure to secure and pump water, the Chief Minister was trying to shift the blame onto nature. "This is not a drought caused by nature, but a drought brought by Revanth Reddy," he said, questioning why crops thrived under former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao's rule despite similar weather conditions, while they were now drying up across Telangana. Speaking to mediapersons at Jangaon on Monday, Harish Rao said due to financial mismanagement, the Congress government failed to clear Rs 7,000 crore in dues to the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) contractor of the Devadula project, leading to non-operation of motors for 33 days. "Had they been operated on time, reservoirs would have been filled, and fields would have received water," he said. He slammed the Congress for running a "20-20 commission" government, as 20 per cent bribes were being taken for clearing bills, land ap-

## Delhi CM Rekha Gupta to present Budget 2025-26 on March 25



GNS News Agency, March 10

New Delhi: The second session of the Budget Session of Delhi Assembly will commence on March 24 and last till March 28 with Chief Minister Rekha Gupta presenting Budget 2025-26 on March 25, said an official on Monday. After the discussions on the Annual Budget on March 26, it is likely to be passed on March 27, said a Bulletin issued by the Assembly Secretariat. The Bulletin also indicated the revival of the practices of Question Hour and Private Members' resolutions that were discontinued under the AAP government since 2015.

For transaction of business, Speaker Vijender Gupta has scheduled sittings on March 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 besides issuing fresh guidelines for issuing Visitors' Gallery Passes. The practice of Special Mention under Rule 280 of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business will also be restarted, indicated the Bulletin.

The Bulletin said members who want to raise matters under Rule-280 may give notice of the same by 5 p.m. on the working day preceding the date of sitting on which the matter is proposed to be raised. Balloting for fixing inter-se priority for the first 10 notices will be held in the room of the Secretary, Legislative Assembly at 9.30 a.m. on the day which it is proposed to be raised, it said. "Notices for Spe-

## Four students injured as school bus falls into paddy field in Telangana's Siddipet

Siddipet: Four schoolchildren sustained injuries as a private school bus fell into a roadside paddy field at Kondengala Gutta in Chinna Kodur mandal. The driver had already dropped most of the students when the accident occurred on Monday evening. Eyewitnesses said rash and negligent driving resulted in the accident. The parents filed a complaint at Chinna Kodur police station. The injured children were rushed to the government hospital in Siddipet and their condition is said to be stable.

## Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy orchestrating multi-thousand crore TDR scam, says KT Rama Rao

GNS News Agency, March 10

Hyderabad: In an indication of a stormy Assembly session starting from Wednesday, BRS working president KT Rama Rao on Monday threw down the gauntlet at Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, charging him with masterminding a massive Transferable Development Rights (TDR) scam worth thousands of crores. He felt that it could be one of the biggest financial scandals in the State's history, orchestrated under the guise of urban planning. "This conspiracy is worth an investigation by Central agencies such as the CBI, ED and I-T. The Chief Minister must release a White Paper on the current TDR ownership and recent transactions in the upcoming Assembly session to prove me wrong," he challenged, demanding to know who was buying the TDRs in bulk and where they were being consolidated.

In an informal interaction with the media at the BRS Legislative Party office here on Monday, Rama Rao said Revanth Reddy, along with four real estate brokers, was manipulating the system for illicit profits through policy manipulation and insider trading. According to him, the Chief Minister and his close aides were hoarding TDRs, using inside knowledge of impending policy changes to control the market. According to the BRS working president, these brokers were aggressively acquiring TDR at throwaway prices, while the Chief Minister prepares to impose Floor Space Index (FSI) restrictions in Hyderabad. He said once FSI limits were enforced, demand for TDRs would skyrocket, allowing Revanth Reddy's associates to sell them at inflated rates, pocketing massive illegal gains. "This is nothing short of a pre-planned financial conspiracy. It is a blatant misuse of power," he said.



He dismissed the argument that FSI restrictions were necessary for Hyderabad's urban planning, stating that it was a mere smokescreen to justify selling TDRs at artificially inflated prices. Rama Rao recalled that during late YS Rajasekhara Reddy's tenure, the Congress government encouraged unrestricted FSI to promote development — an approach later upheld by successive administrations, including the BRS after the formation of Telangana, benefiting both landowners and builders. "Revanth Reddy's decision to reverse this policy is nothing but a cover-up for his profiteering agenda," he said. He pointed out that the TDR system was originally designed for public welfare, enabling the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) to acquire nearly 400 acres of land worth thousands of crores for infrastructure projects. "Instead of using this system for public benefit, Revanth Reddy has turned it into a tool for illegal wealth," he stated, declaring that if Revanth Reddy fails to provide clear answers, legal action will be inevitable to protect the rights of people.

## Congress, BRS, CPI candidates file nominations for MLC polls

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): Candidates from Congress, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and Communist Party of India (CPI) filed nominations for the MLC polls under the MLA quota on Monday. Vijaya Shanti, Addanki Dayakar and Kethavath Shankar Nayak filed their nominations as Congress MLC candidates while Neelikanti Sathyam submitted his nomination papers on behalf of the CPI. Similarly, Dasoji Sravan filed his nomination paper from the BRS party. The polls for five vacancies in Telangana Legislative Council under the MLAs quota will be held on March 20. At the nomination programme for Congress party, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, TPCC President Mahesh Kumar Goud and other Congress leaders participated in the programme. (NSS)

## Indore man murders woman, attacks husband in Telangana's Siddipet



Victim Asra Begum (45) was found dead in a pool of blood, who was killed by a man, whom Asra was allegedly in a relationship with until a few months ago

GNS News Agency, March 10

Siddipet: The Rimmanaguda village located along the Rajiv Rahadhari woke up to hear the news of a shocking murder on Monday morning. While the victim Asra Begum (45) was found dead in a pool of blood, her husband Sadatullah (50), natives of Cherlapally in Hyderabad, sustained injuries in an attack by a man, whom Asra was allegedly in a relationship with until a few months ago. According to the police, Asra and her husband used to stay in Hyderabad when Asra used to work as an attendant at an advocate's office. MD Aslam, a native of Indore in Madhya Pradesh, had befriended her. She left with Aslam for Indore five years ago but returned to Cherlapally a few months ago. However, she reportedly filed a complaint against Aslam in Indore on the charge of cheating her. To sort out the issue, Aslam reached Cherlapally on Sunday. They arrived at Rimmanaguda, where Sadatullah worked as a watchman, to sort out the issue. During an argument, Aslam attacked Asra and Sadatullah with a shovel and fled the scene. While Asra died on the spot, her husband sustained serious injuries. The police have registered a case. A probe is on. The Gajwel police have reportedly taken the accused into custody.

cial mention can be given for March 24, 26, 27 and 28. Members are requested to confine the text of the Special Mention to 8-10 lines only and not to deviate from the original text while raising the same on the floor of the House. Any deviation will be disallowed and treated as summarily expunged from the proceedings. The matter should relate to only one department and raise only one issue," said the Bulletin.

## Govt seeks additional Rs 51,462 cr in supplementary demand for grants

GNS News Agency, March 10

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday tabled the second batch of supplementary demands for grants in Parliament, seeking approval for Rs 6,78,508.10 crore in additional spending for the government during financial year 2024-25 that ends March 31 this year.

This includes 52 grants and three appropriations. Of this, the net cash outgo - the actual additional spending requiring fresh funding - amounts to Rs 51,462.86 crore, while the rest is being offset by savings and enhanced receipts across various ministries. The largest allocations include defence pensions (Rs 8,476 crore), communications (Rs 10,910.71 crore), finance (Rs 13,449 crore), and agricultural schemes (Rs 6,044.76 crore). The net amount sought by the government in 2024-25 will cover the spending of Rs 7,000 crore towards the Unified Pension Scheme, which was announced during the ongoing financial year and will come into effect from April 1. The UPS, offered as an alternative to the National Pension System, provides for a pension of 50 per cent of the last drawn pay for government employees retiring after 25 years in service.



# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### Boosting R&D

The Modi government's Rs 1 lakh crore fund proposed to boost private sector research and development (R&D) is a bold step towards addressing the country's chronic underinvestment in innovation. Structured as low-interest, long-term loans, this initiative signals a crucial shift in the country's approach to scientific advancement — one that places the private sector at the forefront of the nation's research ecosystem. India has long lagged behind global leaders in R&D investment, with expenditure stuck at a dismal 0.65 per cent of the GDP. In contrast, the US and China allocate over 2 per cent of the GDP, with their private sectors contributing a staggering 75 per cent of the total R&D spending. In India, however, private sector investment has hovered around 30-36 per cent, reflecting a deep-seated reluctance among industries to prioritise fundamental research over short-term profits. The new scheme seeks to reverse this trend by making funding accessible to companies with commercially viable research proposals, a model akin to a production-linked incentive scheme for R&D. The newly established Anusandhan National Research Foundation is expected to play a pivotal role in administering these funds. Unlike traditional grant-based schemes, this initiative emphasises applied research with clear commercial potential. This focus on tangible outcomes may ensure that the investment translates into new products, patents and economic growth. However, its success hinges on robust implementation, transparent selection criteria and the ability to attract industry participation beyond a few dominant sectors like pharmaceuticals and defence. While this move is promising, the government must also strengthen academia-industry collaboration, streamline bureaucratic hurdles and create incentives for long-term innovation rather than short-term gains.

### MRPS demands CM to withhold job notifications until SC categorisation

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): TGPS is releasing the results of various examinations in Telangana from today. The commission has released the list of provisional marks for group 1 exams. The general rank cards for the Group 2 exams will be released on Tuesday. However, the founder president of MRPS Manda Krishna Madiga has demanded that all job test results should be withheld till the SC categorisation is done.

He was the chief guest at the relay hunger strike held at Indira Park on Monday under the aegis of MRPS. Krishna Madiga demanded that CM Revanth Reddy keep his earlier promise of applying SC categorisation benefit to previous job notifications. He said the SC Classification Act (2000) was framed when Chandrababu was the Chief Minister of the united AP State. He said clause 4 had been inserted in the Act to make the principle of classification applicable to every job notification given earlier. He suggested that the Chief Minister of Telangana should now look into the act.

"Some people are spreading misinformation that it is not possible to take up the job placements as per the classification given earlier," he said and added that if Revanth Reddy shows the honesty shown by Chandrababu in the past, every job notification classification would be implemented. He said the anti-categorisation verdict was implemented at a fast pace and questioned as to why the obstacles were being put in place to implement the classification implementation judgment. (NSS)

### Former CM KCR will attend assembly session: KTR

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): BRS party working president KT Rama Rao today said their party chief KCR would attend the upcoming assembly session. He said KCR would witness the Governor's address on Wednesday and added that KCR would also participate in the budget speech session. Dasoju Sravan filed his nomination papers today as an MLC candidate from MLA quota. KTR attended the event and participated in a chat with the media.

Speaking on the occasion, KTR said former CM KCR



would attend the upcoming assembly session. "Later, KCR will also come for some programmes. But as a son, I feel that KCR should not attend the assembly sessions. No one in the Congress is suitable for KCR's level. As a son, I am of the opinion that KCR should not come to listen to their mad words, useless abuses and cries," he said. Reminding that KCR had nominated Shrvan Kumar as an MLC candidate in 2023, he alleged that the BJP deliberately blocked his nomination as the MLC then. "If Shrvan had left the BRS party, he would have already entered the State legislature. But, he continued in the BRS party with confidence," he said. KTR criticized Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for not keeping his word in Delhi. He alleged that Revanth Reddy was making a lot of money by misusing his position.

## CGPDTM & WIPO organize international seminar on "PCT & Madrid System, 2025"

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): The Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks (CGPDTM), Union Ministry of Commerce & Industry & World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) jointly organized a one-day International Seminar on "Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) and Madrid System, 2025," in association with Pharmaceutical Export Promotion Council of India, at Dr MCR HRD Institute. The industry leaders, start-ups, innovators, researchers, and policy makers, who attended the training program, discussed the ever-evolving landscape of patents and international intellectual property protection.

Dr Shashank Goel, IAS, Director General, Dr MCR HRD Institute, & E.O. Special Chief Secretary, who was the chief guest at the inaugural function, said Intellectual Property is the backbone of a knowledge-driven economy, and this platform will help innovators, start-ups, and businesses understand the strategic advantages of filing patents under the PCT route.

Dr Shashank Goel, IAS, highlighted that India

is emerging as a global innovation hub, driven by the Start-up India Initiative, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India Program and so on. He also stated India has witnessed an unprecedented rise in patent filings, reflecting the growing emphasis on research, development, and technological advancements.

David Muls, Senior Director, Madrid Registry, WIPO, Geneva, emphasized that India is at the heart of the evolving innovation landscape, ranking 39th in the 2024 Global Innovation Index and leading in Central / Southern Asia. "Intellectual Property filings in India have surged — patent applications more than doubled in a decade, trademarks increased 2.5 fold, and design filings grew over three fold, demonstrating the nation's growing commitment to innovations", he added.

Distinguished persons, including Hanna Kang, WIPO, Geneva, Roberto Perez Gomes, WIPO, Geneva, N. Ram Chander, Joint Controller of Patents & Designs, Office of CGPDTM, Dr Pawan Kumar Pandey, Deputy Registrar of TM, GI, Office of CGPDTM, and Dr Gayathi, Dy. Director, Pharmexcil, spoke on the occasion. (NSS)

## MEIL Foundation donates Olectra electric buses to AIIMS Mangalagiri & Panakalaswamy temple

Mangalagiri, March 10 (NSS): Taking a step forward with a strong commitment to a cleaner and greener future, MEIL Foundation, the CSR arm of Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Limited, has donated two state-of-the-art Olectra 7-metre electric buses to AIIMS & Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple at Mangalagiri in Andhra Pradesh as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative. These eco-friendly buses were formally handed over by K.V. Pradeep, Chairman & Managing Director, Olectra Greentech Limited.

The inauguration ceremony was made with the presence of Nara Lokesh, Minister of IT, Andhra Pradesh, who, along with other dignitaries, flagged off the buses. These advanced electric buses are designed to make travel comfortable, safe, and efficient. Each bus can accommodate 18 passengers and can run 150 km on a single charge. They come with digital instrument panels, Electronic Hydraulic Power Steering (EHPS), real-time Vehicle Tracking Systems (VTS), and Reverse Park Assist Systems (RPAS) for enhanced safety. Passengers can also enjoy USB charging ports and air-conditioned

interiors for a pleasant journey.

Olectra Greentech Limited, a trendsetter in electric mobility, has been leading India's transition to clean and sustainable public transport. The company has already delivered over 2,500 electric buses, covering more than 30 crore kilometres and reducing CO2 emissions by over 2.7 lakh tons, which is equivalent to planting 1.24 crore trees!

At the event, KV Pradeep expressed Olectra's commitment to sustainability, saying:

"We are proud to support AIIMS & Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, through this CSR initiative. These buses will not only provide an efficient transport solution but also help in creating a cleaner, greener Andhra Pradesh. Olectra remains dedicated to revolutionizing public transport and building a sustainable future for India." With this initiative, Olectra and MEIL Foundation continue their mission to create a world where transportation is not just efficient, but also kind to our planet. (NSS)

## FGG demands CS to stop payment of IT of Ministers from govt funds

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): M. Padmanabha Reddy, president, Forum for Good Governance (FGG) has written a letter to Chief Secretary to stop the unconstitutional practice of payment of Income Tax payable by Chief Minister, Dy Chief Minister, other Ministers, Corporation Chairpersons and advisors having cabinet rank being paid by Government.

"This provision is against the principle of equality before law. In this connection, we have represented to the Chief Secretary to stop this unconstitutional practice, but there was no response. Further, we have requested GAD to provide the details of Income Tax being paid from public funds, the reply given to us is "The information requested is related to personnel / Privacy information of the individual as such cannot be furnished. He pointed out that Tax payer's money is spent to pay Income Tax of Ministers, as such people have the right to know the information. It is unfortunate that the officer of J.S. rank is unaware of this simple fact.

The GAD in Secretariat is resorting to wrong and erroneous calculations for payment of Income Tax. Many times, they are adding their private agriculture and business profits also and Government is paying Income Tax. GAD has issued orders (G.O. Rt. No. 917, dated 25-3-2015) for payment of Income Tax for the financial year 2014-15 in respect of eight individuals based on wrong calculation. The Income Tax paid for Chief Minister for the year 2014-5 is Rs 15,39,111.

Telangana State was formed in June 2014 and Chief Minister started working since June 2014. He has drawn salary for nine months from June to February 2015.

As per amended Act of 2012, the Chief Minister is eligible for salary Rs 16,000, special allowance Rs 8,000, sumptuary allowance Rs 7,000, security car allowance Rs 25,000, own car allowance Rs 10,000, Fuel charges Rs 15,000, Camp office Allowance Rs 10,000, and constituency allowance Rs 83,000, Totalling Rs 1,74,000.

Except salary and special allowance all other items are paid to meet the expenditure supposed to be incurred as such do not attract I.T. Act. Therefore, the taxable income works out to Rs 24,000 per month or Rs 2,88,000 per year as against the income GAD paid Rs 15,39,111/- Income Tax of Chief Minister. Same is the case with other persons mentioned in G.O.

The Forum for Good Governance requested the Chief Secretary to order for enquiry for the lapses mentioned. It also requested to put a stop to the unconstitutional practice of paying Income Tax of Chief Minister and Ministers from Tax Payer's money. Today in India, many States have stopped payment of Income Tax of Ministers from Government funds. A few States like Telangana are only paying Income Tax of Ministers from public funds. As the financial year incoming to close, I.T. paid by the Government for Chief Minister and others may be put on Government website for the information of public, Forum for Good Governance added. (NSS)

## Kavitha accuses Revanth of plunging State into fiscal distress

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): Bharat Rashtra Samithi MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha today launched a sharp attack on the CM Revanth Reddy Congress government, accusing it of plunging Telangana into financial distress with reckless borrowing and zero delivery on electoral promises.

Addressing media persons at Telangana Bhavan on Monday, MLC Kavitha highlighted that in just 15 months, the Congress government has borrowed a staggering ₹1.52 lakh crore but failed to implement even a single flagship welfare scheme promised during its campaign. She demanded that the government release a comprehensive white paper detailing all loans taken and their utilization.

"Women were promised ₹2,500 per month. Brides were promised 10 gram gold. Young women expected electric scooters. Farmers were promised loan waivers and bonuses. Not a single promise has been fulfilled. The poor have been abandoned, while payments to big contractors continue uninterrupted," BRS leader Kavitha stated. She strongly countered Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's claims of a financial crisis in the State, asserting that Telangana generates over ₹18,000 crore per month in revenue, spends approximately ₹6,000 crore, and maintains a healthy surplus.

"During his visit to Delhi, the Chief Minister claimed that the State couldn't afford ₹500 crore for capital expenditure. In reality, Telangana spends around ₹3,000 crore monthly on infrastructure. This deliberate misinformation is damaging the State's image nationally," she said and accused the Congress government of lacking social awareness, vision, and the intent to serve the people. "This government has made 420 promises and delivered none. ₹1.5 lakh crore has vanished with no trace of public benefit. Where has this money gone?" she



asked.

Taking to social media platform X (formerly twitter), MLC Kavitha wrote: "15 Months. ₹1,50,000,00,000 Debt.

Women didn't receive ₹2,500. No gold, no scooters, no pensions, no infrastructure. Yet, Revanth Reddy got the chair, and the people got betrayed. 420 promises. 0 delivered. ₹1.5 lakh crore vanished.

Where did the money go if it didn't go to the people?" Kavitha reiterated her call for financial transparency and demanded immediate accountability from the Congress regime, warning that the people of Telangana will not forgive this betrayal.

## Congress, BRS colluded in MLC elections: NVSS Prabhakar

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS):Telangana BJP leader and former MLA NVSS Prabhakar today alleged that the ruling Congress and BRS parties colluded in the recent Graduate and Teachers MLC elections in Telangana.

Speaking to media persons at the BJP State office on Monday, he said when the Congress leader Deepa Dasmunsi was the Telangana Congress in-charge, there was a dupe fight between the two parties. "Now, with the arrival of senior leader Meenakshi Natarajan as the State Congress party in-charge, there is no real fight," he claimed. He criticized the CPI party for playing politics of money. He alleged that the left party had once sold itself to the Congress party. He said there was criticism from all over the State against the Congress government. He also said no group was happy with the State government. He claimed that the ruling party leaders had shrugged off their hands because they could not fulfil the promises made and added that they were criticizing the BJP to divert people's attention from their promises. (NSS)

## Biofactor signs MoU with UoH

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS):Biofactor, a leading agricultural biotechnology company, has signed an MoU with the School of Engineering Sciences & Technology, University of Hyderabad (UoH), to develop nanotechnology-driven solutions for sustainable farming. The MoU was signed by Dr Devesh Nigam, Registrar of UoH and Dr Laxmi Narayana Reddy, CEO of Biofactor in the presence of Prof. B J Rao, Vice Chancellor, UoH; Prof. Samrat Sabat, Director, R&D at UoH and faculty members.

The collaboration aims to enhance crop productivity, precision nutrient delivery, and eco-friendly nanopesticides, ensuring better resource efficiency and reduced chemical dependency. The partnership will focus on biofortification and innovative nano-enabled inputs to benefit farmers with cost-effective, high-yield solutions.

"This partnership bridges cutting-edge material science with real-world agricultural needs", said Dr Dibakar Das, UoH while Dr L.N. Reddy, CEO, Biofactor, added, "Leveraging nanotechnology, we aim to empower farmers and enhance global food security." Biofactor has previously collaborated with CIRCOT Mumbai, ANGRAU Guntur, IAR Bangalore, and IIOR Hyderabad. (NSS)

## Online monitoring of electricity feeders in TGSPDCL: Musharraf Faruqui

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): The Telangana Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (TGSPDCL) is adopting Feeder Outage Management System (FOMS) technology for its 11 KV feeders to facilitate the prompt identification and resolution of power supply issues, according to Chairman and Managing Director Musharraf Faruqui.

Faruqui explained that this system automatically pinpoints the damaged or faulty sections within the feeder. Geographical Information System (GIS) data is transmitted to the relevant Assistant Engineer via the SASA app, accompanied by a buzzer alert to help them easily locate the defect. This innovation will ensure that electrical repair teams can reach the affected sites swiftly to restore power.

Faruqui further mentioned that the duration of the outage can be monitored in real time, with updates available up to the level of the CMD.

As part of the process, this technology will be incorporated in 8,621 (GHMC - 3412 & Rural 5209) 11 KV feeders within the organisation. At present, the technology has been implemented in 4,433 (GHMC - 1353 & Rural 3081) 11 KV feeders. For the remaining feeders, 2,000 feeders will be implemented by the end of March and the remaining feeders by the end of April, Musharraf Faruqui said.

