

## Hyderabad Metro Rail announces 10 per cent discount on new revised fares

Hyderabad: L&T Metro Rail (Hyderabad) Limited (L&TMRHL) has announced a 10% discount on the newly revised fares, across all fare zones in all the three metro corridors, which will come into effect from May 24. The fare revision was introduced based on the recommendations of the Fare Fixation Committee (FFC) and as part of a comprehensive strategy to ensure the long-term sustainability of metro operations and maintenance, a press release said. This decision has been taken after carefully considering passenger feedback and reflecting the organization's commitment to enhancing commuter affordability while maintaining financial prudence.

## Four killed, 17 injured in road crash in Vikarabad



GNS News Agency, May 20  
Hyderabad: In a fatal incident, four persons died and at least 17 others were injured after a private bus

carrying a marriage party went out of control and crashed into a truck ahead at Rangapur village in Pargi mandal of Vikarabad district on Tuesday. The victims were identified as Balamma (60), Sandeep (26), Mallesh (30) and Ashwini (30), all relatives from different villages in Shabad mandal. According to the police, the incident occurred when the private bus was which was carrying about 50 persons was proceeding from Pargi towards Shabad. The victims who had attended a wedding in Pargi on May 16 were returning after the formal dinner at the bride's residence on Monday night. When the marriage party bus reached Rangapur outskirts around 2am on Tuesday, the driver is suspected to have lost control of the steering wheel and crashed into the truck ahead. The victims who were seated in the front part of the bus suffered grievous bleeding injuries and died on the spot and 17 others escaped with minor and medium injuries. The Pargi police are investigating.

## Congress showcases BRS government's initiatives to Miss World contestants

Hyderabad: The Congress, before and after the Assembly elections, had repeatedly accused the previous BRS government of failing to develop the State and questioned its contributions. But now, in sharp contrast to these claims, the Congress government is showcasing different initiatives and achievements under the BRS government to contestants of the Miss World pageant! Since the last few days, the Miss World contestants have been visiting different places across the State, including the Yadagirigutta temple, the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), the BR Ambedkar Telangana Secretariat and the Buddhavanam, among others.

The reconstruction of Yadagirigutta – the spiritual capital of the State, in traditional style and with impressive architecture, has given a new identity to Telangana on the temple tourism circuit in the country after former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao took up the renovation project. The Miss World contestants were mesmerised by the attractive sculpture and grandeur of the temple. They visited Pochampally village, which won the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's "Best World Tourism Village" award in November 2021 under the BRS government. The Miss World contestants also visited Buddhavanam, which was completed by the previous government.

This was followed by visits to the Integrated Command and Control Centre and Secretariat. At the ICCC, the contestants were briefed about the advanced surveillance system, the real-time policing and urban management and other facilities. At the Secretariat, the contestants were briefed about the administrative nerve centre of the State, besides the architectural significance of the structure. All these structures were constructed by the previous BRS government.

## Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams to use anti-drone tech; approves transfer of non-Hindus

Hyderabad: The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Board has decided to use anti-drone technology considering the security aspects at Lord Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple, Tirumala. It also gave the nod for transfer of non-Hindu employees working in the TTD through alternative ways or by offering them Voluntary Retirement Scheme.

These decisions were taken during the TTD Board meeting held under the Chairmanship of TTD Trust Board Chairman BR Naidu at Tirumala on Tuesday. After the board meeting, TTD EO J Syamala Rao briefed media on the resolutions passed during the board meeting. The TTD Board has decided to take legal action against the DD Next Level film crew for remixing the "Govinda Namavali" mantra and hurting the sentiments of the devotees. It was also decided to receive technical and financial proposals from architects (consultants) to prepare a comprehensive master plan for development of Tiruchanoor, Amaravati, Narayanavanam, Kapilatheertham, Nagalapuram and Vontimitta temples. With devotees visiting Akashaganga and Papavinasanam areas in large numbers, it was decided to formulate a plan to further enhance the spiritual, environmental and infrastructure facilities here. This apart, measures to enhance Annaprashadam services to devotees at Vontimitta were

## Kaleshwaram probe: Ghose Commission summons KCR, ex-ministers

Hyderabad: Justice P.C. Ghose Commission, which is probing irregularities in the execution of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation project, has summoned former chief minister and BRS president K. Chandrasekhara Rao. The Commission has also issued notices to former Minister T. Harish Rao and BJP MP Eatala Rajender. While K. Chandrasekhara Rao (KCR) has been asked to appear on June 5, BRS leader Harish Rao has been summoned on June 6. Rajender has been directed to appear before the Commission on June 9. During KCR's first term as the chief minister between 2014 and 2018, Harish Rao was the irrigation minister while Rajender held the finance portfolio. During KCR's second term from 2018 to 2023, Harish Rao was the finance minister,

while the irrigation portfolio was with KCR. The Commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Pinaki Chandra Ghose, is probing the alleged irregularities in planning, design, construction, quality control, operation and maintenance of Medigadda, Annaram and Sundilla Barrages of the Kaleshwaram project. The one-man Commission was constituted in March 2024, a few months after some piers of the Medigadda Barrage caved in. The term of the Commission has been extended repeatedly for seven times so far after its initial term ended on June 30, 2024. Notices to KCR, Harish Rao and Rajender were issued a day after the state government extended the Commission's term for two more months, till July 31, to enable it to complete the examination of all those involved.

## Mullanpur, Ahmedabad set to host IPL play-offs

New Delhi: Ahmedabad has been shortlisted to host the Indian Premier League's final on June 3 along with Qualifier 2, while Mullanpur is likely to be the venue of the first two play-off games this month. Considering the monsoon, the BCCI has also shifted the May 23 fixture between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and SunRisers Hyderabad in Bengaluru to Lucknow. The last match at the Chinnaswamy Stadium was washed out. Hyderabad and Kolkata were supposed to host the play-offs as per the original dates but the IPL schedule had to be revised in the wake of the India-Pakistan