Speaking in a video conference with the Superintending Engineers and Chief Engineers of all circles/zones under the organisation on Monday, the CMD said that the Yasangi agriculture season is currently at its peak in the Telangana State and the demand is close to 17,000 Megawatts.

"The peak demand and highest consumption are also being recorded in the DISCOM area. The officials and staff should be more vigilant and ensure that no problems arise in terms of power supply," he said. (NSS)

## SCR GM reviews safety of train operations

Hyderabad, March 10 (NSS): SCR General Manager Arun Kumar Jain conducted a detailed review meeting on safety of train operations on Monday at Rail Nilayam, here.

Neeraj Agrawal, Additional General Manager, SCR, also participated in the meeting along with all the Principal Heads of Departments. Divisional Railway Manager's (DRMs) of all six Divisions i.e. Secunderabad, Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Guntakal, Guntur and Nanded joined the review meeting through video conference.

The General Manager reviewed the status of safety drives being conducted over the zone for smooth running of trains and safety of passengers and workmen. He emphasized that during the course of the safety drives the officers, supervisors as well as the construction staff should be sensitized on all aspects of safety. He emphasized the field officials to ensure worksite safety requirements without compromise.



# Chandigarh MC withdraws Rs 6 crore from pension fund to pay Kajauli Waterworks bill



GNS News Agency, March 10

The Chandigarh Municipal Corporation has withdrawn Rs 6 crore from its employees' pension fund to pay the electricity bill for Kajauli Waterworks, a move that has sparked controversy among municipal officials.

Expressing strong opposition to the move, Bunty stated that the payment of Kajauli Waterworks bills by the civic body was completely unjustified. He argued that since the water supply from Kajauli Waterworks serves Punjab areas, the responsibility of bill payment should lie with the Chandigarh Administration and not the MC.

# Man gets 10 years in prison for acid attack, Delhi court awards Rs 20 lakh compensation to victims

GNS News Agency, March 10

The Delhi court was hearing arguments against 28-year-old Raghav Mukhiya, who was convicted under Section 326A (acid attack) of the Indian Penal Code on November 8 last year. (File Photo) The court was hearing arguments against 28-year-old Raghav Mukhiya, who was convicted under Section 326A (acid attack) of the Indian Penal Code on November 8 last year.

The court was hearing arguments against 28-year-old Raghav Mukhiya, who was convicted under Section 326A (acid attack) of the Indian Penal Code on November 8 last year. On February 18, 2017, the father and his daughters were attacked by acid in West Delhi.

# 65-year-old violates traffic rules 49 times, court cancels his licence for three months

Punjab and Haryana High Court, traffic challan, Indian Express. The court not only revoked the man's licence but also imposed a fine of Rs 500 per violation, bringing the total penalty to Rs 24,500.

# For the faithful observing Ramadan, Kausar Baug's streets overflow with flavour and festivity

GNS News Agency, March 10

With the holy month of Ramadan being observed across the country, one neighbourhood in Pune transforms into a paradise for food lovers who fast from dawn to dusk and those looking for good food.



Vendors hurriedly prepare platters of golden samosas, smoky kebabs, and steaming haleem while shoppers weave through the narrow lanes, eager to break their fast with something special.

ished during sehri is nihari, a slow-cooked stew made with tender meat, bone marrow, and a fragrant mix of spices, traditionally eaten with naan.

Fifteen years ago, Kausar Baug was just a few vendors serving iftar essentials. Today, it is complete with neon-lit stalls, an ever-growing crowd, and a mix of old and new culinary offerings.

# SKM lifts all dharnas, 'will protest outside houses of AAP MLAs on March 10'



GNS News Agency, March 10

A day after the Samyukta Kisan Morcha's (SKM) Chandigarh Chalo call was thwarted by police action against farmers, the farmer union on Thursday lifted all 28 dharnas on various highways of Punjab and announced that farmers would stage protests outside the houses of all AAP MLAs in the state on March 10.

know about our demands related to the Punjab government. BKU (Lakhowal) president Harinder Singh Lakhowal said the SKM would hold a meeting at Kisan Bhawan in Chandigarh on March 15 to discuss the next course of action.

During the interaction with the chief minister on March 3, the SKM had given a memorandum of 18 demands, of which 17 were related to the state government, a farmer leader said, adding that the 18th demand was from the Union government — seeking the quashing of the Draft National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing (NPFAM) and the implementation of old demands agreed by the Centre in December 2021.

# Bad weather halts ops to rescue Panchkula man missing in HP

GNS News Agency, March 10

Authorities on Thursday suspended the rescue operation launched on February 28 to trace a 28-year-old Panchkula resident who went for trekking in Himachal Pradesh, due to adverse weather conditions.



Accompanied by a friend from Panchkula, Akshay Sahani, a blogger, had embarked on the Churdhar peak trek from Nohradhar to visit the temple of the local deity Sri Sirgul Maharaj on Mahashivratri, February 26.

"We suspended the rescue operation following the advice of experts and mountaineers involved. Continuing the operation in the current weather conditions would be risky for the rescue team. The operation will resume once the weather becomes favourable.

the adverse weather, trekkers — especially youths — continue to risk their lives attempting to reach the Churdhar peak. On Wednesday, the rescue team stopped and turned back a group of five solo trekkers from neighbouring Solan district at Tishri.

# In Red Corner Notice against gangster Kapil Sangwan, Delhi Police to ask CBI to add fresh case



GNS News Agency, March 10

Days after a Delhi court issued an NBW (non-bailable warrant) against UK-based gangster Kapil Sangwan, the Delhi Police is exploring options to urge the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) Interpol branch to add a fresh case of extortion to the Red Corner Notice (RCN) issued against him.

According to a source, the Crime Branch, which is investigating the case, is looking to move an application before the court to declare Sangwan a proclaimed offender. It will also write to the CBI to add the fresh case of extortion in the RCN.

# From sustainable food to shoes, start-ups showcase innovation at TIECON Chandigarh



Punjab Governor and UT Administrator Gulab Chand Kataria underscored the pivotal role of TIECON in fostering a vibrant startup ecosystem in Punjab and Chandigarh

TIECON Chandigarh 2025 here on Thursday brought together innovative start-up founders who pitched ideas across diverse industries. Punjab Governor and UT Administrator Gulab Chand Kataria underscored the pivotal role of TIECON in fostering a vibrant startup ecosystem in Punjab and Chandigarh.

The administrator lauded the city's emergence as a hub for IT-enabled industries, which has significantly contributed to job creation and economic expansion. "It is heartening to see Chandigarh evolving into a fertile ground for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Ashish Sudhera's Beat22.com, touted as India's largest beats marketplace, provided musicians and producers a platform to buy, sell, and collaborate. In the real estate sector, Sanjeev Vasishth's Propall leveraged AI to generate hyper-realistic 3D walkthroughs.



## Karnataka HC quashes ED summons to CM Siddaramaiah's wife



GNS News Agency, March 10

The Karnataka High Court Friday quashed the Enforcement Directorate's summons to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi B M and Minister B S Suresh in the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) scam case. Justice M Nagaprasanna delivered the verdict on petitions filed by Parvathi and Suresh challenging the ED's action — summons had earlier been put on hold by the court on January 27. Arguing on the case, Senior Advocate Sandesh Chouta (Parvathi's counsel) said that the ED was conducting a parallel investigation despite the case already being probed by the Lokayukta police and a Special Investigation Team (SIT), PTI news agency reported. Meanwhile, representing the ED, Additional

Solicitor General of India Arvind Kamath contended that Parvathi was the second accused in the predicate offence and had received proceeds of crime. Minister Suresh's counsel, Senior Advocate CV Nagesh, maintained that his client was not an accused in the case and therefore should not have been summoned. However, ASG Kamath countered that the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) grants the ED the authority to summon individuals, even if they are not named as accused, to obtain documents and records. In February, Karnataka Lokayukta police gave a clean chit to Siddaramaiah and his wife in the alleged Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) land scam case, citing "lack of evidence".

Last year, Karnataka Governor Thawarchand

Gehlot allowed three private individuals to seek investigations against Karnataka CM on complaints of corruption in the allotment of 14 housing sites in Mysuru to the wife of the CM — in exchange for 3.16 acres of land allegedly acquired illegally by a local authority in the city. In separate complaints, anti-corruption activists T J Abraham, Snehamayi Krishna, and Pradeep Kumar alleged that the CM's wife was an illegal beneficiary of a controversial land exchange scheme that was devised by the MUDA in 2020 to resolve cases in which the authority had illegally acquired land without informing owners about the acquisition. Siddaramaiah and the Congress party have denied the allegations. The Congress has pointed out that the launch of MUDA's "50:50" scheme (to grant 50% of land in a developed locality in exchange for 50% of the land illegally acquired by MUDA), and the decision to allot 14 plots to Siddaramaiah's wife under the scheme took place in 2020 and 2021 — when the BJP was in power in the state. The three anti-corruption activists have questioned the original ownership of the 3.16-acre parcel of land.



GNS News Agency, March 8

After a botched Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the vehicular tunnel connecting Hebbal and Silkboard junction in Bengaluru city, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) is now scrambling to onboard a consultancy firm for preparing the DPR for its double-decker vehicular tunnel connecting KR Puram and Nayandahalli. Due to a lack of response from interested bidders, the civic agency has now pushed the deadline to March 11 for the firms to submit their bids for preparing DPR for the 28 km tunnel road project. The BBMP had first floated tenders for the double-decker tunnel project on January 25. After it failed to secure any interest from the

consultancy firms, the civic body invited bids for the second time on February 15. According to a BBMP officer, the lack of response from firms stems from the paucity of time.

Earlier, the civic agency had provided only three months for Delhi-based Rodic Consultants to prepare the DPR of the 18km north-south twin tube tunnel road project between Hebbal and Silkboard junctions. The executive summary of the DPR received extensive criticism from citizens, urban mobility experts, and civic groups for an alleged 'copy-paste' job. The DPR had several flaws ranging from errors in traffic assessments to underplaying environmental concerns caused by the tunnel roads. While BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Giri

Nath attributed the mistakes to a 'compiling error', the civic agency penalised Rs 5 lakh on Rodic Consultants for the botched-up work. The BBMP had spent a whopping Rs 9.5 crore on the DPR preparation. "The consultancy firms are treading a cautious line and even more careful before submitting bids after the previous controversies. Moreover, the firms have asked for more time from us (BBMP) to prepare the report, as against the three-month deadline given last time for preparing the DPR for the Hebbal-Silkboard tunnel work. The firms are also particular about not introducing any errors and attracting penalties from us given how internationally acclaimed they are," a BBMP officer told. The officer said that the firms are exploring all legal aspects of the project before submitting the bids. "Hence they are buying more time. We will soon onboard a firm by the end of March," he added. BBMP officials also confirmed to The Indian Express that the civic agency has shortlisted the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (Hudco) to fund a significant portion of the Rs 14,981 crore required to construct the 18-km tunnel road

connecting Central Silk Board and Hebbal. The proposed funding will serve as Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to enhance the project's commercial feasibility.

"Hudco has agreed to fund the BBMP with an interest rate of 8.9 per cent. Initially, they had proposed 9.05 per cent interest, but after negotiations, we agreed on 8.95 per cent. The BBMP has written a letter to the Urban Development Department seeking approval on the matter," said another officer. BBMP is seeking Rs 8,000 crore in loans over the next five years to support the project's financial needs. According to BBMP, five firms have submitted bids for preparing the DPR of proposed elevated corridors that include split flyover at MEI junction and elevated corridors between KR Puram and Yeshwantpur, Konanakunte Cross and Banashankari, Ragigudda and Thalaghattapura, Old Madras Road and Madiwala, Ngawara and Bagalur, Hennur and Bagalur, Tannery Road and Nagawara, West of Chord Road and Nandini Layout and an additional link road to Kempegowda International Airport (KIA). The firms in-

clude Infracon, Infrastar, Nagesh Consultants, Park Consultants, and Siddhi Consulting Engineers. "We are evaluating the bids of these firms and will soon fix one of them for preparing the DPR," a BBMP official said. The civic agency had invited DPR bids based on the final feasibility report on the Comprehensive Bengaluru City Traffic Management Infrastructure Plan, prepared by Altinok Consulting Engineering. The report consists of a detailed feasibility study and proposes a 170-km network of tunnels, double-decker tunnels, elevated corridors, and underpasses to streamline mobility and decongest Bengaluru traffic. The study proposes traffic management and road infrastructure solutions in terms of vehicular tunnels, grade separators, and road widening in selected corridors. As part of the plan, 16 elevated corridors and two tunnels have been proposed. The total length of elevated corridors/double-deckers roads/underpasses is 124.7km. Meanwhile, the total length of tunnels (North-South and East-West) is 46 km. The report estimates the road infrastructure projects at a total cost of Rs 54,964 crore.

## Delhi L-G Saxena inaugurates Amrut Biodiversity Park, which is themed on India's freedom struggle

GNS News Agency, March 10

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena Friday inaugurated the Amrut Biodiversity Park developed on the Yamuna riverbank, and elaborated on the symbolic significance of its name. The biodiversity park is part of Phase II of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA)'s Yamuna Floodplain Restoration initiative and is a joint venture with the CSIR-National Botanical Research Institute in Lucknow. Spanning around 115 hectares, it is located along National Highway 24 and next to the Commonwealth Games Village.

DDA said the Amrut Biodiversity Park is one of its kind as it is themed on India's freedom struggle. The park features kaccha tracks namely 'First War of Independence', 'Santhal Rebellion', 'Champaran Satyagraha', 'Dandi March' and 'Azad Hind Fauj' that run alongside distinct ecosystems. "Amrut represents something that emerges from a process of purification or manthan. Similarly, the park's creation involved cleaning and rejuvenating the area, resulting in what can be called an 'Amrut'. This makes the name 'Amrut Biodiversity Park' truly fitting," Saxena told reporters.

Amrut biodiversity park An augmentation of 225 million litres of water is being done, as per DDA. @official\_dda Besides 14,500 native plants and tree species such as jamuns, shishams, kadams, and mausiri, as well as 3,20,000 riverine grasses including blue panic grass and sarkanda, the park also has around four water bodies. According to DDA officials, existing catchments in the area were dredged to restore the site's hydrology. An augmentation of 225 million litres of water is being done, as per the agency. "The entire site is prone to inundation during the monsoons as water is released from ITO Barrage. The site had a flat topography with an overall slope away from River Yamuna, forming small catchment zones that collected water from annual inundation and formed gullies within the site," reads an official project document. The project has received backlash from environmental activist groups



from time to time, since its announcement in 2022 after an MoU was signed with the CSIR for horticulture works. For instance, the South Asian Network on Dams, River and People (SANDRP) has raised concerns about the project's flood-prone nature and financial viability.

Meanwhile, as L-G Saxena toured the park along with officials, near the entrance demarcated as a 'wetland' stood a recently dredged land. Amrut biodiversity park Delhi The space largely looked barren as native plantations were widely spaced and the riverine grasses far in sight. (Photo: X/ @official\_dda) "During the monsoon season, these dredged areas will fill up... and water bodies will be visible," briefed an officer to L-G Saxena. Meanwhile, passersby stopped and leaned on the roadside highway railings to take a look at the biodiversity park. Apart from the vibrant flowerbeds in the entrance and kaccha pathways where a battery-operated mobile van was taking visitors to different points of the park, the space largely looked barren as native plantations were widely spaced and the riverine grasses far in sight. Confident about the success of the initiative, Saxena said, "... In one or one and a half years, this area will be transformed... birds of different species will come here as we have planted different types of trees including fruiting plants... The water bodies will also provide a soothing impact for visitors."

## Delhi Police arrest serial burglar linked with 17 cases



GNS News Agency, March 10

Deepak, 24, was found in possession of a large cache of stolen goods, including gold jewellery, mobile phones, a gas cylinder, and a stolen two-wheeler, said the police. (File Image) Deepak, 24, was found in possession of a large cache of stolen goods, including gold jewellery, mobile phones, a gas cylinder, and a stolen two-wheeler, said the police. The Delhi Police said they have arrested a serial burglar responsible for 17 cases of burglary and house theft in the past month from Dwarka Monday. Deepak, 24, was found in possession of a large cache of stolen goods, including gold jewellery, mobile phones, a gas cylinder, and a stolen two-wheeler, said the police.

The case came to light when a man lodged a complaint on February 17, reporting that an unidentified individual had broken into his house through a window at around 5.30 pm, and stole gold and silver jewellery along with cash. Following this, the Anti-Burglary Cell of the Dwarka police, under Inspector Vivek Maindola, launched an investigation. CCTV footage from the crime scene showed the suspect entering the house through a window. The police used his image from the CCTV footage and circulated it among police informants, who identified him as Deepak, a

known burglar and drug addict, said the police. Multiple raids were conducted at his hideouts, but he remained elusive. According to the police, a tip-off led them to Mahavir Enclave where Deepak was intercepted on a stolen two-wheeler, carrying some of the stolen goods presumably to sell them. After he saw the police in the area, he attempted to flee but was apprehended.

"He was examined at length and it was found that his family had disowned him due to his criminal activities... Due to the poor financial status (of the family), he could never study. At an early age, he became a drug addict due to which he started committing burglary and house theft as a juvenile. He had been arrested before in 2023. It was found that he was involved in over 15 burglary cases in Uttam Nagar, Bindapur, Dabri, Mohan Garden, and Najafgarh," said Ankit Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Dwarka.

## IIT, Hyderabad, joins hands with Coal India to develop clean coal tech

New Delhi: State-owned CIL on Friday said it has entered into a pact with the Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, to develop clean coal technologies.

Coal India Ltd (CIL) has inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad (IIT-H) for establishing a Centre of Clean Coal Energy and Net Zero (CLEANZ) at Hyderabad, the PSU said in a statement. CIL's management has green-flagged a grant of Rs 98 crore to IIT-H for a duration of five years for setting up this Centre of Excellence.

## Zero bids for double-decker KR Puram-Nayandahalli tunnel road DPR preparation, BBMP extends deadline to March 11

## Balance tilted away from the Sukhbir Badal in Punjab Assembly, maintaining possession over SGPC is next challenge

GNS News Agency, March 10

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) acting president Balwinder Singh Bhunder has openly accused former president Sukhbir Singh Badal's brother-in-law and former minister Bikram Singh Majithia of betrayal. This accusation has shifted the balance of power in the Punjab Assembly away from Sukhbir Singh Badal. The party had only three MLAs in the Punjab Assembly, and one of them, Sukhwinder Sukhi, joined the Aam Aadmi Party last year. The second MLA, Manpreet Singh Ayali, remained silent for an extended period. Ayali was faced with a decision when former Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh nominated him to a seven-member committee tasked with starting a new membership drive for the party on December 2 of last year.

The SAD, however, disagreed with the idea of a seven-member committee, and Ayali openly supported former Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh. He also opposed the Shiromani Committee's decision to remove Raghbir Singh from his position. The only MLA left in the SAD was Ganieve Kaur Majithia, the wife of Bikram Singh Majithia. She is expected to support her husband if the feud between Sukhbir Singh Badal and Majithia continues. Sukhbir Singh Badal's wife, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, is the only elected party member from Bathinda in parliament, while her brother, Bikram Singh Majithia, remains a notable figure. However, Sukhbir lacks any close MLA allies in the Assembly. There has been significant resentment within the SAD. Numerous state and district-level SAD leaders have either openly expressed their dissatisfaction or resigned from their positions prior to the start of the party's membership drive in January this year. This discontent stems from the removal of the Jathedars. Former Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) president Gobind Singh Longowal has opposed the decision to remove the Jathedars. "As a former president of SGPC, I condemn the decision to remove the Jathedars. This decision raises questions about the functioning of the SGPC," said Longowal.

The following people have resigned from their posi-

## Puneites throng Comic Con as it returns to city after 8 years

GNS News Agency, March 10

Scores of Puneites thronged the Balewadi sports complex for the first day of the Comic Con as the event returned to Pune after eight years. People cosplaying as Marvel's Captain America, Japanese Manga character Naruto, Dumbledore from Harry Potter, and various other characters roamed the arena, which was full of comic book stalls and merchandise. Short for Comic Book Convention, Comic Cons are popular events where comic book enthusiasts gather to meet creators and each other. The event is also an opportunity for these enthusiasts to dress up like their favourite characters. Abhishek Prabhakar, cosplaying as Fred Flintstone from the American animated sitcom, said, "It's fun to be here. Comic con is here after many years, and we are enjoying it. This is my third time cosplaying, second time in



Pune." Samiksha Khare, who was Wilma Flintstone for the day, said, "This is the first time I'm here and I'm enjoying it a lot, so many talented people here." These costumes also don't come cheap. Kishlay, dressed as a character from the game GFTO, spent nearly Rs 2,500 to make his costume while his friend Malhar who was dressed as the video game character Penitent One spent about Rs 4,000 for his costume.

Stalls by Indian comic book companies and artists like Amar Chitra Katha, Rajesh Nanagulkonda, Saumin Patel, Indusverse, also made their mark at the event. Dan Parent, comic book artist and writer of the popular Archie Comics, told The Indian Express at the event, "Having a great time here, wonderful people and loving the city. The crowd here is good and had a great panel discussion. All the Comic Con shows in India

are always good. I am always encouraging people to expand their horizons and pick up new comics from places like India. There is a whole subculture here and a whole comic book industry." Comic book lover Supratim Das said, "I have been to similar events in Kolkata and Delhi, but this is my first time in Pune. It is very vibrant and there are so many stalls here, usually the stalls are just filled in a corner."



# Fiscal discipline and managing capital expenditure remain daunting tasks as Maharashtra govt refuses to roll back populist schemes



GNS News Agency, March 10

In an attempt to strike a delicate balance between allocating resources for its 2024 Assembly poll promises and providing funds for capital expenditure to keep pace with growth and development, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis-led Mahayuti government is under pressure to take bold decisions in Budget 2025-26. The main challenge facing the government is to find new ways to increase its revenue and boost capital expenditure. The state has experienced significant political turmoil over the past five years, with two different governments, each serving for 2.5 years. As a result, the state's economy has undoubtedly suffered. As the PM's Economic Advisory Committee report (2024) pointed out, Maharashtra's national GDP contributions went down from 15.2 per cent in 2010-11 to 13 per cent and 13.3 per cent in 2020-21, and 2023-24, respectively.

With state's debt stock over Rs 7.85 lakh crore coupled with growing revenue deficit, the fiscal discipline remains daunting as Deputy CM Ajit Pawar is set to present this government's first budget on Monday. After achieving an absolute majority that has brought political stability to Maharashtra, the Mahayuti coalition—comprising the BJP, Shiv Sena, and NCP—is expected to redefine its roadmap through this budget. While addressing a party meeting before the budget session began last week, Ajit Pawar indicated, "I may have to make some tough decisions to ensure financial discipline, which remains a priority in accordance with the Centre's guidelines." A highly placed source in the government said, "In the present situation only way forward to inculcate fiscal discipline was to roll back the populist schemes worth Rs one lakh crore. This would have

helped to cushion the financial stress to some extent." However, the source explained, "Given the political pressure, this option has been ruled out. Managing our finances better using 57 per cent of the (Rs 4 lakh crore) unspent allocation provided during the interim June 2024 budget and the new excise policy are being worked."

Insiders have indicated that the government is unwilling to withdraw its flagship project, the Ladki Bahin Yojana, which imposes an annual burden of Rs 46,000 crore on the state. Under this scheme, women aged 18 to 65 receive monthly allowances of Rs 1,500. In addition, providing free electricity to 45 lakh farmers using agricultural pumps of up to 7.5 HP adds an extra expenditure of Rs 14,000 crore. The government's poll promises also include three free cooking gas cylinders and free pilgrimage trips for senior citizens. The chief minister addressed the state legislative assembly on Friday, stating, "We are committed to the Ladki Bahin Yojana and will continue the scheme." He mentioned that only the five ineligible lakh people will be removed from the program, but this will not have a significant financial impact. He also said, "Overall, these schemes amount to Rs 60,000 crore, which is putting some financial strain on us. However, we will manage and overcome this challenge."

The prevailing sentiment among leaders is that Maharashtra is performing well. Fadnis said, "If the situation were truly dire, why would Maharashtra remain the most preferred destination for both domestic and foreign investors?" He was referring to the Rs 15.78 lakh crore worth of investments secured through 54 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Additionally, he noted that RBI data ranks Maharashtra as the top state for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) over the past nine months. Despite this, Maharashtra ranks fifth in per capita income for 2023-24, with Telangana holding the first position. The estimated per capita state income for 2024-25 is Rs 3,09,340, compared to the previous fiscal year's estimate of Rs 2,78,681. Maharashtra's economy is projected to grow by 7.3 per cent, according to the advance estimates for 2024-25. However, the economic survey for 2024-25, released on Friday, indicates a decline in the growth rates of both the industrial and service sectors.

The survey states, "During 2024-25, the real Gross State Value Added from agriculture and allied activities is expected to grow at 8.7 per cent, while the industry and

services sectors are anticipated to grow at 4.9 per cent and 7.8 per cent, respectively." The services sector is projected to grow at a rate of 7.8 per cent in 2024-25, down from the 8.3 per cent estimated in the first revised estimate (RE) for 2023-24. Meanwhile, the industrial sector is expected to grow by 4.9 per cent in 2024-25, compared to the 6.2 per cent growth indicated in the first RE for 2023-24. In the industrial sector, the projected growth rates for manufacturing and the electricity, gas, water supply, and other utility services for the current fiscal year are 4.2 per cent and 6.5 per cent, respectively. This represents a decrease from the first revision estimates of 2023-24, which were 6.8 per cent and 8.1 per cent. Meanwhile, the construction sector has shown growth. Another concern highlighted by the survey is the reduction in the transfer of financial resources from the Government of India to Maharashtra.

Currently, 55 per cent of revenue receipts are allocated to committed expenditures, which include salaries (32 per cent), pensions (12 per cent), and interest payments (11 per cent). Although the state government has set an ambitious target of achieving a one trillion dollar economy by 2030, it remains uncertain whether this goal can be met given the current growth rate. While the share of central taxes has increased for the year 2024-25, the grants-in-aid and loans have seen a reduction. The state received Rs 1,39,369 crore in 2024-25, down from Rs 1,51,453 crore in 2023-24, according to budget estimates. The survey indicates that the percentage of total debt to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is expected to remain well within the prescribed limit of 25 per cent, as outlined in the Maharashtra Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Rules of 2006.

For the 2024-25 budget estimate, the primary contributor to the total debt stock will be the state's internal debt, projected to reach Rs 6,37,141 crore, which accounts for 81.4 per cent of the total. The survey also shows the total receipts and expenditures are expected to marginally increase by 0.1 per cent and 2.0 per cent, respectively, in 2024-25 (BE) compared to the previous year. The share of revenue expenditure in total expenditure is expected to be 77.6 per cent in 2024-25 (BE). While the share of capital expenditure in total expenditure was expected to be 22.4 per cent as per 2024-25 (BE), it saw a marginal decline to Rs 1,49,977 from Rs 1,50,848 which was estimated for 2023-24.

## 'Drunk' BMW driver who urinated in middle of Pune road arrested

GNS News Agency, March 10

The Pune city police Sunday arrested the driver of a BMW car who allegedly urinated in full public view at a junction in Yerwada Saturday morning. The police identified the accused driver as Gaurav Manoj Ahuja, 25, a resident of NIBM Road, Kondhwa. The police said Gaurav was taken into custody from Karad in the Satara district. He was then brought to Pune and placed under arrest around 7.50 am after conducting his medical examination at the Sassoon hospital. Gaurav allegedly got out of a BMW car in the middle of the road at Shastri Nagar junction in Yerwada around 7.30 am on Saturday. He allegedly urinated at the junction, in front of the people passing through the spot. A video of the incident went viral on social media.

In the initial video, the car is seen stopping on the road at Shastri Nagar junction as the driver steps out and urinates at the spot. His friend Bhagyesh Prakash Oswal, 22, holding a liquor bottle, is seen sitting inside the car as passersby take objection to the act. The driver and his friend then drive off in the car. The police arrested Bhagyesh in this case around 11 pm on Saturday. An FIR was lodged against Gaurav and Bhagyesh under sections 270, 281, 285, 79 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and sections 184, 185 of the Motor Vehicle Act, for obscene acts in a public place and driving the car after consuming liquor. While the police were searching for Gaurav, he released a video late Saturday night apologising for his act. The police also questioned Gaurav's father Manoj Ahuja, a businessman from Pune, as he was found to be the owner of the BMW car.

Sources confirmed that Gaurav had been arrested as a 'bookie' in 2021 by a team led by Inspector Rajnish Nirmal in a high-profile cricket betting case, along with gangster Sachin Pote. He was later released on bail by the court, the police said. Neelam Gorhe, Deputy chairperson of the Maharashtra Legislative Council, and other political leaders demanded strong legal action against Gaurav. Posting Gaurav's video on his social media account, Vijay Kumbhar, a senior RTI activist and leader of Aam Aadmi Party's Pune unit stated, "Pune's Drunker Brats on a Rampage - Protected by Money, Power and Political Clout! The spoiled, drunk sons of wealthy families in Pune have turned the city into their personal playground of terror. Armed with their father's wealth and influence, they believe they are above the law - driving recklessly in luxury cars, intimidating ordinary citizens and creating public nuisance without any fear of consequences."

## In Jathedars' removal, Mann sees 'badlakhori'

GNS News Agency, March 10



GNS News Agency, March 10

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann Saturday accused the Shiromani Akali Dal of taking a "revenge" on Akal Takht and the Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib jathedars, saying their unceremonious removal by the SGPC seemed to be act of "badlakhori". The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Friday removed Giani Raghbir Singh from the post of Akal Takht Jathedar and Giani Sultan Singh as Jathedar of the Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib. It also appointed Sikh scholar Kuldeep Singh Gargaj as the new jathedar of Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib. He will additionally serve as the acting Jathedar of Akal Takht.

Mann said it was ironic that the validity of the SGPC's executive committee, which removed the jathedars, expired around a decade ago. He urged the Centre to immediately conduct the elections to the apex gurdwara body's so that the state's Sikh shrines could be freed from "modern-day mahants". Referring to Akali Dal leaders, including Sukhbir Singh Badal, the chief minister said, "You accepted all your mistakes and even undertook 'tankhah (religious punishment)'. Now, you say 'we will remove the jathedars'. It seems an act of badlakhori (vengeance)." In a statement later, Mann said the development had bruised the psyche of the entire Sikh community and added it would never forgive the Akali leadership. The trend of "picking and removing" jathedars from the pocket of these "rejected leaders" reflects the sorry state of affairs, he added. The Akalis had indulged in "theatrics by apologising for their sins", he said. Jathedars are highly revered by the entire Sikh community and this type of behaviour with them is unwarranted and undesirable, he further said.

The North American Punjabi Association too termed the dismissals of the jathedars a "blatant act of vengeance" by the SGPC leadership. Association president Satnam Singh Chahal said the decision reflected the undue influence and power of a select few individuals within the SGPC's working committee, further jeopardising the sanctity of these prestigious positions. "These two jathedars held some of the highest spiritual roles in the Sikh community and their removal signifies that individuals in these positions are now subject to the whims of a few within the SGPC," Chahal said. "This has sparked great resentment and concern among the Sikh diaspora worldwide, especially those in North America," he added. Chahal emphasised the historical and spiritual significance of the Akal Takht and the Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib. These institutions carry immense responsibility for the faith and its followers, and their leadership should not be swayed by political motives, he said. "This is an affront to the values of Sikhism and the centuries-old principles upon which the Sikh 'panth (community)' is built. The removal of these distinguished jathedars undermines the very foundation of the Sikh faith," Chahal said.

## Two dead in crash on National Highway 65 in Nalgonda district

GNS News Agency, March 10

Narketpally: Two passengers of a car died and three others injured critically when their car rammed into a stationary truck on the outskirts of AP Lingotam on National Highway 65 in the early hours of Sunday, police said. The injured have been rushed to Kamineni Hospital in Hyderabad where their condition is stated to be progressing. The car passengers, all residents of Alwal locality of Hyderabad were on their way to Vijayawada.

## Chandigarh to experience early and hotter summer

GNS News Agency, March 10

Chandigarh is experiencing an early onset of summer, with temperatures in March 2025 projected to exceed those of previous years. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecasted above-average temperatures for the month, raising concerns about potential impacts on daily life and agriculture.

As of March 9, the city recorded a morning temperature around 15°C, with the day's high anticipated to reach approximately 32°C. Forecasts indicate a further rise in temperatures, with highs peaking at about 34°C on March 11 and 13. Over the next two weeks, daytime temperatures are expected to fluctuate between 28°C and 34°C, while nighttime lows will range from 16°C to 20°C. Historically, March in Chandigarh has seen more moderate temperatures. For instance, in March 2024, high temperatures ranged from 22°C to 29°C, with lows between 6°C and 16°C. This year's forecasted highs of up to 34°C represent a significant increase, suggesting an unusually warm spring.

The IMD has warned that March 2025 will experience above-average temperatures across most regions of India. This trend poses risks to winter-sown crops such as wheat, chickpea, and rapeseed, which are sensitive to temperature fluctuations during their maturation phase. Farmers and agricultural planners are being advised to monitor crop conditions closely. The festival of Holi, falling on March 13 this year, is expected to coincide with one of the warmer days of the month. Residents planning outdoor celebrations should prepare for daytime highs around 34°C.

## Bikram Majithia revolts against Sukhbir Badal, strongly opposes removal of Jathedars

GNS News Agency, March 10

The divide between former Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal and his brother-in-law Bikram Singh Majithia came out in the open after the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) removed Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh and Takht Kesgarh Sahib Jathedar Giani Sultan Singh.

Majithia, along with his close aides—including former minister Sharanjit Singh Dhillon, core committee member Lakhbir Singh Lodhinangal, and other senior leaders—issued a statement on Saturday, expressing strong resentment over the SGPC's decision.

"We hold the honour and dignity of Sri Akal Takht Sahib Ji and the Jathedar Sahib Ji of the Takht Sahib in the highest regard. The decision taken yesterday by the SGPC has deeply hurt the sentiments of the Sikh Sangat as well as our own. Guru Sahib Ji has granted Sangat a divine status, and keeping in mind their emotions, we cannot agree with this decision," the statement read.

Speculation about differences between Majithia and Sukhbir Singh Badal had been circulating for some time. Even Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had often mocked their strained ties, challenging them to share a common stage. With this statement, Majithia has openly opposed the leadership on a sensitive issue for the Akali Dal. His faction also aligned itself with the SAD rebel group Sudhar Lehar, calling for unity.

"It is crucial to come together and build a common consensus to preserve the honour and dignity of Sri Akal Takht Sahib Ji. The recent developments have caused great distress among our party members and workers. This internal discord has strengthened anti-Panthic forces and weakened the Shiromani Akali Dal," the statement added. The leaders further urged party members to set aside personal rivalries and work for Punjab and the Panth. Former SGPC president Gobind Singh Longowal also opposed the removal of the Jathedars, calling it a questionable move. Reacting strongly, SAD acting president Balwinder Singh Bhunder accused Majithia of betraying the party. "Majithia was wrong to question the SGPC's decision—an institution whose first president was his great-grandfather, Sundar Singh Majithia.

## How going organic way turned tables for this Bathinda farmer

GNS News Agency, March 10

When Gurdeep Singh, 50, started organic farming around 20 years ago, little did he know that not only will he be self-sufficient but he will also help others with employment opportunities. With just 1.5 acres of his own and an additional 3.5 acres on lease, the journey of the farmer from Mehma Sawai in Bathinda from conventional farming to a thriving organic venture is nothing but inspiring. Today, he grows an impressive variety of seasonal vegetables and employs five workers and pays them around Rs 10,000 each every month.



He grows over two dozen types of seasonal vegetables in both Kharif and Rabi seasons, including peas, broccoli, radish, spinach, cauliflower, cabbage, pumpkin, beans, ladyfinger, bitter gourd, colocasia, potato, tomato, chillies, bell pepper, fenugreek, chola, turmeric, onion, garlic, without using chemicals. He also grows wheat, which he sells for double rate of MSP at Rs 2,425 per quintal. He also dedicates half an acre to growing green fodder for his three cows. He says people today are more aware of the dangers of chemical-laden food and I give them poison-free vegetables. "My cauliflower is sold for Rs 50 per kg, while others sell theirs for Rs 1 or Rs 2 when there's a glut. Every Wednesday and Sunday, I travel 30 km to Bathinda city to sell my produce. I sell around one quintal peas, two quintal cauliflower, two quintal radish, one quintal potatoes, and 30-40 kg of various other vegetables

## Maha Kumbh is over, now for the hard part: Dismantling Mela city over 4,000 hectares

GNS News Agency, March 10

The Maha Kumbh may be over for pilgrims and the Akharas, but for the government authorities, a mammoth task awaits: dismantling the temporary city spread over 4,000 hectares on the banks of the Ganga. According to various authorities and agencies involved in the uninstallation and cleanup, while the deadline to bring the entire area back to how it was is March 20, the processes — a third-party verification, dismantling and inventorying — means the deadline could be pushed.

Authorities have to dismantle, clean and store away about 2 lakh tents, over 1.5 lakh portable toilets, 2.69 lakh chequered aluminium plates used for laying roads, about 1,300 km of water pipelines, over 56,000 water taps, 80 temporary tubewells, over 52,000 electric polls, over 70,000 LED lights, over 200 km of sewage pipes, over 800 signages, 2,700 CCTV cameras and 31 pantoon bridges. It also means dismantling about 23 hospitals and first-aid posts. Authorities then have to ensure one more major task is completed — ensuring water quality in the area is up to the mark, especially since the National Green Tribunal previously pulled up the Uttar Pradesh government over it during the Maha Kumbh.

"There are various steps and different levels of monitoring — uninstallation, verification, preparing and tracking Rs 1,000 crore-worth of inventory. We have set a target of 15 days to bring the city back to Ground Zero. Then, we will need to pass the zero-discharge test of the NGT," Vijay Kiran Anand, the Mela Adhikari, said. According to authorities, the inventoried items that can be stored away for later use will be put in godowns and will eventually be repurposed for the annual Magh Mela next year. Other items will be sent to districts that need them, officials said. Significantly, while the preparation for Kumbh had started over a year ago, it wasn't until October — when the river had receded after a delayed monsoon season — that the city began to

every week. Despite the higher cost, my customers never ask for a discount and they trust the quality," he says, adding that farmers feel ashamed to sell their crop on their own and prefer going to the mandis.

Initially, he carried his vegetables on bicycle, then later upgraded to a scooter, and eventually purchased a Fiat car and later a Maruti car. "Now, I use a Gypsy with a trolley to transport the vegetables and get paid then and there," he adds. But it was not always this smooth for Gurdeep. Around 20 years ago, he used to grow cotton. "One day, Amarjit Singh Sandhu, a vegetable expert from Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Bathinda visited our village and encouraged me to consider organic farming. On his advice, I started a kitchen garden using organic seeds from the kendra. The first harvest was modest, but it was the beginning of a transformation. With support from Ambuja Cement, which launched a project in my area enrolling around 400 farmers, I was able to grow organic vegetables. As my crops passed organic certification, the owner of the company visited my fields, praised my work and gave a cheque of Rs 1.5 lakh," he says, adding that a private bank helped him install a greenhouse and also set up a vermi-compost plant. Gurdeep has installed a solar-powered tube well and does not avail any power subsidies. He laid underground pipelines to carry water to his fields, saving a significant amount of water that would otherwise evaporate in open channels. He also runs a small dairy business, selling milk and producing ghee. "My farm is a closed-loop system, I grow my own seedlings, compost my waste, and produce my own organic inputs. This reduces my reliance on external sources and ensures that everything I produce is truly organic. I spray 7-8 months old sour buttermilk on my crops, which works wonders on several pests, including fungi. I was a marginal farmer, but now I am able to provide jobs to others and pay Rs 2.80 lakh annually in rent for 3.5 acres," he says, adding that he is ready to provide free organic farming training by visiting other farms.



be set up. The entire city stretches 14 km on the banks of the river and is divided into 25 sectors. According to officials, the dismantling will involve several departments such as urban development, irrigation, public works, power, and health. However, a significant portion of the work — such as cleaning and dismantling the 1.5 lakh toilets and urinals, the 1,300 km-long water pipelines and 200 km-long drainage lines, and uninstalling tube wells and water taps in tents, kitchens and other accommodations — will lie with the urban development and irrigation departments. An official involved in the cleanup said third-party verification began soon after the Mela wrapped up on February 26.

"This is crucial because all payments and bills are generated on that basis. Verification is complete in about 20 of 25 sectors and will be completed in the rest in 2-3 days. Meanwhile, dismantling and inventorisation have already partially begun," he said. "As I understand, verification is nearly complete," Amit Singh, the Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam managing director, said. "Simultaneously, we are dismantling pipelines in coordination with the Mela Authority. For example, some water pipelines will not be dismantled just yet since toilets will need to be cleaned before they are uninstalled and sent into storage."



## 1 dead, several injured as Cyclone Alfred tracks west across Australian east coast



GNS News Agency, March 10

Flooding rains will continue for days to lash a region of the Australian east coast even though it avoided the destructive winds of its first tropical cyclone in 51 years, officials said on Saturday (March 8, 2025). One person was confirmed dead and several were injured.

Tropical Cyclone Alfred had been expected to become the first cyclone to cross the Australian coast near the Queensland state capital, Brisbane, Australia's third-most populous city, since 1974. But it weakened Saturday to a tropical low, which is defined as carrying sustained winds of less than 63 kph (39 mph), then came to a near-standstill off the Brisbane coast for several hours.

The cyclone's remnant is forecast to track west across the Australian mainland in the coming days bringing heavy rain, Bureau of Meteorology manager Matt Collopy said. "The real threat now is from that locally heavy-to-intense rainfall, which may lead to flash and riverine flooding," Collopy told reporters. Cyclones are common in Queensland's tropical north but are rare in the state's temperate and densely populated southeast corner that borders New South Wales state.

A 61-year-old man who disappeared in a flooded river near the New South Wales town of Dorrigo was confirmed the first casualty of the crisis when his body was recovered on Saturday, police said. Several defence personnel were injured when two military trucks involved in the emergency response collided at the town of Tregeagle in New South Wales on Saturday, police said. Nine Network television and other media reported that 36 people injured, eight seriously, with two people trapped in the trucks.

A woman sustained minor injuries when an apartment building lost its roof in the Queensland border city of Gold Coast on Friday, police said. The woman was one of 21 people who were evacuated from the building. A couple sustained minor injuries when a tree crashed through the ceiling of their Gold Coast bedroom during strong winds and rain on Thursday night, officials said.

Queensland Premier David Crisafulli said 330,000 homes and businesses had lost power due to the storm since Thursday. No other natural disaster had created a bigger blackout in the state's history. New South Wales reported as many as 45,000 premises without electricity on Saturday. But tens of thousands had been reconnected by late in the day, officials said. Rivers were flooding in Queensland and New South Wales after days of heavy rain, the meteorology bureau said. The missing man was the only failure among 36 flood rescues carried out by emergency teams in northern New South Wales in recent days, most involving vehicles attempting to cross floodwaters, police said.

## 12 people injured by 3 men shooting randomly at Toronto pub customers



Shortly after the shooting, police said that a suspect wearing a black balaclava was seen fleeing in a silver car and was still at large after the shooting

GNS News Agency, March 10

A dozen people were injured in a shooting at an eastern Toronto pub in what police called a reckless act of violence by three men who entered the bar and fired randomly without warning. Superintendent Paul MacIntyre of the Toronto Police Service said that authorities received numerous emergency calls reporting a shooting at the Piper Arms around 10:40 p.m. A preliminary investigation determined that three males entered the pub and began shooting at customers, MacIntyre said during a news conference at the scene. There were no immediate arrests.

"One male was armed with what appears to be an assault rifle, the other two males were armed with handguns, and they walked into the bar, they produced their guns and they opened fire indiscriminately on the people sitting inside," MacIntyre said, adding that there were no fatalities. Police arrived at the scene and found 12 people suffering from various injuries. The victims were transported to local hospitals and six were confirmed to have gunshot wounds that were not life-threatening, MacIntyre said, calling the victims "extremely lucky." The remaining six victims were hurt by flying and broken glass. The motive wasn't immediately clear, MacIntyre said, calling the shooting "a brazen and reckless act of violence that's really shaken our community and the city itself." MacIntyre said that he and other officers were "horrified" by what they saw on a security video. "These guys just looked at the ground and opened fire," he said. Shortly after the shooting, police said that a suspect wearing a black balaclava was seen fleeing in a silver car and was still at large after the shooting. People were being warned to stay away from the area.

Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow said she had spoken to Police Chief Myron Demkiw and was told "all necessary resources" had been deployed. "It is troubling because of the magnitude of the shootings and the number of people hurt, and I don't want to speculate as to the why and how," Chow told reporters Saturday morning at a news conference.

# Counting our vulnerable dolphins

GNS News Agency, March 10

Earlier this week, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change released the findings of a population study of dolphins found in Indian rivers, putting their numbers at 6,327. These playful creatures with their torpedo-like bodies generate excitement whenever they are spotted. People flock to see them. Urban teenagers describe them as 'cute'. There are two kinds of river dolphins. Facultative river dolphins occur in both marine and fresh waters. In India, Irrawaddy dolphins are seen around the Chilka lake, where an estimated 155 of these are a major tourist attraction, and off the Sunderbans. The smaller tucuxi is found in the Amazon and Orinoco rivers, and the Yangtze finless porpoise is about 1 metre long.

Obligate river dolphins are found only in fresh water bodies. The Yangtze river dolphin of China is presumed to be extinct, having been last spotted in 2007. The distinctively pink Amazon river dolphin is over 2.5 metres long. The equally large Ganges river dolphin has a widespread habitat, and is found in the main bodies and some tributaries of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Closely related to the Ganges dolphin, the Indus river dolphin is the State aquatic animal of Punjab. Here, it is found in the river Beas and its Harike wetlands in the Tam Taran district. The Environment Ministry study could locate only three of these dolphins, indicating their precarious existence. Only about 1,800 survive in the Indus in Pakistan. Dolphins and toothed whales have a prominent, fatty mass on their foreheads called the melon. It acts as a lens that focuses sound, and is very important in echolocation. Our river dolphins prefer waters that are muddy, with low salt content. An unusual feature of the Ganges and Indus river dolphins is their poor eyesight. Navigation and feeding is done by echolocation, where ultrasound waves, in the form of distinctive clicks, are emanated from their vocal chords, and the melon on the forehead is used to sense the echoes of these waves bouncing off nearby objects. These dolphins also show a tendency to swim on their sides, using the fins on the sides of bodies to feel along the bottom of riverbeds in their search for food.

In our river dolphin species, the eye is barely a centimeter across, and has a thick cornea and no eye lens. The retina has very few cells for registering light, and the optic nerve that carries visual sensations to the brain is thin, barely a filament. Visual perception seems restricted to detecting light, and the direction from which light is coming. Comparisons of brain regions involved in sensory perception in these river dolphins with the marine bottlenose dolphin shows that

markets, shopping malls, military installations, airports, universities, tourist attractions, schools, hospitals, places of worship, and government facilities. Terrorists have targeted U.S. diplomats and diplomatic facilities in the past," the advisory said. It said Pakistan's security environment remains fluid, sometimes changing with little or no notice. There are greater security resources and infrastructure in the major cities, particularly Islamabad, and security forces in these areas may be more readily able to respond to an emergency compared to other areas of the country, it said.

On advisory related to the "Vicinity of Line of Control - Level 4: Do Not Travel", it said, "Do not travel to the India-Pakistan border, including areas along the Line of Control for any reason. Militant groups are known to operate in the area. India and Pakistan maintain a strong military presence on their respective sides of the border." "The only official Pakistan-India border crossing point for persons who are not citizens of India or Pakistan is in the province of Punjab between Wagah, Pakistan, and Atari, India. Travelers are advised to confirm the status of the border crossing prior to commencing travel. An Indian visa is required to enter India, and no visa services are available at the border." On the Balochistan province, the travel advisory is at "Level 4: Do Not Travel". "Do not travel to Balochistan province for any reason. Extremist groups, including an active separatist movement, have conducted deadly terrorist attacks against civilians, religious minorities, government offices, and security forces," it said. It added that "do not travel to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which includes the former FATA, for any reason." "Active terrorist and insurgent groups routinely conduct attacks against civilians, non-governmental organisations, government offices, and security forces." "These groups historically have targeted both government officials and civilians. Assassination and kidnapping attempts are common, including the targeting of polio eradication teams and Government of Pakistan security service (police and military) personnel," it said.

## U.S. issues advisory cautioning against travel close to India-Pakistan border, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



GNS News Agency, March 10

The U.S. has issued an advisory cautioning against travel to the immediate vicinity of the India-Pakistan border and the Line of Control due to terrorism and the potential for armed conflict and to the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The U.S. State Department issued the travel advisory on Friday (March 7, 2025). The advisory states that people should "reconsider travel to Pakistan due to terrorism and the potential for armed conflict". The travel advisory asks Americans to not travel to Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which include the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), due to terrorism. It also cautions against travel to the immediate vicinity of the India-Pakistan border and the Line of Control due to terrorism and the potential for armed conflict. "Violent extremist groups continue to plot attacks in Pakistan. Terrorist attacks are frequent in Balochistan province and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which include the former FATA. Large-scale terrorist attacks have resulted in numerous casualties, and small-scale attacks are frequent.

"Terrorism and ongoing violence by extremist elements have led to indiscriminate attacks on civilians, as well as local military and police targets. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting transportation hubs,

tributing to discussions online in English even if it is not their main language in India — as The Hindu has reported — has been a major challenge in putting together such data. The AI Kosha is the beginning of an attempt, therefore, to make India-specific data much more widely available. The datasets that have so far been uploaded — such as translation models between several "pairs" of Indian languages — are an effort to diminish this bias by giving researchers and firms building AI tools in India wider access to local content. Many open source AI models would theoretically allow an Indian firm to build their own powerful generative AI tools, such as chatbots. But local data, policymakers and developers have argued, are critical to ensure that such deployments are actually useful over what foreign firms like OpenAI and Google already offer.

What else does the IndiaAI Mission work on?

The mission has seven pillars overall. While the Common Compute facility and AI Kosha have been under particular focus due to developments like DeepSeek — the Chinese AI model that was trained at a far lower cost than competing models from the U.S. — there are other aspects that policymakers have targeted. One is the AI Safety Institute of India, which is yet to be formally launched. Such institutes are being created or accredited around the world to develop guardrails around unintended consequences of AI deployments, and to study the risks of the mushrooming use of AI across the industry and government. These include everything from making sure that a chatbot doesn't give away a recipe for a bomb (for example), to making sure that specialised AI tools, like those used in biomedical research, are reliable and can "explain" their output. Other pillars include the IndiaAI Innovation Centre, which aims to create "domain-specific foundation models"; an application development initiative to help develop use-cases that can be commercialised or put to productive use; Futureskills, an initiative to develop AI labs in smaller cities; and startup financing. A key effort that dovetails with many of these pillars is the request for proposals put out by the mission to develop an indigenously developed foundation model. Building a foundational model — the main program that a generative AI tool runs on — is highly resource-intensive and accounts for the bulk of developing AI models.

## Why are Indian firms racing to build local AI? | Explained

GNS News Agency, March 10

The story so far: On March 6, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's IndiaAI Mission launched AI Kosha, a national dataset platform that will gather non-personal data from various ministries and departments in order to develop Artificial Intelligence models and tools. It also launched the Common Compute portal to allow startups and academia to access a shared pool of Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) to build and run AI models and tools.

What is the IndiaAI Mission?

The IndiaAI portal was initially set up as a joint initiative between the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the Indian tech industry association Nasscom in 2023. The portal has evolved into a mission led entirely by the Union government, announced last March with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore. The mission was approved by the Union Cabinet amid the rapid proliferation and development of generative AI models like ChatGPT and an increased global enthusiasm to develop AI. The key objectives of the mission were: "Making AI in India and Making AI Work for India". While the mission works on many interventions and resources for private companies and academia to research and build AI, a key one that has emerged in recent weeks has been the Common Compute facility to provide GPUs to startups that may not be able to buy them independently in a large volume. GPUs, also known as graphics cards, are a key component in many PCs and phones that allow these devices to render images and graphics. However, AI researchers have long used GPUs to run enormously complex calculations involving massive volumes of data. Generative AI models, which can only be created ("trained") and run when they have access to such computing resources, have become a major use case of GPUs. This is what has enabled firms like Nvidia to foray far beyond video gaming to become an essential component of AI infrastructure around the world. However, GPUs are expensive. Blackwell, a GPU made by Nvidia, is reportedly sold out until this October. As such, the IndiaAI Mission has started empanelling data centres in India that have GPUs to provide access to their computing resources to startups and researchers. This access will be handled by the mission, which will decide which entities will get how much computing resource access, and for how long. As of now, 14,000 GPUs have been acquired and commissioned for use by empanelled data centres so far, according to IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, with more to be acquired on a quarterly basis.

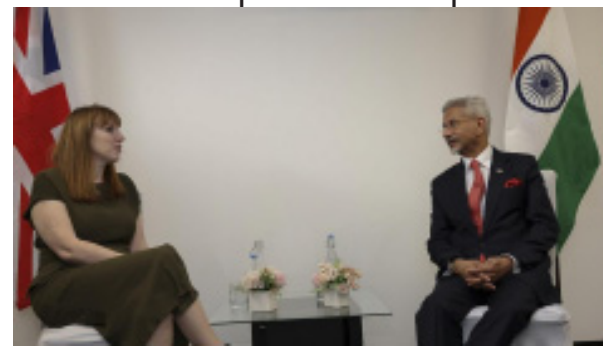
What is AI Kosha?

AI Kosha is the implementation of another pillar of the mission: the IndiaAI Datasets Platform. One of the main issues with building AI models from scratch — or to some extent even adapting existing models to India — is that they are largely trained on Western models that are heavily biased towards English and developed countries. The fact that many internet users are navigating the web and con-



the sight areas are unusually small, and the hearing areas much larger. This indicates a reliance on their biosonar for echolocation. In experiments, Indus river dolphins can detect a 4 mm ball bearing suspended on a nylon thread, and quickly head for it. Human danger to river dolphins comes from the use of their oil in remedies for conditions ranging from muscular strains to arthritis. Overfishing deprives their food supply, and they are snared in fishing nets as unwanted bycatch. Chemical pollutants pose another danger. Despite increasingly refined counting methods, river dolphin population trends remain unclear — they could be rising or falling. Either way, their numbers are critically low. We must foster greater public awareness of these remarkable creatures.

## In Manchester to open a consulate, Jaishankar says India-U.K. ties set to expand and deepen



GNS News Agency, March 10

Approaching the end of his official tour of the U.K. and Ireland, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar inaugurated a new Consulate in Manchester on Saturday (March 8, 2025) and visited the Lancashire Cricket Club at the Old Trafford cricket ground. He spoke at both locations of a positive shift and expansion in the India-U.K. relationship. U.K. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner and Minister for the Indo-Pacific Catherine West were among those present. No other PM has invested as much in strengthening ties with diaspora as Modi: EAM Jaishankar. Jaishankar said there was nothing more fitting than "to have a Consul General inaugurate her Consulate" on International Women's Day, referring to India's new Consul General in Manchester, Vishakha Yaduvanshi.

"We are making up for a lot of things perhaps we could have and should have done earlier," Mr. Jaishankar said, adding that today's inauguration was a testament to how the India-U.K. relationship had changed. "It is equally a preparation for what is to come," he said. "We are clearly anticipating a very big pickup in the relationship in the times to come," he added. Mr. Jaishankar emphasised this while speaking to a gathering at the Lancashire Cricket Club, where he highlighted the role of the diaspora. India's relationship with the U.K. is rooted in history, Mr. Jaishankar said. "That history is a very complex history. All of you understand that," he added. "Every big, deep, important relationship is a mixed one. I think it's important to pick the good side, look for the possibilities there," the Minister said, adding that the problems should and will be addressed. On Wednesday, a pro-Khalistan demonstrator had rushed in front of Mr. Jaishankar's car in London, tearing a cloth that resembled the national flag. The government had summoned the U.K.'s Acting High Commissioner in New Delhi and issued a demarche. This was the latest in a series of related incidents that have challenged the relationship's smooth functioning over the last few years. Mr. Jaishankar had visited the U.K. in November 2023 as part of a reset in bilateral ties. "In fact, when we see the direction of the world today, I would say that the case for deepening these ties gets stronger, not weaker, and one current expression of that is the sort of accelerated effort that we are putting in the free trade agreement (FTA)," Mr. Jaishankar said. He was presumably referring to the geopolitical shifts precipitated by the new foreign policy direction of U.S. President Donald Trump. At the Consulate in Manchester, Mr. Jaishankar indicated that the FTA was symbolic of the India-U.K. bilateral relationship moving into a higher orbit. The Minister appealed to universities in Manchester to set up campuses in India. The University of Southampton has already announced that it will soon be enrolling students in its Gurugram campus. Other U.K. universities, seeking to better their financial prospects, have shown an interest in setting up shop in India. The Minister also announced the launch of a Pravasiya Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (Non-Resident Indian Help Centre) in the U.K., the first in this part of the world. Mr. Jaishankar suggested that direct flights from Manchester to New Delhi could be imminent. Indigo had announced a direct flight to Amsterdam and Manchester, from India, starting in July 2025.

## Human remains found in SLBC tunnel as rescue efforts continue

Hyderabad: Rescue teams discovered traces of human remains in the partially collapsed Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel on Sunday. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams supported by workers from other agencies, working on two spots, identified by the cadaver dogs and seismology studies, made a breakthrough in the operations. They unearthed what is suspected to be highly mutilated remains of one of the missing workers. This discovery has slowed down the manual excavation efforts as the teams proceed with utmost caution to ensure the safe retrieval of the remains. The excavation work at the second site identified by cadaver dogs from Kerala is expected to take a couple of hours to reach similar depths. The challenging conditions inside the tunnel, including muck, water, and heavy debris, have made the rescue operation particularly difficult. Despite these obstacles, the rescue teams remain committed to their mission, employing advanced technologies such as Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to detect human presence. State Disaster Management Special Chief Secretary Arvind Kumar has been closely monitoring the progress of the rescue operations. Authorities have planned to deploy robots from March 11 to assist in the debris removal and ensure the safety of the rescue personnel.



## Trump says India agreed to cut tariffs way down



GNS News Agency, March 10

New York/Washington: US President Donald Trump said India has agreed to cut its tariffs "way down" as he reiterated his claim that the country charges America massive tariffs that make it difficult to sell products there. "Our country, from an economic standpoint and financial standpoint and a trade standpoint, has been absolutely ripped off by almost every country in the world," Trump said in remarks from the Oval Office on Friday. "Canada, Mexico and then you just go right down the line. India charges us massive tariffs, massive, you can't even sell anything into India. It's almost, it's almost restrictive. It is restrictive. We do very little business inside," he said.

"They've agreed, by the way, they want to cut their tariffs way down now because somebody's finally exposing them for what they've done. And the same thing with China, same thing with a lot of other countries, and the EU has been a terrible abuser of this country," Trump added. This was the third time this week that Trump has criticised the high tariffs charged by India. On Thursday, Trump said India is a very high-tariff nation and reiterated that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in on April 2.

In his address to the joint session of Congress on Tuesday, the first of his second term in the White House, Trump criticised the high tariffs charged by India and other countries and termed them as "very unfair". Addressing lawmakers from the US Capitol, Trump announced that reciprocal tariffs will kick in next month. In the past, Trump has called India a "tariff king" and a "big abuser". Last month, during a joint press conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the White House, Trump said that India has "been very strong on tariffs". "I don't blame them, necessarily, but it's a different way of doing business. It's very hard to sell into India because they have trade barriers, very strong tariffs," he had said.

## Pope Francis responding well to pneumonia therapy and showing 'gradual, slight improvement'



It was the first time the doctors had reported that Pope Francis was responding positively to the treatment for the complex lung infection

GNS News Agency, March 10

Pope Francis is responding well to the treatment for double pneumonia and has shown a "gradual, slight improvement" in recent days, the Vatican said on Saturday (March 8, 2025). But his doctors have decided to keep his prognosis as guarded, meaning that he's not out of danger yet. The 88-year-old Pope, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, has remained stable, with no fever and good oxygen levels in his blood for several days, doctors reported in a Vatican statement.

The doctors said that such stability "as a consequence testifies to a good response to therapy." It was the first time the doctors had reported that Pope Francis was responding positively to the treatment for the complex lung infection that was diagnosed after he was hospitalised on February 14. Pope Francis worked and rested during the day on Saturday, as he entered his fourth week at Rome's Gemelli hospital with his condition stabilised following a few bouts of acute respiratory crises last week.

"In order to record these initial improvements in the coming days as well, his doctors have prudently maintained the prognosis as guarded," the statement said. In his absence, the Vatican's day-to-day operations continued, with Cardinal Pietro Parolin celebrating Mass for an anti-abortion group in St. Peter's Basilica. At the start, Parolin delivered a message from the Pope from the hospital on the need to protect life, from birth to natural death. In the message, dated March 5 and addressed to the Movement for Life, which seeks to provide women with alternatives to abortion, Pope Francis encouraged the faithful to promote anti-abortion activities not just for the unborn, but "for the elderly, no longer independent or the incurably ill." Later Saturday, another cardinal closely associated with Pope Francis' papacy, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, presides over the nightly recitation of prayers for Francis. Czerny then returned on Sunday to celebrate the Holy Year Mass for volunteers that Francis was supposed to have celebrated.

Pope Francis has been using high flows of supplemental oxygen to help him breathe during the day and a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask at night. Pope Francis was hospitalised Feb. 14 for what was then just a bad case of bronchitis. The infection progressed into a complex respiratory tract infection and double pneumonia that has sidelined Francis for the longest period of his 12-year papacy and raised questions about the future.

## Reading helps learn about many things in a multi-dimensional way.

GNS News Agency, March 10

When I was younger, my father used to advise me to read books. He believed general reading habit is a virtue that we all should strive to inculcate. I did not pay heed to his consistent efforts to make me read. I used to hate reading as it was boring while other activities such as music, sports, and computers were fun. He tried to experiment with different genres to create a spark in me for reading, but he could not achieve the desired result. I did not read any novel that he brought. Still, out of courtesy I used to read some books that felt interesting. Books on space sciences and stories of Akbar-Birbal were my favourites.

Recently, I came across the "streetlight effect", which is a sort of bias in our perspective that makes us search for something where it is easier to



search. The moment I read the actual concept, I used to refer to and apply this in my life as I was influenced by that comic. That was the moment I felt, we can learn so much by general reading as a child. As my interest kindled, I started reading books that I used to ignore. I read the Panchatantra, Hitopadesh, and others as I discovered they were written to impart life lessons to

Even before studying a lay person in a lucid manner. I felt sorry for not listening to dad and losing out so much in the journey. We have a collection of wisdom compiled in books since ages that we choose to ignore. But it is our own loss!

Reading helps learn about many things in a multi-dimensional way. It enriches our perspective. These days, hard skills are not enough and we require soft skills to succeed in any profession. However, good literature can help us brush up our soft skills such as interpersonal, communication, adaptability skills. It is con-

cerning to see people learning programming languages but getting weaker at natural languages these days. Thus, literature could be a good active entertainment that helps us develop skills that have monetary value as well apart from the non-monetary benefits they carry. Sometimes, we need the eyes of others to gain an insight into our own persona. Good literature provides a plethora of perspectives to see the self and the world in a different light. It may enable us to take diverse perspectives without contaminating our own.

It may curb ethnocentric behaviour and provides opportunities to learn with an open mind. Today, I realise that dad was so right and that I have learnt so much with that passive reading I did because of him. Hence, we must strive to read better literature to get better at everything that life has to offer.

## Cotton imports increase despite pressure on Indian cotton prices

GNS News Agency, March 10

Cotton imports were to the tune of \$104 million in August 2024, \$134.2 million in September 2024, \$127.71 million in October, \$170.73 million in November, and \$142.89 million in December, 2024. In January this year, it stood at \$184.64 million. Comparably, the imports were \$74.4 million in August 2023, \$39.91 million in September 2023, \$36.68 million in October 2023, \$30.61 million in November 2023, and \$29.47 million in December 2023. In January 2024, the imports were \$19.62 million.

Meanwhile, the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) has procured close to 100 lakh bales of Indian cotton that has come into the market since the beginning of the new season on October 1, 2024. In the peak cotton arrival season in December 2024, the CCI bought almost 60% of the daily arrivals at the minimum support price (MSP). The price of the Shankar 6 variety of cotton on Saturday was ₹52,500 a quintal. Jaipal, a cotton farmer in Telangana, said at the beginning of the season that farmers are not happy because yield is less. "International cotton prices are weak and mills are able to buy from there," he said. Kurbur Shanthakumar, president of Karnataka State Federation of Farmer Associations, said the cost of production per quintal is ₹9,000 and the MSP is ₹7,235. But, brokers were buying in the open market at only ₹5,000 to ₹5,500 per quintal. The Union Budget announced in February has a Cotton Mission aimed at improving productivity.

For the Indian textile industry, international cotton prices are weak and with export demand looking up for garments and home textiles, there is a need for the textile industry to be internationally competitive. More than 60% of garments exported are cotton-based. Extra Long Staple cotton can be imported duty free and exporters can import cotton without duty under Advance Authorisation. The mills seem to have imported cotton as international cotton prices were lower than Indian prices and the imports have not disturbed the local market, industry sources said. "Brazil is an



aggressive seller [in the international market]. Australia, the U.S., Africa, and Brazil were all comfortably placed in prices till a few days ago. Indian cotton prices were higher compared with these countries. The Indian textile mills took a calculated risk and imported in spite of 11% duty as Indian cotton and yarn are relatively over priced. The Indian government and textile industry should look at boosting demand so that textile exports increase and cotton prices remain in parity for the producers and processors. It is also very critical to maintain 'fibre security' for the mills by increasing cotton productivity and area," Manish Daga, president of the All India Cotton Farmers Producers Organisations Association, said. "If Indian cotton is 80-85 cents a pound, Brazilian cotton is 60-65 cents a pound. Cotton productivity in India is about 450 kg per hectare as against 1,800-2,000 kg/ha in Brazil. Indian yarn exports should increase," Pankaj Sharda, director at Indian Cotton Association, said. Cotton imports were high in 2018-2019 and 2021-2022 when the textile sector had good orders. India has 38% of cotton global acreage but only 23% of the global production. The government should look at acreage-based MSP for the farmers and take urgent steps to increase productivity, Southern India Mills' Association chairman S.K. Sundararaman said.

## Mpox deaths reach 260 in Africa as humanitarian crisis in Congo hampers response



GNS News Agency, March 10

Addis Ababa: The death toll from Africa's ongoing mpox outbreak has reached 260 since 2025, with total cases surpassing 24,200, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). During an online media briefing on Thursday evening, Ngashi Ngongo, chief of staff and head of the Executive Office at Africa CDC, said that the African continent has reported 24,272 mpox cases since the start of the year.

Of these, 6,034 were confirmed and about 260 related deaths were recorded. Data from the African Union's specialised healthcare agency show that in the past week alone, 11 African countries reported 2,610 new cases, including 664 confirmed ones and 45 new related deaths. Ngongo said that among the 22 African countries affected by the ongoing mpox outbreak, 15 countries are currently experiencing active transmission of the virus, while seven countries are in a controlled phase. Meanwhile, the Africa CDC has expressed concern about the challenges in addressing the mpox outbreak in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where clashes have intensified between the DRC army and the March 23 Movement rebels in recent weeks, Xinhua news agency reported.

According to Africa CDC, the DRC, currently the epicentre of the mpox outbreak in Africa, reported 1,918 cases in the past week, including 202 confirmed cases and 44 new related fatalities. Ngongo highlighted the ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict, with more than two million people displaced, both internally and across borders. He warned that the situation is severely hindering efforts to contain the mpox outbreak.

He said that the conflict has disrupted laboratory services, hampered testing and reporting efforts, and that at least 605 active mpox patients have fled treatment centers

in conflict-affected regions. The Africa CDC also indicated that transporting samples has become increasingly challenging due to the humanitarian crisis. Mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, was first detected in laboratory monkeys in 1958. It is a rare viral disease typically transmitted through body fluids, respiratory droplets and contaminated materials. The infection often causes fever, rash, and swollen lymph nodes. Last week, the Africa CDC announced that the ongoing mpox outbreak in Africa remains classified as a Public Health Emergency of Continental Security. The continental healthcare agency initially declared the mpox outbreak a Public Health Emergency of Continental Security in mid-August last year. Shortly afterward, the World Health Organization also designated the viral disease as a public health emergency of international concern.

## 10 missing Indian workers found in West Bank, brought back to Israel

GNS News Agency, March 10

New Delhi: Ten Indian workers, who went missing, were located in West Bank and have been brought to Israel, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the Israeli authorities tried to locate the Indians. "They were located in West Bank... they have been brought back to Israel. This matter is being investigated as to how they went (to West Bank)," he said, replying to a question during his weekly media briefing. Jaiswal said the Indian embassy in Israel is in touch with the Israeli authorities on the issue.

"Our embassy is in touch with the Israeli authorities for the safety and for the well-being of these Indian nationals... All 10 Indian nationals who had gone to West Bank, are in Israel, and are being looked after," he said.



## Indian community leader in Australia sentenced to 40 years for sexually assaulting five women



GNS News Agency, March 10

Sydney: An Indian community leader in Australia has been sentenced to 40 years in prison, with a non-parole period of 30 years, for the "premeditated and elaborately executed" rapes of five Korean women, according to a media report. Balesh Dhankhar, 43, sat in the docks and showed no emotion as he was sentenced in the Downing Centre District Court on Friday.

Dhankhar posted fake job advertisements to lure women before drugging them in or near his home in Sydney. The former IT consultant then groped and raped the women, the Australian Associated Press reported. He also filmed his crimes for his future sexual gratification, the report said. In jailing Dhankhar on Friday, District Court Judge Michael King said the offender's conduct was "premeditated, elaborately executed, manipulative and highly predatory" and demonstrated his desire for sexual gratification came in complete and callous disregard for each victim, he said. "This was an egregious sequence of planned predatory conduct against five unrelated young and vulnerable women over a significant period," the report quoted the judge as saying. All the women, aged between 21 and 27, were either unconscious or significantly impaired at the time of the abuse.

Dhankhar kept a sickening Excel spreadsheet in which he rated each applicant of his fake job advertisement based on looks and intelligence. The spreadsheet also recorded his interactions with each victim, their details and his assessment of their vulnerability and suitability for his plans. Until his arrest in 2018, Dhankhar was highly regarded among the Indian-Australian community, founding a satellite group of the Bharatiya Janata Party and acting as a spokesman for the Hindu Council of Australia, the report said. Dhankhar also worked as a data visualisation consultant with ABC, British American Tobacco, Toyota and Sydney Trains. He arrived in Australia as a student in 2006. His presentation as a community-minded individual concerned with and active in improving the quality of life for others was "entirely inconsistent with his seriously flawed and predatory character" revealed in court, the judge said. After preying on his fifth victim in October 2018, police raided his Sydney central business district unit and found date-rape drugs and a video recorder disguised as a clock radio. A jury in 2023 found him guilty of 39 offences, including 13 counts of sexual assault. Dhankhar denies drugging the women or that sex was non-consensual, telling a report writer there was a "difference in how I interpret consent, to how the law sees consent". His non-parole period expires in April 2053, backdated to the end of his trial. Dhankhar will be aged 83 when his full sentence of 40 years ends.

## India, Ireland to set up Joint Economic Commission to boost trade ties



GNS News Agency, March 10

London: India and Ireland have agreed to set up a Joint Economic Commission to increase bilateral trade, investment and technology ties, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar announced after a meeting with his Irish counterpart in Dublin on Friday. He met Tanaiste (foreign minister) Simon Harris over a working breakfast meeting at the Department of Foreign Affairs. The duo also clinched an "Action Plan" to enhance the India-Irish partnership as a highlight of the first visit by an Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM) to Ireland and the first high-level political visit from India since the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015. "We discussed our bilateral cooperation, including a new Action Plan to reinvigorate ties. Agreed to set up a Joint Economic Commission (JEC) to increase our trade, investment and technology linkages," Jaishankar posted on social media.

"Exchanged views on the recent developments in our respective regions and globally, including the Ukraine conflict, West Asia, Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific. Also spoke about India-EU cooperation and multilateralism," he said. The government of Ireland said in a statement that the JEC, once established, will serve as a vehicle to enhance internal cooperation and coordination, and strengthen the "likeminded partnership with one of the largest economies in the world". "With two-way trade already at EURO 16 billion, we're committed to strengthening every opportunity for growth, investment, and collaboration," said Harris. The Irish minister said the first practical outworking towards this plan was the signing by both ministers of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on diplomatic exchange of officials. "Minister Jaishankar and I also discussed a range of bilateral issues including Ireland and India's cultural and people-to-people links, our engagement with India as committed members of the European Union and global issues such as Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, the situations in the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific region and common challenges such as climate change," stated Harris. "We agreed that by working more closely together at the multilateral level, we can better address bilateral and global issues in a mutually beneficial manner," he added. Following the dialogue, Jaishankar concluded his Ireland tour with tributes at a memorial to Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore at the St Stephen's Green Park in Dublin.



# India must revisit the animal welfare framework at its zoos

The move by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) to suspend the membership of the Delhi's National Zoological Park (originally the Delhi zoo) has sparked much debate on the animal welfare framework in Indian zoos. On October 7, WAZA notified suspension of the Delhi zoo's WAZA membership, effective from October 8, 2024, with the possibility of cancellation if the conditions laid down by WAZA in the said notification are not fulfilled by the zoo by April 7, 2025. The decision has evoked shock but also relief as the Delhi zoo's 29-year-old African male elephant, Shankar, which was given to India as a diplomatic gift by Zimbabwe in 1998, has been consistently neglected. Shankar had a female companion which passed away in 2005 and was never replaced. The male elephant exhibits maladaptive behaviour. This situation is problematic as elephants are extremely social animals forming complex relationships. WAZA was made aware of the elephant's plight through numerous complaints. A team from WAZA also visited the zoo on March 18, 2024, which showed the elephant to be in a poor physical and mental state. It was found to be tethered by a chain in a solitary enclosure without the normal stimulants or the immersive environment found in the wild which keep elephants content and healthy.

The WAZA team thereafter urged the Delhi zoo to take note of the elephant's plight and act within the next 15 days to end the animal's suffering in line with WAZA's Animal Welfare Strategy which specifies the 'Five Domains Animal Welfare Model'. Nothing substantial was ever done, compelling WAZA to indefinitely suspend the Delhi zoo's WAZA membership. But this suspension has been made subject to two conditions: either get the animal relocated or address its health concerns by April 7, 2025. The deplorable condition of the elephant goes against every ideal of WAZA carved out through its science-based knowledge in animal care and welfare, environmental education and global conservation, since its inception in 1935, with the aim of guiding zoos and aquariums across the world and ensuring animal welfare and conservation.

Plight of other elephants Delhi zoo also has two Asian elephants — a male and a female. It is hard to ignore the mental distress that these Asian elephants exhibit through their incessant 'head-bobbing', which is a classic sign of mental distress in elephants. The elephants are also in an enclosure with insufficient area. It is agonising to see them in distress. Studies suggest that on average, a wild elephant, under non-extreme environmental conditions, walks for up to 10 kilometres a day. They also forage in a forest for up to 19 hours a day during which they undertake a range of behaviours that are regarded as essential for their survival. It appears that it was the poor nutrition, unsuitable environment and poor physical health of Shankar which compelled WAZA to act against the Delhi zoo. Notably, these are also problems which affect the two Asian elephants causing them to lose motivation to undertake survival-related behaviours. The situation at the Delhi zoo is an outright violation of global standards in the maintenance of zoos and its animals in other countries such as the United Kingdom and Ireland. The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), in its 'Management Guidelines for the Welfare of Elephants', states that zoos must ensure that the standards

of husbandry practices, housing, health and welfare management of elephants are humane, appropriate and in line with their intelligence, social behaviour and longevity. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) of the United Kingdom, in its 'Standards of Modern Zoo Practice', acknowledges that as elephants are highly-intelligent animals with large natural ranges and a complex social life, meeting their needs in captivity is challenging. It further states in paragraph 8.8.4 that elephants have to be kept in stable, female groups with matriarchal herds being the norm and that even the non-productive, older or problem elephants have to be kept in groups considering their indispensable need to socialise. In paragraph 8.8.6, it further states that even the bull elephants in musth, if separated from cows or other bulls, cannot be subjected to prolonged physical or social isolation from other elephants. But the Delhi zoo has kept Shankar in social isolation for a very long time. Pertinently, in paragraph 8.8.5, it states that female elephants must have contact with other female elephants at all times and shall ideally be part of a group of at least four female elephants that are over two years old. The female Asian elephant has not had any female company for a very long time. Thus, the zoo is violating every single one of these global standards despite being the object of international censure.

CZA is remiss in statutory duties It is hard to believe that the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, has not been aware of the rampant violations of law at the zoo, being the nodal authority under the said Act. These violations seem all the more worrisome considering the fact that in 1982, the Delhi zoo was renamed as the National Zoological Park with the idea of it being the model zoo of the country. If its poor management so far is any indication, the zoo has only been a major let-down for animal rights activists. As a member of WAZA, the CZA has been repeatedly informed by WAZA, since at least March of this year, about the shortcomings in its approach when it comes to the framing and enforcement of up-to-date guidelines—in line with the global norms—regarding animal welfare applicable to zoos across India.

The CZA, by letting the zoo deprive its elephants of the company of other elephants and a healthy environment, and by not addressing their mental and physical health needs, is violating its statutory duty as can be inferred from a conjoint reading of Section 38C(a) and Section 38H(6) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 — which mandates that the CZA has to specify the minimum standards, in line with global standards — for housing, upkeep and the veterinary care of animals at Indian zoos and that it shall cancel the recognition granted to a zoo if it is found to be failing to meet or maintain those standards. In fact, by not cancelling the recognition of the zoo, the CZA is also violating the scheme of law underlying the Recognition of Zoo Rules, 2009, wherein the central government has laid down the general standards to be observed by zoos; these include not separating any animal from its group unless it is for the welfare of that animal and ensuring that it is treated for health issues which includes mental health. Considering that elephants have an innate need to live in herds, not being in herds adversely affects their welfare. Thus, the zoo has no



justification for the way it has been treating its elephants for so long now.

It is bizarre that even though the zoo does not have the infrastructure, the capacity or the suitable environment to keep these majestic animals, it still insists, in the face of condemnation, on having these animals at the cost of their welfare. The CZA has turned a blind eye to the woes of these elephants. Even though it has framed guidelines titled 'Elephants' Upkeep in Zoos', wherein the CZA has emphatically asserted its ban on zoos that lack an appropriate environment for housing elephants, and has asserted that elephants must be housed in small groups, it is baffling that it has not enforced the full rigour of these guidelines. Maybe the CZA should look at and draw inspiration from the work of Indian rescue centres such as 'Wildlife SOS', which is dedicated to the care of abused, diseased, wounded and malnourished elephants. It is sad that even though there are robust laws on paper regarding elephant care and welfare which empower the CZA to resolve these problems, it has not been enforcing these laws the way it ought to. Perhaps, this is because the law does not prescribe any consequences for CZA itself in cases where the CZA wilfully neglects to discharge its statutory duties. It would help if the Indian government introduces checks and balances in the law with respect to the CZA and even for errant zoos that do not follow prescribed standards of animal care. The CZA has fallen short of the expectations of animal rights advocates and there are huge shortcomings in its attitude towards its statutory duties. While it would not be right to denounce the Delhi zoo solely based on its callous handling of its elephants, it does beg the question: is it even ethical for any zoo to have such animals when it does not have the infrastructure or the capacity to have them? Delhi zoo and the CZA have clearly sprung into action and are now looking at long term and 'WAZA-worthy' solutions to the problems of their elephants. With WAZA indicating in its October 7 notice that it might also cancel the CZA's WAZA membership, WAZA's membership of nine Indian zoos hangs in the balance. If the CZA's WAZA membership is cancelled, it will spell disaster for India's animal welfare and conservation efforts. The CZA must ensure that it complies with all the conditions which have been set out by WAZA and also make sure that the Delhi zoo has its house in order soon. Nipun Bhushan is an advocate practising law at various courts across Delhi with a focus on environment and sustainability

## It mends with us: Simran Mangharam writes on lessons learnt in love, in 2024

It struck me, as I sat down to write this, that I talk quite a lot about how we should love each other. That is, of course, my job. But I would like to focus a little more, today, on our relationships with ourselves. That's where it all begins, after all... But there I go again, linking it to a larger mission. I'd like to end 2024 by offering an unequivocal reminder that you have every reason to be kinder to yourself, more patient, and more forgiving. I have three quick tips to help you get started. First, get into the habit of asking: "How am I treating myself?" "What's the nicest thing I've said to myself lately?" "In what little way could I make myself a priority today?"

This should help lead into Step 2: Making time for the things you love (call it self-care, downtime, a hobby; whatever makes it work). Reach out for help, if need be, to make this me-time possible. Let it become part of the culture of how things are done, in your home and in your life. Step 3: Extend your new self-regard to interactions with other people. Start, perhaps, by learning how to take a compliment. I am often surprised by how many people will toss one back at the deliverer, as if it were a grenade. I understand that this is driven by embarrassment, but it does two small injuries: it discourages the other person from ever offering another one and, more importantly, it reinforces an inherent idea that you didn't deserve it. My recommendation: Try smiling and simply saying: Thank you. It can be a game-changer.

These are small steps, but reinforced as habits, they act as a reminder that we do deserve love. And that journey does begin within. What else have I learnt this year, that put a new spin on things? Here are my key pointers.

\* Forgive. Yourself, others, the past... it doesn't matter. Drop the dead weight. Let it go. You'll be surprised by how forgiveness can help emotions such as anger, resentment and hurt, accumulated over years, dissipate like a fog. This is something I find myself discussing often, with clients. Take the action required; sever a tie that causes harm. Move on. But even then, forgive. It is a great force of healing, and of good.

\* Make room for change. Aim to always love your partner, even when you don't really like them. There will be missteps between any two people sharing a life: issues with money, sex, temperament, career, the kids. People change over time too. I've seen couples driven to the brink simply because one of them rather suddenly turned into a party-loving extrovert. Trust that, together, you can course-correct. But in order to do that, there will need to be a certain degree of flexibility in how you view each other.

\* Boundaries, boundaries, boundaries. Of course you should be able to be your authentic self with a partner (or even a friend). But, in my experience, it isn't sustainable to try to mash two lives together as if they were play dough. You will need to figure out where the separations lie: friends, bathrooms, bedrooms. Find the line that works for you, or it may just end up drawing itself somewhere you never wanted it. \* Reach out: Physical contact can be the keystone in the arch that holds a relationship up. Simple hugs, holding hands, even loving eye contact or a peck on the cheek can boost emotional well-being and reinforce a bond. As a habit, they serve to tell a partner, like few other things can, that they are loved and valued.

\* Have the difficult conversation. This one is specifically for couples who may be struggling: It takes regular maintenance to keep anything ticking over healthily. It isn't just you; but also, it won't just go away. Talk, talk, talk — through whatever it is that is threatening the foundation you have built. I have seen too many couples opt for denial over a difficult conversation. The difficult discussion will come anyway; it will just be harder to have when it does. Argue, if that's what it takes; try to do so without personal attacks or judgement. Learn to admit when you are wrong; that certainly helps. And remember, even in the worst times, you are not opposing teams on a football field. You are lamplighters, trying to keep the same flame alive.

## Justin Trudeau: The autumn of a liberal

EMS News Agency, Jan 2

Once a liberal icon who represented the values of the 'cultural Left', Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, now in the last year of his third term, is mired in a crisis of unpopularity, dissension and defections from within his Liberal Party fold. The embattled Mr. Trudeau has been in power for nearly a decade since November 2015, for three terms. Few Canadian Prime Ministers have survived to rule for four terms. But in both the 2019 and 2021 federal elections — the latter called in September 2021 after Mr. Trudeau advised the country's Governor General to dissolve parliament — the Liberal Party was reduced to leading a minority government. In March 2022, Mr. Trudeau was able to retain power after the Liberals and the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) agreed to a confidence and supply agreement, entailing NDP support in parliament tied to the Liberals backing the NDP agenda on welfare and taxes.

In the years since, Mr Trudeau's popularity has plateaued. Recent approval ratings show that he enjoys barely 26% support compared with the 63% he had in the early days of his first tenure. Liberal Party leaders within his caucus have called for his resignation and earlier this month, a key Minister and someone widely considered to be his successor, Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, resigned abruptly, calling Mr. Trudeau's policies as "costly political gimmicks". Meanwhile, a resurgent Conservative Party, led by Pierre Poilievre, has steadily upped its popularity due to negative perceptions in the electorate about Mr. Trudeau's governance. And the social democrats have been miffed too because of ideological differences with the Liberal Party.

Recent approval ratings show that Justin Trudeau enjoys barely 26% support compared to the 63% he had in the early days of his first tenure. His current unpopularity is tied to the problems related to the economy: issues such as raging inflation, a housing crisis and opposition to immigration have led to a significant decline in opinion for Trudeau. Elections are supposed to be held in October 2025 but there is an increasing likelihood that the Liberal Party will seek a leadership change before that. In September, the NDP had ended its 2022 agreement but Mr. Trudeau survived three no-confidence motions called by the Conser-

vative Party since then, as the NDP and the federalist Bloc Quebecois have been reluctant to vote alongside the conservatives. Elections are supposed to be held in October 2025 but there is an increasing likelihood that the Liberal Party will seek a leadership change before that to mitigate the loss of support due to Mr. Trudeau's unpopularity. The opposition in Canada apart, Mr. Trudeau has had to chart unsteady waters in Canada's external affairs as well. The re-election of Donald Trump as the U.S. President and his open hostility to Mr. Trudeau, besides threats of tariffs on Canadian goods, is a major irritant.

Canada's relations with India also took a nose-dive over allegations by Mr. Trudeau that Indian intelligence agencies were linked to the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Khalistani separatist and Canadian citizen, even as the Indian government upped the ante over its concerns that Mr. Trudeau's government was providing safe haven to Khalistani extremists. Mr. Trudeau was also confronted publicly by the Chinese President Xi Jinping for "leaking" discussions between the two sides on "Chinese interference" in Canada to the media.

How did things go so south for the "liberal darling" of the northern hemisphere?

Mr. Trudeau rode to power in Canada promising a liberal agenda and delivered on some issues that were dear to the "cultural Left". He acted on promises of instituting gender equality by appointing a Cabinet with 50% representation to women and appointing more women judges in Canada's Supreme Court. Recreational marijuana's sale and use was legalised in Canada in 2018. A carbon tax was introduced as Mr. Trudeau sought to implement climate-friendly policies — the Conservatives have vowed to remove this on coming to power. Child care agreements were implemented as was representation for and reconciliation with Indigenous people. The reforms on dental care, pharma care and a federal "anti-scab" (employers replacing striking workers) law were made possible due to the aforementioned support from the NDP. But Mr. Trudeau's image as a reformer reforms committed to liberalism had already been hurt because of a number of scandals. While he appointed an indigenous woman to the post of Justice Minister in Jody Wilson-

## 'Time for PM Modi to show he can turn his slogans into visible reality'

With Donald Trump throwing huge chunks of the world as we once knew it into history's garbage bin every day, it is comforting to hear words of reassurance from our own Prime Minister. Last week he reminded us that from being an economic basket case some years ago he has managed in the past ten years to place India in the ranks of the top economies of the world. We are the fifth largest now and will soon be the third, he told a conference organised by a media group in Delhi. He addresses so many meetings and makes so many speeches that it is hard to keep up with all of them, but the gist is that 'aal is well'.

Following his lead, his ministers also exude optimism and confidence. It is true, they admit, that if Trump goes ahead with imposing reciprocal tariffs, Indian exports to the United States could take a hit. Nothing to worry about. Trump's popularity among Indians remains untouched. Last November, special prayers were said in India for candidate Trump. Hindu priests stood before a garlanded portrait of the American President chanting 'Make world great again' and 'Vote for Donald (sic) Trump' before reciting Sanskrit shlokas and preparing a 'havan.' Admittedly, this was before Modi went to the White House and was told by his 'friend' that India was the 'tariff king of the world' and needed to change its ways. And before some of our fellow citizens, who had entered the United States illegally, were sent back in handcuffs and fetters.

Perhaps India will be alright despite these things. But just to make sure of this, we need to up our game. The reason why China is more alright than us is because it is in competition with the United States to become the world's most powerful economy. It is now so advanced when it comes to new technological frontiers that it has come up with an AI model that is as good as any and much cheaper. It has been the factory of the world for decades and though our prime minister told us again last week that this is a role we will play soon, we are not there yet. We are not there for many reasons. But one big reason is that instead of concentrating on the things that matter, most BJP leaders spend their time on things that confirm that we still have third world priorities. Instead of making a serious effort to improve the abysmal quality of our public education system, they choose to stir up a needless war over Hindi. The list of things to do before we can begin to compete with China, or even East Asia, is long but our political leaders concentrate on what they understand best, which is how to create tensions between Hindus and Muslims. Last week, there was a huge row in Maharashtra over someone having praised Aurangzeb and in Madhya Pradesh, the police thrashed men they suspected of being cattle smugglers. In Delhi, the process of erasing Moghul names from roads and their 'glories' from our history books continues briskly, causing Indian Muslims to feel as if the objective of these exercises is to make them feel like second-class citizens. Can we not get beyond all this? The extraordinary response to the Mahakumbh (more than half the population of India is believed to have turned up) is proof, not that proof was needed, that Indians are certainly the most religious people in the world. But now that it is over, the Prime Minister may need to get his team to work on things that could help India reach closer to the economic heights that China has reached.

## From Turbulence to Triumph: Air India's New Avatar

Air India is reinventing itself with thoughtful service upgrades, and cultural nuances like a creative safety video and a soulful fusion soundtrack. I received a very pleasant gift from Air India just before Christmas on a flight from Bengaluru to Delhi. The plane was spanking new. Business class seats consisted of a cubicle for each passenger. The service was excellent, and the food was several notches above the usual tasteless fare on flights. I had planned to work on my laptop. But soon after take-off right on time past noon, lunch was served. Then the temptation of taking a siesta was irresistible—as the seat stretched to a full-length bed—and I readily succumbed. An hour later when I woke up, the plane was about to land. I did not do the writing I had planned to do, but it was one of the most pleasurable flights I have had in an airline from which expectations had plummeted very low for quite some time now. The reincarnated Air India, merged with Vistara, promises a new experience, at least in those sectors where new planes are flying, and the staff has been trained to provide world-class service. I was happy too at the degree of thought that has gone into all aspects of the flight experience. The mandatory safety instructions were narrated and enacted on the screen in a novel manner. The short film, while giving the instructions, creatively incorporated all the classical dances of India, and some leading folk genres too. I am told that my good friend, the poet and writer, Prasoos Joshi, has designed the presentation. Well done, Prasoos. The new Air India brand music, which plays before take-off and landing, has been composed by Shankar Mahadevan, with contributing artists Taufiq Qureshi, Prasoos Joshi, and others. It is a fusion piece in the lovely raga Yaman, rendered in the tarana style, combining vocalists, instruments like the tabla, flute and piano, and western orchestration done by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London. Its refrain or bandish is so catchy that—at least for me—the tune got fixated in my mind. I asked the air hostess for the name and composer of the soundtrack. She did not know, which is sad, because all Air India employees—and certainly the on-plane staff—should proudly be able to provide the details of this stellar composition. I must confess that I do have my reservations about fusion music involving the Indian classical music tradition. That is because I am a bit of a purist in this matter. Any careless or ham-handed tampering or tinkering with the infinitely delicate and filigree-like structure of a raga can have disastrous consequences, distorting the original. Experiments with established and highly evolved art forms succeed only in the hands of those who are rooted in that tradition and know the limits of what can change and what cannot. The world may be flat, but not everything lends itself to fusion. This is especially so for ragas, which through their structured elaboration are meant to evoke a mood, redolent of the different seasons or the different times of the day or of different emotions. Any attempt to render it like an adolescent pop band, by racing through the initial, slow phases of a composition to reach the fast-paced crescendo, foundationally mutilates the genre. Sometimes, in the search for the new, I get the distinct impression that we are inflicting terrible violence on the old. But I also understand, that even classical music cannot be etched in stone and must evolve. The tastes of audiences are changing—alas often for culturally illiterate reasons—but they are changing. And, if the change is necessary, the key to dexterously adapting to the new depends on the calibre of the artist initiating it. If



## If your cholesterol is normal, do you need to worry about triglycerides? Here's busting an online myth



ease but they primarily indicate that the body is processing fats inefficiently. Excess triglycerides in the bloodstream are often linked to conditions like obesity, insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome, all of which increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. Myth 3: If My Cholesterol Levels Are Normal, I Don't Need to Worry About Triglycerides Fact: Even with normal cholesterol levels, high triglycerides can be a risk factor for heart disease.

It is possible to have normal LDL and HDL (high-density lipoprotein, or "good" cholesterol) levels while having high triglycerides. Elevated triglycerides are associated with inflammation, insulin resistance, and an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Doctors now recognize that triglyceride levels are an independent risk factor for heart disease and should not be ignored. Myth 4: The Same Diet Changes Affect Both Cholesterol and Triglycerides Fact: While there is some overlap, dietary strategies differ. To lower LDL cholesterol, focus on reducing saturated and trans fats found in fried foods, processed snacks, and fatty cuts of meat. Increase fibre intake through whole grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables. Get healthy fats from sources like nuts, seeds, olive oil, and fatty fish. To lower triglycerides, focus on reducing added sugars and refined carbohydrates (such as white bread, sugary drinks, and sweets), as excess sugar is converted into triglycerides. Limit alcohol consumption, as alcohol significantly raises triglyceride levels. Maintain a healthy weight and engage in regular physical activity, which helps burn excess triglycerides for energy. Myth 5: Medication for High Cholesterol Also Treats High Triglycerides Fact: Different medications target cholesterol and triglycerides differently. Statins, the most common cholesterol-lowering drugs, primarily reduce LDL cholesterol and have a mild effect on triglycerides. However, if triglycerides are very high, doctors may prescribe fibrates, Omega-3 fatty acid supplements, or niacin, which specifically lower triglyceride levels.

When it comes to heart health, cholesterol and triglycerides are often mentioned together. While both are types of fats (lipids) in the blood, they serve different purposes and impacts on the body. Misconceptions about these lipids can lead to confusion about diet, lifestyle and medical treatment. Fact: Cholesterol and triglycerides are different types of lipids with unique roles in the body. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that is essential for building cell membranes, producing hormones (such as estrogen and testosterone), and making vitamin D. It is produced by the liver and is also obtained from animal-based foods like meat, dairy and eggs.

Triglycerides, on the other hand, are the body's main form of stored fat. They are made from excess calories consumed in the diet, particularly from carbohydrates and fats. When you eat more calories than your body needs, the liver converts them into triglycerides and stores them in fat cells for later energy use. Fact: While both can contribute to cardiovascular disease, they do so in different ways. High levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, often called "bad" cholesterol, can lead to plaque build-up in arteries, increasing the risk of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), heart attack and stroke.

High triglyceride levels can also contribute to heart dis-

## Teen obesity the new challenge: How 13-year old's weight shot up to 58 kg after having food ordered on apps



Shweta Deshmukh was worried when she found her 13-year-old daughter weighed 58 kg, 10 kg more than is normal for her age. She had reasons to be worried. Having struggled with obesity herself and having undergone a bariatric surgery, she feared her daughter was heading the same way. The real issue though was the girl's poor eating habits.

"She had intense food cravings and refused to eat home-cooked meals, insisting on ordering food from food delivery platforms. So addicted was she to the flavours that if denied, she would have huge mood swings and become irritable. She seemed to have little control over her appetite. As she gained weight, the girl started experiencing menstrual irregularities with early signs of Polycystic Ovary Disease (PCOD)," says Dr Aparna Govil Bhasker, general, laparoscopic and bariatric surgeon in Pune.

The case of the teen girl demonstrates the need to focus on diet correction in the young population in view of the latest Lancet study which predicts that India will have 16.4 million males and 14.4 million females in the 5-14 age group and 22.7 million males and 16.9 million females in the 15-24 age group cresting the obesity curve. Globally, one in three young people is predicted to be in 2050. This is akin to clinical obesity, when excess fat harms the body's organs and tissues.

**WHY THE DIET SHIFT NEEDS TO BEGIN AT HOME**

"Adolescent eating and drinking habits are all about fast food brands, cola and sugary beverages, shaped by corporate advertising campaigns which make unhealthy choices seem fun, aspirational, and socially desirable.

Home food is always seen as boring or abnormal," laments Dr Bhasker. "Schools and college canteens, along with affordable and easily available street food, further reinforce this trend. The constant exposure to junk food promotions, combined with peer influence, has led to a shift," she adds.

### BEGIN YOUNG

Addictive diet habits develop in the initial years when the child's taste buds are just opening up. "There should be no added sugar in food till the first two years. The moment there is something remotely flavourful or sugary, the child won't go back to eating bland. That's why as they grow up, their flavour profile is too evolved to be satisfied with home-cooked food," explains Ritika Samaddar, director, Dietetics, Max Healthcare.

She advises use of jaggery and dates or natural sugar in the early years. "Traditional Indian dal chawal meals are usually healthy. Snacking is the problem, be it with biscuits, instant noodles, chips, cola and juice, all of which are processed and should be taxed like they are in Singapore," says Samaddar. She even calls for making the play hour mandatory in schools. "When you make it optional along with computer class, students will choose an indoor class, which gives them a more competitive edge. Also, they should get their full sleep time as lack of sleep can cause hormone imbalance which can make them obese," says Samaddar. Remember children need to eat properly and need up to 2,500-3,000 calories per day as they are in the growth and development stage of their lives. That's why, sums up Samaddar, "We must ensure that they get calories, proteins and essential nutrients through the right quality of food rather than its quantity."

can turn dangerous if left untreated. But it is the low-density non-calcified plaques — soft and with a thin covering because they are relatively new — that are unstable and tend to rupture whenever the artery gets constricted by inflammation. Their covering is very thin and they thin out further when inflammation goes up in the body. So inflammatory triggers like smoking, stress, diabetes, high cholesterol and hypertension loosen these plaques faster. When a plaque ruptures, the body senses a tear in the arterial wall and blood clots to repair it. In the process, the plaque and the blood clot together become big enough to block the blood flow to the heart muscle and cause chest pain, a heart attack, or death in some cases. So, even though our young patient's initial plaque was not big enough to block arteries, smoke-induced stress ruptured it, and the blood pooled over it making it bigger than it was. As this case showed, smoking is the biggest threat for unstable plaques as nicotine accelerates inflammation. Patients may not feel symptoms. Even if you are fit and have a proper lifestyle, I would say get your regular blood work and lipid profile done to ensure that no underlying condition becomes threatening in later years. Manage your hypertension and blood sugar, if you have them, at the earliest.

## Why this 28-year-old athletic youngster had a heart attack while playing cricket: What is an unstable plaque?

The other day I had a 28-year-old patient in our emergency room, who had collapsed while playing cricket. Other than chest pain at the time of heart attack, he had had no symptoms. In fact, he was an athletic youngster, who was very particular about his fitness regime and ate clean. Yet he had a 100 per cent blockage in one of his arteries. Although we did an angioplasty, a procedure to widen his arteries and restore blood flow, he did not need a stent to keep them that way. So what happened to him? We did not need to put in a stent because his artery had good recoil, elasticity and seemed healthy. That was because of his regular exercise regimen. But he was a smoker, too, finishing a pack of cigarettes a day. That resulted in inflammation, narrowing of arteries and made the little plaque he had unstable. The exertion from the cricket match dislodged it.

What is plaque?

Plaque is nothing but a build-up of cholesterol and fat in the heart's arteries. Understanding the types and volume of plaque can give you a fair idea of its risk to the heart. There are three types, calcified, non-calcified, and low-density non-calcified plaques. Calcified ones are composed mostly of calcium and are more stable. Non-calcified plaques contain fibrous tissues and have some risk. They

## Tamil Nadu issues high alert as mumps spread among school children in Coimbatore



Chennai: The Tamil Nadu Health Department has issued a high alert as mumps cases continue to rise among children in Coimbatore. Authorities have intensified surveillance and preventive measures after 21 kindergarten (KG) students from a matriculation school in Peelamedu tested positive for the viral infection in the past two days. Following the outbreak, the school administration declared a holiday until March 12 to curb further transmission. Health officials from the Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation reported that 13 KG students had initially shown symptoms two days ago. The school management promptly sent them home to prevent the disease from spreading. Health department officials have assured the public that there is no cause for panic.

However, individuals experiencing symptoms of measles, mumps, or chickenpox are advised to seek medical attention at the nearest government hospital immediately. Mumps is a highly contagious viral disease that primarily affects children but can also infect adolescents and adults. It commonly causes swelling of the parotid salivary glands on one or both sides of the face, leading to pain and discomfort. Other symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, difficulty chewing, and fatigue. The virus spreads through respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing and remains contagious from just before gland swelling begins to up to five days afterwards. Infected individuals should limit contact with others, rest adequately,

and stay hydrated until they recover.

While mumps is generally considered a mild, self-limiting illness, it can lead to complications, particularly in unvaccinated children. A study conducted by the Tamil Nadu Directorate of Public Health (DPH) using data from the Integrated Health Information Portal (IHIP) under the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) has highlighted a concerning rise in mumps cases across the state. According to the study, the incidence rate of mumps per lakh population increased from 0.07 in 2021-22 to 1.30 in 2023-24. Many cases are believed to be underreported since mumps is not a notifiable disease, and some hospitals do not document cases. Between April 2021 and March 2024, Tamil Nadu recorded 1,281 presumptive cases of mumps, with 56.05 per cent of them occurring in women. The study found that 70 per cent of cases were among children under nine years old, while 10 per cent were reported in the 10-19 age group. There has been a steady increase in reported cases over the years.

In 2021, of around 2,261 cases, Coimbatore accounted for 15 per cent and Dharmapuri 11 per cent. Meanwhile, in 2022-23, at least 129 cases were reported with Thiruvallur district accounting for 51 per cent, Nagapattinam 11 per cent and Chennai 4 per cent. During 2023-24, the state logged 1,091 cases. Health experts said that these trends suggest that environmental changes, population dynamics, and variations in vaccination coverage may be contributing factors to an increase in the spread of mumps. While mumps-related complications are rare, especially in children, doctors emphasise that the risk of severe outcomes can be significantly reduced through vaccination.

India introduced the measles vaccine under the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) in 1985 and later introduced the combined Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccine in 2017 to eliminate both diseases by 2020. The DPH study recommends making mumps a notifiable disease in Tamil Nadu to enhance monitoring and control efforts. It also suggests incorporating the mumps vaccine into the UIP schedule as per the Union Government's guidelines to prevent further outbreaks.

## Hyderabad's Haleem, of palate, power, people

Growing up in Hyderabad, Ramadan has always been a season of warmth, festivity, and togetherness. The aroma of slow-cooked Haleem fills the streets, drawing people towards bustling eateries and makeshift stalls. As evening falls, families, friends, and even strangers gather to break their fasts. The first bite is always magical — a rich, creamy mixture of wheat, lentils and meat, infused with aromatic spices and slow-cooked to perfection. But Haleem is much more than a dish. It is an experience, a tradition, an economic powerhouse, and an instrument of diplomacy, shaping business, politics and social ties across Hyderabad and beyond.

Haleem's journey to Hyderabad spans centuries, with its origins rooted in Persia and the Arab world. The dish, then known as Harees, was a simple yet nourishing preparation of wheat, meat, and spices, slow-cooked into a porridge-like consistency. It was brought to the Indian subcontinent by Arab traders and later refined under the patronage of the Mughals and the Nizams of Hyderabad. The emergence of vegetarian Haleem as a plant-based alternative reflects Hyderabad's evolving culinary landscape, where inclusivity and adaptation play a key role.

The Nizams, known for their love of rich and elaborate cuisine, transformed Harees into what is today recognised as Hyderabad Haleem. They introduced a more complex cooking process, blending local spices, broken wheat, and clarified butter (ghee) with slow-cooked meat. Over time, the dish evolved from a royal delicacy to a beloved staple during Ramadan, enjoyed across the city and beyond. Today, Haleem is not just a culinary masterpiece but a representation of Hyderabad's heritage, seamlessly bridging the past with the present. Deeply woven into Hyderabad's identity, Haleem is a symbol of generosity, unity and goodwill. Its rich history has made it a dish that transcends class and background, bringing people together in a shared experience of taste and tradition.

During Ramadan, restaurants, street vendors, and even households open their doors to share Haleem, reinforcing the city's famed hospitality. People from all walks of life — rich and poor, young and old — come together over a bowl of Haleem, strengthening social bonds and fostering an atmosphere of inclusivity. The spirit of sharing Haleem extends beyond family circles, as neighbours exchange bowls of the dish and community kitchens distribute it to the less fortunate. As Hyderabad continues to grow and evolve, Haleem remains a constant, reminding us of the values that define the city. Hyderabad Haleem was awarded GI tag (geographical identification) in 2010.

However, while commercial outlets are known for their flavours, homemade Haleem is often the healthier and more nutritious choice. Made with fresh, carefully selected ingredients and controlled levels of oil and spices, homemade Haleem ensures both taste and well-being. It also allows individuals to experiment with ingredients to cater to dietary preferences, including vegetarian Haleem, which has gained popularity. But its significance does not stop at social unity — Haleem has also emerged as a cultural and diplomatic asset, influencing business, politics and global perceptions of Hyderabad. Hyderabad's Iftar gatherings have evolved into much more than religious or social events — they are now powerful tools of diplomacy. Every Ramadan, politicians, business leaders and diplomats use these feasts as a platform to engage with communities, discuss policies and build relationships in a relaxed, informal setting.

Elected representatives cutting across party lines attend Iftar feasts to connect with the public and project an image of inclusivity. Sharing Haleem at these gatherings fosters goodwill, creating a unique avenue for political dialogue. Similarly, corporate executives and entrepreneurs leverage these events to network with potential partners, clients, and investors. Many business deals and collaborations take shape in these informal settings, where Haleem acts as both an icebreaker and a bonding element.

Haleem is a driving force behind Hyderabad's economy. Every year, the Haleem industry generates over Rs 500 crore in revenue, creating thousands of jobs and boosting multiple sectors. It also fuels an economic surge in food delivery services. Religious and social organisations also use Haleem as a means to engage with underprivileged communities, reinforcing the values of charity and social responsibility. This deep-rooted tradition not only strengthens communal harmony but also positions Hyderabad as a city where culture and commerce intertwine.



### Healthier, Hygienic

With the increasing demand for Haleem during Ramadan, mass production often leads to concerns about hygiene, food safety, and adulteration. Additionally, being mindful of portion sizes and consumption frequency is crucial. Haleem, though packed with protein and energy, can be calorie-dense due to its slow-cooked nature and the use of ghee and meat. A balanced approach to enjoying this delicacy ensures that it remains a cherished part of Ramadan traditions without compromising health.

Dr CL Venkat Rao, a renowned physician, describes it as a perfectly balanced meal, rich in high-quality protein, complex carbohydrates, and essential nutrients. "The slow-cooked blend of wheat, lentils, and meat ensures sustained energy release, aids digestion, and strengthens immunity," he explains. The inclusion of spices like turmeric and black pepper enhances metabolism, while collagen from slow-cooked meat supports bone and joint health. But despite its numerous benefits, Dr Rao advises moderation, as commercially prepared Haleem often contains excess ghee and rich meats, which can lead to a high calorie intake. Opting for healthier variations ensures that this timeless dish remains both nourishing and wholesome.

While traditional Haleem remains the heart of Hyderabad's food culture, a new variation — vegetarian Haleem — is catching on. This alternative caters to vegetarians and health-conscious individuals while retaining the essence of the traditional dish. Instead of meat, vegetarian Haleem is made using lentils, wheat, dry fruits, and plant-based protein, ensuring a rich, flavourful texture similar to the original.

The emergence of vegetarian Haleem reflects Hyderabad's evolving culinary landscape, where inclusivity and adaptation play a key role. Many restaurants now offer it alongside the traditional version, ensuring that the experience of Haleem remains accessible to a broader audience. This innovation not only expands the dish's appeal but also reinforces the communal spirit of sharing and togetherness, making Haleem an even more inclusive tradition. The Nizams, known for their love of rich and elaborate cuisine, transformed Harees, famous in Persia and the Arab world, into what is today recognised as Hyderabad Haleem. It was under the seventh Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan in the first half of the 20th century that Haleem became popular in Hyderabad. As Haleem continues to evolve in both its preparation and significance, its role as a cultural unifier and diplomatic tool remains stronger than ever. However, whether traditional or vegetarian, Haleem is more than just a dish — it is a testament to Hyderabad's rich heritage, its spirit of hospitality, and its power to bring people together beyond all boundaries. Haleem is also a driving force behind Hyderabad's economy. Every year, the Haleem industry generates over Rs 500 crore in revenue, creating thousands of jobs and boosting multiple sectors. Hyderabad's famous eateries, from Pista House to Shah Ghouse, compete fiercely for the title of the best Haleem, setting up special counters, extending working hours, and handling bulk orders. The demand also fuels an economic surge in food delivery services, with platforms like Swiggy and Zomato witnessing an exponential rise in Haleem orders during Ramadan. Whether served at a grand Iftar gathering, a roadside stall, or a fine-dining restaurant, the dish carries the same essence — bringing people together, fostering connections and celebrating a shared legacy. This seasonal boom extends beyond restaurants. The increased demand for meat, wheat, ghee, and spices provides a significant boost to agriculture and livestock sectors. From butchers to spice traders, the entire supply chain benefits from the city's Haleem obsession.



## IKEA sharpens focus on sleep quality in India, eyes temperature control and soundproofing



the study.

IKEA already sells duvets with viscose fibres for temperature regulation, along with air purifiers and air quality sensors of different kinds. Based on the study's findings, the next phase of IKEA's product development will focus on expanding these offerings. IKEA conducted the sleep study in 57 markets through online market research panels, with roughly 1,000 respondents from each country. While the study attempted to be nationally representative, it noted that in 20 countries, including India, China, Mexico, and Turkey, highly educated individuals were overrepresented due to greater internet access among this group. India's IKEA sleep score — a measure of sleep quality on a scale of 0-100, based on five factors — stood at 68, matching that of the UAE. Mainland China recorded the highest IKEA sleep score at 74, while Norway, the US, the UK, and Canada scored in the high 50s, according to the survey. The study also found that the gap between desired and actual sleep for Indians is much smaller — just 35 minutes, compared to the global average of 80 minutes. Sleep-related products such as bedroom furniture, beds and mattresses, and home textiles contribute significantly to IKEA's revenue in India. "Dark-coloured bedroom furniture and beds with storage are highly popular (in India) due to space optimisation needs. In textiles, printed flat sheets outperform solids and fitted sheets. Firm pocket spring mattresses are preferred over softer foam options. In lighting, softer tones and room-darkening curtains are gaining popularity," a spokesperson from IKEA India said. The Swedish retail giant will undertake product research and development based on insights gained from the sleep study for markets across the world. IKEA also conducts ethnographic research based on home visits. "We spend days with people, have dinner together, and really observe (them) throughout the day. A quick home visit gives you a snapshot, but if you spend the whole day together, you get a much better sense of the rhythm at home in different countries," Wuts said.

IKEA is looking to develop products that help Indians sleep better by tackling key disruptors like heat and noise, Jasper Wuts, range insights manager at IKEA Sweden, told The Indian Express. The company is exploring the expansion of its home furnishing range with temperature-regulating materials. It is also considering providing soundproofing solutions through curtains and windows.

The Swedish furniture giant's push into sleep solutions comes as it expands presence across India, having launched online deliveries in Delhi-NCR and other north Indian cities earlier this month. "In India, we're exploring how we can further enable better temperature management and soundproofing," Wuts said, citing a recent global IKEA study on consumer sleep habits. The study found that while 71 per cent of surveyed Indians feel they sleep enough, stress remains a key challenge for 30 per cent of the respondents.

"It stood out (in the study) that from the bedding perspective, people in India are already quite satisfied. It's more about the environment in the bedroom and how we improve that for consumers in India and other countries," he said. Satisfaction levels with bed, bedding, and pillows hovered between 83 and 86 per cent, whereas satisfaction with air quality and temperature was at 9 per cent, according to

## How continuing fall in the secondary market is impacting IPO activity

The domestic stock market has been reeling under heavy selling pressure for the past few months. Benchmark indices, Sensex and Nifty, have lost nearly 13 per cent from their peaks touched in September last year, eroding nearly Rs 79 lakh crore of investors' wealth. A sharp correction in the secondary market has impacted the initial public offering (IPO) fundraising plans of companies. Over two dozen companies that received IPO approval from the market regulator, SEBI, have yet to launch their offerings. These companies are waiting for the market to stabilise before they proceed with their IPO fundraising plans. A slump in the secondary market also lowers retail investors' interest in the primary market.

According to data obtained from Prime Database, 26 domestic companies received approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) between April-December 2024 and are yet to hit the primary market. These companies have plans to raise Rs 42,390 crore through IPOs. A company has a 12-month period to launch its IPO after receiving approval from the market regulator. The prolonged delay by companies in launching their IPOs can be attributed to the current market volatility, characterised by weakening investor confidence due to concerns over tariff wars and lacklustre corporate earnings with incessant selling by foreign investors adding to the market woes.

"Companies that received approval from October 2024 onwards, which is when the selloff started, till December 2024 are perhaps hoping that market conditions will improve for them to launch their IPO," said Pranav Haldea, Managing Director, PRIME Database Group. Some of the big IPOs that have received SEBI's nod between October and December 2024 and are yet to launch the offer are Schloss Bangalore Ltd (Rs 5,000 crore), Ather Energy Ltd (Rs 4,500 crore), Avanse Financial Services Ltd (Rs 3,500 crore), Manjushree Technopack Ltd (Rs 3,000 crore) and Ecom Express Ltd (Rs 2,600 crore). Besides, there are a few companies that have received regulatory approval between April-September 2024 and still have valid approvals include National Securities Depository Ltd (Rs 3,000 crore), S K Finance (Rs 2,200 crore), Kalpataru Ltd (Rs 1,590 crore), Asirvad Micro Finance Ltd (Rs 1,500 crore) and Belstar Microfinance Ltd (Rs 1,300 crore). The sluggish IPO activity follows a robust IPO fundraising by companies in 2024. In the last calendar year, 91 companies raised Rs 1.6 lakh crore through IPOs. The number of small and medium enterprises (SME) IPO touched a high of 240 compared to 182 in 2023, as per Prime Database.

After touching record highs in September 2024, the Sensex and the Nifty have lost nearly 13 per cent, so far.



The BSE's 30-share Sensex has plunged 11,503.54 points, or 13.4 per cent from its all-time high of 85,836.12. The broader Nifty 50 has corrected 3,663.55 points, or 13.97 per cent, from its peak of 26,216.05. Even the broader market has witnessed a massive sell-off, with BSE Smallcap crashing 21 per cent and BSE Midcap falling 20 per cent from their record highs. This fall in domestic equity benchmarks has primarily been led by a massive sell-off by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) who dumped over Rs 2.12 lakh crore worth of equities since October 2024. Investors' sell-off is also driven by concerns over tariff wars, overvalued domestic stocks and subdued quarterly earnings of corporates. Analysts said a correction in the secondary market has a significant impact on the IPO market. The current fall in the stock market has led to a decline in monthly IPOs in 2025. While in January only six companies launched IPOs, February saw only three primary market offerings. This is much lower than the number of IPOs seen in September (12), October (6), November (8) and December (15).

In a falling market, companies also do not want to launch IPOs as they may struggle to raise the targeted funds, analysts said. "Promoters do not want to offload their stake in a bad market. In a declining market, they do not get the valuation, and subscription (to the IPO) is also not very good," said Ashish Nanda, Chief Digital Business Officer, Kotak Securities. When a retail investor incurs losses in the secondary market, his interest in the IPO market also reduces. In the past also there have been many companies that have chosen not to launch their IPOs even after receiving regulatory approval, due to unfavourable market conditions. "Since 2019, 94 companies looking to raise roughly Rs 1.35 lakh crore, allowed their IPO approval to lapse. IPO is a once-in-a-lifetime event for a company and when markets are volatile or bearish, companies prefer to let their approval lapse," Haldea said.

## Tata Capital to file draft IPO papers after NCLT nod on merger with Tata Motors Fin

Financial services firm Tata Capital is likely to file preliminary papers with markets regulator Sebi to raise USD 2 billion (over Rs 17,000 crore) through an initial public offering (IPO) only after getting final approval from the NCLT for Tata Motors Finance merger with the company, according to sources. At this size, the company is expected to be valued at around USD 11 billion, they said. The final order is awaited from the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which is expected to be closed by the end of this financial year (FY25), sources said. An email sent to Tata Capital regarding the filing of draft papers remained unanswered. Tata Capital, identified as an upper-layer non-banking finance company (NBFC) by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), already received its board approval to float the initial share sale.

The proposed IPO would comprise 2.3 crore equity shares by way of a fresh issue and an offer of sale (OFS) by certain existing shareholders, according to a disclosure made to stock exchanges. Apart from the IPO, Tata Capital announced plans to raise funds through a rights issue to further bolster its financial position before the public listing. If successful, this would be one of the biggest initial share sales in the country's financial sector. This would also be the Tata Group's second public market debut in recent years after the listing of Tata Technologies in November 2023. The move is part of the company's effort to comply with the RBI's listing requirements.

As per the RBI mandate, upper-layer NBFCs are required to list on the stock exchange within three years of being designated as an upper-layer NBFC. Tata Capital was



categorised as an upper-layer NBFC in September 2022. Apart from Tata Capital, another upper layer NBFC HDB Financial Services, owned by HDFC Bank, is also gearing up to launch its IPO. The company filed its draft papers in October to garner Rs 12,500 crore through the initial share sale. While law firm Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas and investment bank Kotak Mahindra Capital have been roped in as advisors to manage the company's IPO, a draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) with Sebi will be filed only after receiving approval of the NCLT on the proposed merger, sources said. In the Q3 earnings call of Tata Motors, the auto maker's Group CFO PB Balaji said the Tata Motors Finance creditors meeting has been completed.

"Final orders (are) awaited from the NCLT, and we do expect closure for this by the end of this financial year," he had stated. In September, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) cleared the proposed merger.

## New Income Tax Bill defines virtual digital space for searches, seizures



The new Income-tax Bill proposes to give powers to tax officers to access social media and other digital accounts including online investment, trading and banking accounts, as well as email servers. The new I-T bill has defined "virtual digital space" in the powers to call for information by income tax authorities during surveys, searches and seizures. It defines a virtual digital space as "any digital realm that allows users to interact, communicate and perform activities" through computer technology.

Sources said the new provision under Section 247 of the I-T Bill to override the access code of a virtual digital space is "only the reiteration of the already existing provision in a simpler language". "No additional power has been given to the tax authorities," a source said. Similar powers for searches and seizures are currently there under Section 132 of the existing I-T Act, 1961, wherein authorities can inspect and seize books of accounts and other documents in the form of electronic records. However, the new bill specifically outlines virtual digital spaces.

As per Section 132 of the I-T Act, tax authorities can enter and search "any building, place, vessel, vehicle or aircraft" where persons are suspected to have kept books of account, other documents, money, bullion, jewellery or other valuable articles to evade tax. Authorities have the powers to break open doors, locks, safes, other repositories, and seize any such suspected books of account, other documents, money, bullion, jewellery or other valuable articles.

Now, the new bill — tabled in the Lok Sabha last month — explicitly includes "virtual digital space" under the ambit of such searches and seizures as it attempts to define books of accounts and other valuable items in physical or electronic form. This also allows tax authorities to override

the access code to any said computer system, or virtual digital space, where the access code thereof is not available. "The authorised officer may, during the course of any search or seizure, examine on oath any person who is found to be in possession or control or access holder of any computer systems, books of account, other documents or asset, or any other person who is present in the premises or is being searched," the bill states. Sources said that under Section 132 of the existing I-T Act, tax authorities have been seizing electronic devices such as desktops and hard disks, and collecting evidence from communication platforms such as emails, WhatsApp, and Telegram. "These evidence are not only essential to prove the tax evasion in the court of law but also computing the amount of tax evasion," a source said.

The provision of 132(1)(ib) via Finance Act, 2002 has mandated the person in possession or control of any books of account or other documents maintained in the form of electronic record to facilitate the authorised officer's access to such documents, sources said. This facilitation includes providing necessary credentials required for access as well as seizure of such documents, they added. Section 132 provides powers to designated tax authorities to conduct search and seizure operations based on information of tax evasion. The Income-tax Bill, 2025, which was introduced in Lok Sabha last month, intends to simplify India's six-decade-old structure of direct taxation by streamlining provisions, removing obsolete references, and creating a crisper and simpler legal framework. The proposed bill will be reviewed by the Select Committee of Parliament. Once passed by Parliament, the new law will likely come into effect on April 1, 2026. Aggam Walla is a Correspondent at The Indian Express, reporting on power, renewables, and mining. His work unpacks intricate ties between corporations, government, and policy, often relying on documents sourced via the RTI Act. Off the beat, he enjoys running through Delhi's parks and forests, walking to places, and cooking pasta. ... Read More Aanchal Magazine is Senior Assistant Editor with The Indian Express and reports on the macro economy and fiscal policy, with a special focus on economic science, labour trends, taxation and revenue metrics. With over 13 years of newsroom experience, she has also reported in detail on macroeconomic data such as trends and policy actions related to inflation, GDP growth and fiscal arithmetic. Interested in the history of her homeland, Kashmir, she

## HCL founder Shiv Nadar transfers 47% stake to daughter Roshni

HCL group founder Shiv Nadar has gifted 47 per cent of his stake in HCL Corp and Vama Delhi, the promoter entities of the group, to his daughter Roshni Nadar Malhotra, in a strategic transfer as part of a well-planned succession strategy. With this transfer, Malhotra will become the largest shareholder of HCL Infosystems Ltd and HCL Tech, solidifying her position in the company founded by her father, and making her one of the richest persons in India.

According to Forbes Real-time Billionaires List 2025, Shiv Nadar's net worth is \$ 34.4 billion, making him the 52nd wealthiest person in the world. HCL Technologies, a flagship of the group, has a market capitalisation of Rs 4.22 lakh crore. The promoters hold 60.81 per cent stake in the company, according to exchange data. Malhotra will become the fourth richest person in India after Mukesh Ambani (\$ 92.2 billion), Gautam Adani (\$ 56.2 billion) and Savitri Jindal & family (35.4 billion). After the transfer, Malhotra will acquire control and become a majority shareholder of Vama Delhi and HCL Corp, HCL Technologies and HCL Infosystems said in stock exchange filings.

Malhotra, who holds an undergraduate degree in Communications from Northwestern University and an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management, is the chairperson of HCL Technologies, a multinational IT services and consulting company. She had taken over the position from her father in 2020. She will also acquire control over the voting rights in relation to the 12.94 per cent stake held by Vama Delhi and 49.94 per cent held by HCL Corp in HCL Infosystems. In HCL Tech, she will acquire a 44.17 per cent stake held by Vama Delhi and a 0.17 per cent stake from HCL Corp. "A gift deed dated March 6, 2025, executed by Shiv Nadar in favour of his daughter Roshni Nadar Malhotra for transfer of his 47 per cent shareholding in Vama Sundari Investments (Delhi) Private Limited (Vama Delhi); and a gift deed dated March 6, 2025 executed by Shiv Nadar in favour of his daughter Roshni Nadar Malhotra for transfer



of his 47 per cent shareholding in HCL Corporation Private Limited (HCL Corp)," the filing said. "Gift deeds have been executed pursuant to a private family arrangement intended to streamline succession, which would ensure continuity of ownership and control by Shiv Nadar Family (promoter family) and would provide desired stability to the company," the filings said.

Capital market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has granted Malhotra an exemption from making an open offer, facilitating the smooth transfer of shares. Immediately prior to the execution of the gift deeds, the father and daughter held 51 per cent and 10.33 per cent shareholding, respectively, in Vama Delhi and HCL Corp. "Roshni Nadar Malhotra will acquire control of, and become majority shareholder, of Vama Delhi and HCL Corp, and accordingly will acquire control over the voting rights in relation to the 12.94 per cent stake held by Vama Delhi and 49.94 per cent stake held by HCL Corp in HCL Infosystem," according to the filing. Beyond her corporate role, Malhotra is involved in philanthropic activities through the Shiv Nadar Foundation, which is focused on education and has established some of India's top colleges and schools, and conservation efforts via The Habitats Trust.

## 'At an elevation of 15000 ft. above sea level' - Cabinet approves two major ropeway projects in Uttarakhand under Parvatmala Pariyojana

The union cabinet Wednesday approved two major ropeway projects - Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib Ji (12.4 km) and Sonprayag to Kedarnath (12.9 km) - in Uttarakhand, which will be developed under National Ropeways Development Programme - Parvatmala Pariyojana. The total cost of both projects is over Rs. 6,811 crore and these will be developed on Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBFOT) mode, one of the variants of the Public-Private Partnership, or PPP, model.

Currently, the journey to Hemkund Sahib, which is a site of famous gurudwara, is undertaken through 21-km uphill trek from Govindghat and is covered on foot or by ponies or palanquins. Similarly, the journey to Kedarnath temple is a 16-km uphill trek from Gaurikund and is currently covered on foot or by ponies, palanquins and helicopter. According to the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH), Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib Ji ropeway project will have Monocable Detachable Gondola from Govindghat to Ghangaria (10.55 km) and further integrated with the advanced Tricable Detachable Gondola (3S) technology from Ghangaria to Hemkund Sahib Ji (1.85 km). It will have a design capacity of 1,100 passengers per hour per direction (PPHPD) with maximum carrying capacity of 11,000 passengers per day. Whereas, Sonprayag to Kedarnath ropeway will have Tri-cable Detachable Gondola (3S) technology with a design capacity of 1,800 passengers per hour per direction carrying 18,000 passengers per day.

Tri-cable Detachable Gondola is a ropeway system where the Gondola or passenger compartment is supported by three cables and the gondola can be detached from the haul rope at the stations for loading an unload of passen-

gers. Tri-cable Detachable Gondola have higher capacity, longer span between towers and higher cost compared to monocable systems, which runs on a single cable. Ropeways do not need large construction works on the ground surface as such incur lower land acquisition costs. It has higher cost of construction per km than roadways. However, ropeways may be more economical than roadways. In an statement, the ministry said that the project will foster the economic growth of the region as both religious sites - Hemkund Sahib ji and Kedarnath - attract lakhs of pilgrims every year.

Hemkund Sahib Ji is situated at an elevation of 15,000 ft in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, where the Gurudwara open for about 5 months in a year between May and September and is visited by about 1.5 to 2 lakh pilgrims annually. Similarly, Kedarnath is situated at an elevation of 3,583 m (11,968 ft) in the Rudrapur district, where the temple is open for about seven months and is visited by around 20 lakh pilgrims annually. Both the projects will significantly increase the total length of Parvatmala Pariyojana. Launched in Union Budget 2022-23, MoRTH's ambitious ropeway scheme aims to develop more than 250 projects with ropeway length of over 1,200 kilometers under PPP model with around 60 per cent contribution support by Government of India. The Programme is being implemented by National Highway Logistics Management Limited (NHLML), a special purpose vehicle of the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI).

According to the ministry's annual report 2024-25, a total of Rs. 300 crore was allocated for the ropeway projects during current financial year and out of this Rs. 200 crore was spent till December 31, 2024.



## Varun Chakravarthy makes 'distance' joke as he poses with Champions Trophy silverware

GNS News Agency, March 10

Varun Chakravarthy, who played a vital part in India's triumphant Champions Trophy campaign by taking 2 wickets in the final against New Zealand, posted some photos with the silverware with an interesting caption. "A lot of distance was travelled to get a taste of this Cup!!," he posted on Instagram with two winking emojis. The caption appeared to take a cheeky dig at the people who suggested that India had an unfair advantage in the Champions Trophy, having all their matches in Dubai while other teams had to travel from Pakistan to the UAE. After the second semifinal, South Africa's David Miller, lashed out at the ICC over scheduling after the Proteas were knocked out of the tournament following a 50-run loss to New Zealand on Wednesday. The schedule of the Champions Trophy led both Australia and South Africa to travel to Dubai from Pakistan after the group



stage to prepare for the potential semi-final clash against India. But when the Rohit Sharma men beat the Kiwis in their last group game, setting up a semi-final clash with Australia, the South African team had to fly back to Pakistan for their semi-final match against New Zealand. "It's only an hour and 40 minute flight, but the fact that we had to do that was not ideal," Miller had said after South Africa's exit from the tournament. The South African team left for Dubai from Karachi on Sunday afternoon and was back in Lahore on Monday. South African top-order batter Rassie van der Dussen and former Australia skipper Pat Cummins, had also said India are in an advantageous position as they have played all their games at one venue while other teams have had to travel to different venues in Pakistan.

## Michael Atherton on Champions Trophy 2025 Final: 'India favourites, New Zealand are coming after playing in Pakistan'

GNS News Agency, March 10

Former England captain Michael Atherton believes that team India are a clear 'favourite' to win the Champions Trophy 2025 final in Dubai against New Zealand who are coming after playing their semi-final in Pakistan. Rohit Sharma-led team India will take on New Zealand, captained by Mitchell Santner in the final of the Champions Trophy at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday. "India are favourites without question. They're unbeaten in the tournament and playing at the ground (Dubai) where they've had lots of exposure, whereas New Zealand have gone to Pakistan for their semi-final and come back," said Atherton to SkySports. "India are a complete team. It is hard to look at that team and think of any weaknesses," Atherton said about Men in Blue who will play their fourth final since 2023. "They've got an aggressive and good opening partnership. They've got the best ODI player in the history of the game at number three. They've got an in-form Shreyas Iyer at four. Then they've got a whole host of all-rounders that give them both variety with the ball and depth with the bat, and Mohamed Shami's return means that they haven't really missed Jasprit Bumrah that much, so it is a complete team," he added. India did not travel to the host country Pakistan for security reasons and played all its group games, the semi-final and now the final too, in Dubai. Pakistan and the ICC didn't think it best to split India's games across other venues in the UAE for financial reasons. The square at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium has progressively slowed down. Australia's 264 in the first semifinal was the highest first-innings total here in the Champions Trophy — chased down by India with 11 balls to spare. When India and New Zealand clashed here in their group game last Sunday, the ball hardly bounced up more than the knee in the second innings. Spin, thus, will play a key role in determining the outcome of this final.

## Ton machine Watson reveals the 'secret sauce' for his century spree

VADODARA: Shane Watson, who scored his third century in four matches in the ongoing International Masters League, after his 110 against India Masters in the previous game, revealed the 'secret sauce' for his rousing form with the bat. "First, I am grateful for and in fact all the veterans were part of this incredible tournament. It's truly an honour to be back out there playing. A huge credit to the people who have put this league together—it has been so much fun," Watson informed after his century. He credited the pitch at Vadodara, calling it one of the best he has. "The secret sauce is playing here in Vadodara. It's a beautiful pitch and an incredible stadium—one of the most stunning venues I've been a part of. I'd love to take this pitch everywhere I go!," Watson said. "It played a little slower today, but we were still able to get going. With the short side on one end, it makes it a little easier to go harder, knowing you have that advantage."

## 'We went undefeated despite losing all five tosses': Rohit Sharma reacts to India's unbeaten run in Champions Trophy



GNS News Agency, March 10

Rohit Sharma Champions Trophy unbeaten India's captain Rohit Sharma, third left, and teammates celebrate with the winners trophy on the podium after defeating New Zealand in the final cricket match of the ICC Champions Trophy at Dubai International Cricket Stadium in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, March 9, 2025. (AP Photo/Christopher Pike) The Indian team on Sunday went the whole mile in the Champions Trophy as an undefeated unit after they defeated New Zealand in the final in Dubai. Reacting to the unbeaten streak, skipper Rohit Sharma lauded the team and said it was a pretty special feat to boast of an unblemished record in such an important tournament.

"We went undefeated despite losing all five tosses. Yet, we still won the trophy. Across the five matches we played, we didn't lose a single one. Winning a tournament without a single defeat is a massive achievement in itself, and it gives

me immense satisfaction. To be honest, until we won the trophy, no one really thought about it. But after the victory, it hit us—we had gone through the entire tournament undefeated. That realization made it even more special. It's difficult to put into words how that feels right now," the captain said in an exclusive interaction with JioHotstar. "We have an incredibly solid team, and it's a joy to play alongside such committed individuals. Everyone knows their role and responsibilities. Of course, emotions run high on the field. Sometimes, I get a bit carried away, but it's all in the spirit of the game. The words exchanged on the ground aren't meant to hurt anyone or show off—they are just an expression of our passion. At the end of the day, our main goal is to win, and we are ready to do whatever it takes to achieve that," he added. Sunday's Champions Trophy triumph helped India break the tie with Australia with a record third Champions Trophy title, adding onto the wins in 2002 (shared with Sri Lanka) and 2013.

## 'Varun Chakaravarthi is going to be the challenge': Nasser Hussain warns New Zealand ahead of Champions Trophy final vs India

GNS News Agency, March 10

Former England skipper and cricket pundit Nasser Hussain has warned New Zealand to be wary of India's mystery spinner Varun Chakaravarthi in the Champions Trophy 2025 final, which will be played in Dubai. Speaking with Michael Atherton and Ian Ward on Sky Sports, Hussain said, "Not many of the New Zealand line-up had seen Varun Chakaravarthi in that group stage. They have now. He is tricky when you've not seen him before, so that's going to be a challenge for them. India have been playing with four spinners — Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav and Varun — and this has seemed to be working in Rohit Sharma's Men In



Blue's favour on a tacky surface of Dubai.

Hussain also heaped praise on India's spin-bowling set-up and the variety they offer. He said, "They (India's four spinners) are (all different), and two of them are genuine all-rounders. Before they set off out here, Rohit was asked why you need so many spinners. They've got Washington

turning, you want a slightly quicker spinner. So the likes of Varun, who got a fiver in the last group game against New Zealand, and Ravindra Jadeja are vital," he added. Varun registered exceptional figures of 10-0-42-5 against New Zealand during their group-stage match. His Player of the Match performance helped India beat the Kiwis by 44 runs. The mystery spinner, who only played two matches so far in the eight-team tournament, has picked up seven wickets and is in third place in the most-wicket charts behind compatriot Mohammed Shami and New Zealand's Matt Henry, whose participation in the final is doubtful after sustaining a shoulder injury during the semi-final against South Africa in Lahore.

## Rashid Latif asks former England cricketers to stop whinging about Champions Trophy schedule: 'Begaani shaadi mey abduallah deewana'

GNS News Agency, March 10

India's Varun Chakravarthy, second from right, celebrate the wicket of New Zealand's Will Young with his team mates during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and New Zealand at Dubai International Cricket Stadium in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, March 2, 2025. (AP Photo) India vs New Zealand CT Final 2025 Live Cricket Streaming: India's Varun Chakravarthy, second from right, celebrate the wicket of New Zealand's Will Young with his team.

Former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif has launched a scathing attack on former England cricketers Nasser Hussain, Michael Atherton, and David Lloyd for their claims that India has an 'undeniable advantage' and that the ICC Champions Trophy schedule is 'rigged' to favor the Rohit Sharma-led team, which played all its matches in Dubai. India did not travel to host country Pakistan for security reasons and played



all its group games, the semifinal, and now the final, in Dubai. 1 Pakistan and the ICC deemed it best not to split India's games across other venues in the UAE for financial reasons. "If we (Pakistan) are talking about India having an advantage, you get it. But why are former England cricketers whinging about it now? Begaani shaadi mein abduallah deewana (They are trying to be overly involved in someone else's affairs),' Rashid Latif said on the show 'Caught Behind.' Latif then explained the

scheduling problem for the ongoing Champions Trophy "Yes, there was a problem with scheduling. On Saturday, March 2nd, India played New Zealand in Dubai. If India had played that match a day earlier, when England played South Africa (on March 1st) in Karachi, then the semifinal lineup would have been decided easily. "It was a blunder from the ICC and all the stakeholders. You have one job: to check the schedule, and you missed the mistake.

Once you agreed, and now your team is out, you are whinging. "All the representatives of the cricket boards are to blame. You should not go to the ICC meeting to have a good time. Do your job properly. "If India is getting all the support, but you all agreed to it, let's say we Pakistanis are making excuses because of jealousy, but the rest of the world should not moan about this issue. You all agreed to this schedule. "They are trying to create an unnecessary controversy," he said.

## 'No excuses for poor performance,' says Djokovic after shock loss against Van de Zandschulp

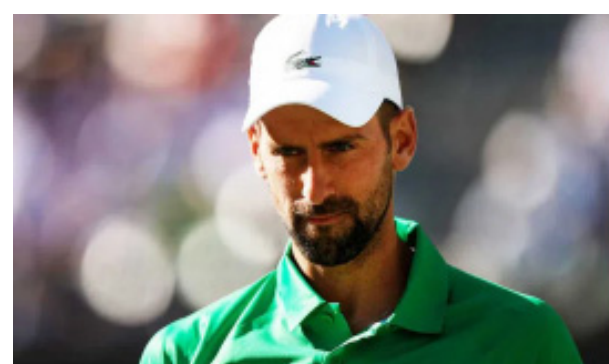
GNS News Agency, March 10

Novak Djokovic made no excuses for the poor performance that sent the five-time Indian Wells champion packing from the California desert on Saturday after falling 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 to Botic van de Zandschulp in the second round. Djokovic, 37, retired from his Australian Open semi-final against Alexander Zverev with a hamstring injury but his movement did not appear hampered on a sun-soaked day on Stadium One court. "Obviously no excuses for a poor performance," he told reporters.

"It doesn't feel great when you play this way on the court, but congratulations to my opponent. Just a bad day in the office, I guess, for me. "I regret the level of tennis considering how I practice these days." The Serbian great came out flat against the tournament's lucky loser, who took full advantage of a blizzard of errors from the 24-time Grand Slam champion to capture the first set. Djokovic raised his level to grab the second but van de Zandschulp refused to back down, running away with the decider before the sold-out crowd. The Indian Wells courts have been resurfaced this year to make them more in line with the conditions at the Miami Open and U.S. Open and Djokovic said he struggled to read the bounce of the ball. "The difference between the centre court and the other courts is immense," he said. "The ball is bouncing on the centre court higher than some of the highest clay courts, to be honest. Just struggled a lot with that. Couldn't find the rhythm. Djokovic said he would need to speak to rival-turned-coach Andy Murray before deciding next steps. Prior to his first match he said he would play the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" at the upcoming Miami Open. "Still haven't talked with Andy and the team, so going to do that and make a plan," he said.

After his withdrawal from Australia, his loss in the opening match at Qatar Open and his stunning defeat to the Dutchman on Saturday, Djokovic is now on a three-match losing streak. "Things are different obviously for me the last couple of years," he said. "I've been struggling to play on the desired level. Every now and then I have couple good tournaments but mostly it's really a challenge. "So it is what it is. I guess nothing can prepare you for that moment, in a sense. You have to experience it and try to deal with it in the best possible way."

## Five-time champion Novak Djokovic crashes out in opening round



GNS News Agency, March 10

Indian Wells: Five-time champion Novak Djokovic suffered an opening round loss at the Indian Wells Open at the hand of lucky loser Botic van de Zandschulp on Sunday (IST). Van de Zandschulp upset Djokovic 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 to add to his ever growing giant killing reputation. He became the second lucky loser in a row to beat Djokovic at Indian Wells, following in the footsteps of Luca Nardi 12 months ago.

Djokovic lost his third match in a row, which last happened in 2018 as part of an injury-hit season. He has dealt with injuries in 2025, too, hurting his hamstring at the Australian Open. Just a bad day in the office, I guess, for me. I regret for the level of tennis, considering how I practice these days. The difference between the center court and the other courts is immense. Ball is bouncing on the center courts higher than some of the highest clay courts," said Djokovic.

After retiring in his Australian Open semi-final against Alexander Zverev, falling to Matteo Berrettini in his Doha opener and now suffering defeat to Van de Zandschulp, it is just the second time Djokovic has lost three consecutive matches since the start of the 2008 season (2018 Australian Open-Miami). The Serb, who owns the record for most titles (40), finals (59) and semi-finals (78) at ATP Masters 1000 level, missed out on tying Nadal for the most match wins in Masters 1000 history, although the perennial record breaker already owns the most Masters titles. Van de Zandschulp capitalised on an uncharacteristically error-strewn opening set from Djokovic before conjuring some inspired shot-making prowess in the decider to prevail in two hours, one minute. By securing his eighth victory over a Top 10 opponent, Van de Zandschulp notched back-to-back wins on the ATP Tour for the first time in 2025, ATP reports. Van de Zandschulp owns a heftier reputation than the Italian, though. The 29-year-old beat Carlos Alcaraz and Rafael Nadal last season and collected a win over Nick Kyrgios on Thursday.

## Picking Varun is a key moment in India's campaign: Shikhar Dhawan

Dubai: Former India opener Shikhar Dhawan said that a key moment in India's campaign in the ongoing Champions Trophy in Dubai was bringing an extra spinner in, Varun Chakravarthy — that has been a game-changer and was a great call by the captain and coaches.

"Varun has made India a more balanced side, especially on the slow and turning pitches. It's very hard to pick the ball from Varun's hand and that has given India a real edge, that's why they started dominating more," Dhawan said. "The semi-final win over Australia was a brilliant performance and Virat Kohli yet again showed his class. He owned the game and used all his experience to win the game for his country," he said. "Another key player has been Mohammed Shami, who has looked very impressive on his return to international cricket after injury," he added. "Playing in a big tournament like this, there is always pressure and you need your experienced players to soak that up, which he has done," Dhawan said. "The most impressive thing has been that the whole team is doing well, not just one or two individuals."



## Shahid Kapoor reacts to hugging and meeting Kareena Kapoor Khan on IIFA 2025 stage: 'It's nothing new'



Ex-couple Shahid Kapoor and Kareena Kapoor Khan hugging and interacting at the IIFA 2025 press conference on Saturday in Jaipur sent their fans into a frenzy. While many couldn't stop gushing over their warm exchange, Shahid addressed their rare public meeting, sharing that it's a common occurrence for them and nothing out of the ordinary. Speaking to the media on the green carpet of the IIFA Digital Awards, Shahid said, "For us, it's nothing new... aaj stage pe mile aur hum log idhar udhar milte rehte (today we met on stage but we keep running into each other here and there) hai but it's totally normal for us... if people felt nice, it's nice."

This wasn't the first time Shahid Kapoor and Kareena Kapoor Khan encountered each other in public. At the Dadasaheb Phalke International Film Festival Awards 2024, Kareena walked past Shahid while he posed with filmmakers Krishna DK and Raj Nidimoru, popularly known as Raj & DK. While Kareena stopped to greet Raj, she chose to ignore Shahid and walked away. However, Shahid continued to smile throughout the encounter.

Shahid Kapoor and Kareena Kapoor were in a high-profile relationship during the 2000s. They dated for several years before parting ways in 2007. During their time together, they co-starred in multiple films, including Fida, Chup Chup Ke, 36 China Town, Milenge Milenge, and Imtiaz Ali's cult classic Jab We Met. In an earlier interview with The Times of India, Imtiaz revealed that Shahid and Kareena had broken up towards the end of Jab We Met's shooting schedule. Following their breakup, Kareena found love with her now-husband, Saif Ali Khan. The couple tied the knot in 2012 and welcomed their first son, Taimur Ali Khan, in 2016, followed by their second son, Jehangir Ali Khan (Jeh), in February 2021. Shahid, on the other hand, embraced an arranged marriage with Mira Rajput. The couple has two children—daughter Misha Kapoor, born in 2016, and son Zain Kapoor, born in September 2018.

## Subhash Ghai slams Bollywood for spending bulk of film budgets on actors' salaries: 'We never paid stars more than 10-15%'

While Bollywood continues to struggle to regain its footing and turn the tide in its favour, renowned filmmaker Subhash Ghai has sharply criticised the industry's growing habit of inflating movie budgets unnecessarily and the exorbitant remunerations demanded by stars. He also alleged that many actors who become producers today lack an understanding of both the craft and the business of filmmaking. Ghai further slammed the industry for neglecting technicians beyond the lead cast, particularly writers and composers.

"When you can make a film for Rs 100 but choose to make it for Rs 1,000, remember that many people will be eager to siphon money from the remaining Rs 900. Once we had collaborators, now there is mere divisions of labour. There are multiple departments today, each with its own agenda. However, not a single person is working with the goal of completing the project within the agreed-upon budget. Earlier, our vision was to make small but good films," Ghai shared during a conversation with Komal Nahta on his YouTube channel Game Changers. Slamming the industry's practice of allocating the lion's share of a film's budget to actors' salaries, Subhash Ghai remarked, "We never paid stars more than 10-15 per cent of a film's budget. Today, actors are taking home nearly 70 per cent." He maintained, however, that this trend was not started by filmmakers but by corporate firms involved in film production. "They have to show these figures in the stock exchange and their balance sheets." Explaining the rationale behind floating his production company Mukta Arts, Ghai stated, "I started it to bring discipline. We made 43 films and not a single one went over budget. We also made a profit on all of them, primarily because we maintained financial discipline. Earlier, we considered films to be like God and we, the makers, were merely human. We became gods only if our films succeeded. Now, it doesn't matter whether a movie succeeds or not — it belongs to someone else and those in the studio are simply making money among themselves." When asked whether actors donning the hat of producers was a positive or negative trend, Subhash Ghai recalled that legendary stars like Devika Rani, Dilip Kumar, Raj Kumar, Rajendra Kumar, Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor were also producers. "However, they understood the mathematics and grammar of filmmaking. But today, when an actor receives a script and likes it, their talent manager often says, 'How will we do it? It's a small-budget film. Your usual salary is Rs 50 crore and this film's total budget is just Rs 40 crore. Let's do one thing, become the producer.'

## Tremendous Netflix series is a reminder of just how problematic mainstream Indian filmmaking is

Hurl a rock in the air and it'll probably hit a mainstream Indian film that lacks a clear perspective. In fact, most of them are objectively misguided. The romantic drama Satyaprem Ki Katha was told from the male character's point-of-view, when it is actually the woman's story. As was last year's terrible Netflix film Maharaj, and virtually every movie that Nitesh Tiwari has directed. Not a single person behind the film Sif Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai, meanwhile, recognised the irony in giving this title to a story about a wronged woman. The prolific writer Jack Thorne might've had similar concerns while plotting Toxic Town, a new Netflix mini-series about a horrific case of bureaucracy and red tape.

He could've told the story from the perspective of the righteous whistleblower who refused to be compromised by the system, or the courageous middle-manager whose morality wouldn't allow him to turn a blind eye to the crimes unfolding around him, or even the brave lawyer who fought for justice at tremendous personal cost. But fortunately — and this is the difference between a smart writer and an unintelligent one — Thorne made the correct decision to revisit these crimes through the perspective of the women who were most affected by them. In the mid-90s, several women in the British town of Corby gave birth to children with physical differences. The town was established for steel workers employed at a nearby plant, similar to how the town of Chernobyl was created for the workers at the nuclear facility. When the steel plant was shut down, the government tasked local authorities with a hasty redevelopment project. They cut corners, and allowed toxic waste to spread across Corby, infecting every inhabitant and, most tragically, expectant mothers and their unborn children.

Thorne makes the smart decision to devote the entire first episode — there are only four in total, thankfully — to introducing and establishing our central characters. Jodie Whittaker plays Susan, a young woman whose second son is born with an improperly developed hand. Aimee Lou Wood stars as Tracey, whose infant daughter Shelby Ann dies due to severe health complications. Both women deal with the tragedies in different ways; while Susan steps up and dedicates herself to giving her kids a normal life, Tracey slips into a depression. It is only many years later, after a journalist begins poking into the matter, that they discover what really happened to them.

In comes Des Collins, an earnest lawyer played by Rory Kinnear. Des promises to do right by the women, and is encouraged by the leaked evidence supplied to him by a middle-aged man who used to work at the town council. Played by Robert Carlyle — the UK's answer to Willem



Dafoe — the character could've very easily been the protagonist of Toxic Town, considering the crucial role that he plays in connecting all its different strands together. But it's the women who take centre stage, and rightly so. Des presents them with four challenges that they must overcome. They must prove that they were exposed to toxic waste, that the waste was poisonous enough to affect their children, that the council was aware, and lastly, that it was negligent.

Although it borrows heavily from HBO's Chernobyl, Toxic Town charts its own creative path. For one, it isn't as dour as that show; it's a crowd-pleasing call-to-action. Susan is an easy character to get behind, and while the script sort of manipulates you into feeling for her — Susan's husband walks out on her shortly after the birth of their second son — it also does the due diligence of giving her enough to do beyond the requirements of the primary plot. Her mental illness is hinted at, as is her alcoholism. Both these points are brought up by the defence during the trial in episode four, but by then, you're willing to take up arms on Susan's behalf. You can tell that the show has its heart firmly in the right place when it decides to devote a chunk of screen time to a difficult moral decision that Des is forced to make. On an expert's recommendation, he tells Tracey that she cannot be listed as one of the complainants. Because her daughter

died, it would reduce the chances of a victory for the women. A lesser show would've ignored this bit altogether, but Toxic Town wants to convey just how emotionally taxing this case was to the people who fought it. They weren't just taking on the corrupt council, but also their own belief system. Toxic Town cleverly charts the passage of time by highlighting not just the evolution of technology — landlines are replaced by iPhones in the decade and a half that it takes for the women to get justice — but also by the language with which the children are spoken about. The same people who would use words such as 'disability' and 'deformity' in conversations about the kids begin talking about them as 'differently abled' as the years go by.

The show doesn't underline these ideas too pointedly, but it's one of the many ways in which it communicates just how long the women (and children) had to fight. Shows like Toxic Town offer a rather sobering reminder of how disinterested our film industries are in exploring stories such as this. Forget making a film or TV series about the state machinery's inability to curb pollution in Delhi or the municipality-level mismanagement in Mumbai, our filmmakers would rather tell the same stories from the government's point-of-view. We'll probably never see an honest show about how the pandemic was handled, but someone certainly made a film about how Indian vaccines saved the world.

## The star actor-screenwriter, with multiple plagiarism allegations, who made a Malayalam blockbuster about an actor stealing a script to win superstardom



While Malayalam cinema has, over the years, created several exceptionally talented writers, including MT Vasudevan Nair, KG George, P Padmarajan, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Lohithadas, John Paul, Thoppil Bhasi, Raghunath Paleri, Siddique-Lal and Syam Pushkaran, among others, Sreenivasan ranks among one of the most celebrated and successful of all time. With numerous blockbusters to his name — many of which played a key role in shaping the careers of industry bigwigs like Mohanlal, Priyadarshan and Sathyan Anthikad — Sreenivasan and his films continue to hold a special place in the hearts of Malayalees. Beyond screenwriting, Sreenivasan has also established himself as a talented actor, thus making his return to the screen in the latest Malayalam film Aap Kaise Ho all the more significant for audiences.

Humour has always been writer Sreenivasan's forte, with social issues serving as recurring themes in his films. However, his early scripts were largely straightforward comedies, relying heavily on slapstick and exaggerated humour. Interestingly, his journey as a screenwriter began with Priyadarshan. By then, Sreenivasan — who debuted in Manimuzhakkam (1976) — had already become a familiar face. As he once shared, despite the shoot for his sophomore directorial venture fast approaching, Priyadarshan had yet to write a script. When Sreenivasan approached him seeking a role, the director told him that he could act in the film only if he wrote the screenplay, without which the movie wouldn't happen at all. This led to the birth of Odaruthammava Aalariyam (1984), based on a story by Priyadarshan. The film became one of the most successful comedies of its time, earning widespread acclaim for its sharp writing, witty dialogues and memorable one-liners. Sreenivasan's writing style and sharp comedic sensibilities quickly became the talk of the town, earning him frequent screenwriting offers. In 1985 alone, he worked as a writer on five films, three of which were directed by Priyadarshan. While some were based on stories written by others, a few were unofficial remakes of other movies. Yet, Sreenivasan's screenplay and dialogues infused the stories with a unique Malayalam essence, making them fresh and deeply relatable. With four of these films becoming major commercial successes, he cemented his reputation as a bankable screenwriter. Meanwhile, he also leveraged these opportunities to establish himself as an actor, taking on significant roles in most of the films he wrote. A key aspect that resonated with audiences in Sreenivasan's films was his portrayal of middle- and lower-class heroes — men struggling to make ends meet. While his earlier works frequently touched on unemployment and revolved around men's fixation on wooing women, by 1986, the former theme had evolved into a more central focus. His narratives began reflecting the everyday struggles of middle- and lower-middle-class families. By seamlessly blending these stories with observational and situational humour, Sreenivasan made them deeply engaging, offering audiences the satisfaction of seeing their lives reflected on screen, though in a more colourful, optimistic manner, often with happier endings. In 1986, he also joined forces for the first time with director Sathyan Anthikad, who would go on to become one of his most frequent collabora-

tors, in the superhit Gandhinagar 2nd Street. Sreenivasan's ability to turn any story into a laugh riot, while retaining its emotional core and staying true to the characters, made him an immensely beloved force in Malayalam cinema.

Another significant advantage for Sreenivasan — and many of his peers — was that their early years in the industry coincided with the rise of a young Mohanlal, who was still establishing himself and eagerly taking on diverse roles. Thanks to his remarkable range and acting prowess, makers could pen the unimaginable and yet he would outdo their expectations. From his State Award-winning role in TP Balagopalan MA to his performances in Mazha Peyyunn Muddalam Kottunnu, Hello My Dear Wrong Number, Doore Doore Oru Koodu Kottam and Sanmanassullavarkku Samadhanam, Mohanlal consistently elevated Sreenivasan's scripts to new heights with his impeccable portrayals. By the end of 1986, Sreenivasan had established himself as one of the most prolific mainstream screenwriters in Malayalam. Doore Doore Oru Koodu Kottam, for which he also wrote the story, stood out for its socio-political themes, particularly its critique of corruption in the education sector, all conveyed through a satirical lens. The film also offered early signs of Sreenivasan's contempt toward public politics and mainstream political parties. Even his unoriginal works were well-received and since filmmakers of that era rarely credited their sources when copying from other films, figures like Sreenivasan and Priyadarshan largely escaped scrutiny then for uncredited adaptations. However, in an incident that reinforced the saying "what's done in the dark will come to light", his and the industry's habit of unchecked plagiarism was exposed when young writer duo Siddique-Lal publicly accused Sreenivasan and director Sathyan Anthikad of lifting their story without

permission. Although the first film Siddique and Lal wrote, Pappan Priyappetta Pappan (1986), failed at the box office, the duo gained some industry attention. This gave them the opportunity to narrate a story idea to Sathyan and Sreenivasan, who were looking for fresh concepts. After discussing the details, they parted ways, only for Siddique and Lal to discover months later that Sathyan and Sreenivasan had developed a new project with a new script that contained key elements from their story; this eventually altered the classic Malayalam comedy-drama Nadodikkattu (1987). Although Siddique and Lal were eventually credited in Nadodikkattu's title cards as contributors to the story idea, they were shattered that the film's screenplay had been developed by others without their consent. However, following the intervention of their mentor, director Fazil, they chose to move on, considering how a public controversy might affect their budding careers. Nonetheless, this marked the first of several plagiarism allegations Sreenivasan would face. Although his second directorial venture Chinthavishtayaya Shyamala revolves around a man who neglects his responsibilities as a husband and father by hiding under the comforts of theistic and spiritual lives — forcing his wife to shoulder the entire burden of running the household — Sreenivasan gives the inept male character excessive sympathy; portraying him as unaware of the consequences of his actions rather than holding him accountable more. Despite his deeply flawed and irresponsible behaviour, he is ultimately granted redemption and reinstated as the hero, while the female lead is once again relegated to a secondary position within the familial hierarchy. According to Nana Online, Sreenivasan faced plagiarism accusations for this film too, with acclaimed writer Madhu Muttam alleging that the story was originally his.

## Namita Thapar breaks the bank for Shark Tank India pitchers rejected twice on the show, offers whopping Rs 150 crore valuation

A couple of young entrepreneurs pitched their fitness app business on Shark Tank India, which is currently airing its fourth episode. They left the panel of 'sharks' shocked by their ask of Rs 1.5 crore for .5% equity, valuing their company, Fitelo, at a whopping Rs 300 crore. Anupam Mittal joked, "Your valuation is obese." The founders said that they struggled with weight for many years, and began Fitelo with the intention to help others in their position. Through the app, they provide diet plans, counselling, fitness lessons via exercise and various forms of dance, and also psychological aid.

Anupam felt that while this was a key differentiator, their model is broadly similar to that of competitors such as Healthify Me. The founders said that they were rejected twice for Shark Tank, back in the first and second seasons, when they were at Rs 1 crore and Rs 4 crore turnover. They didn't apply in the third season, but told the 'sharks' that they are now targeting Rs 100 crore in revenue this year. "There has to be something magical about your app," Vineeta Singh remarked, noting the return rate.

Kunal Bahl described this as the 'smile curve', and said that it proves that customers have found value in the product. But he didn't invest, nor did Anupam or Ritesh Agarwal. Each of them was very impressed with the business, but felt that it was going to undergo certain changes in the next year or so. They felt waiting and watching would



be the best idea. Vineeta, however, made them an offer. She gave them a valuation of Rs 75 crore, which the founders weren't in favour of. Namita Thapar jumped in, and said that she would be made fun of in her youth. She said that she was called 'moti' by other children and that this left a deep impression on her mental health. The fact that the founders offer psychological counselling was appealing to Namita, who said that they could also offer supplements through the app in the future. She agreed to join hands with Vineeta, and they offered the founders Rs 1.5 crore at a Rs 150 crore valuation, plus a royalty, which they accepted.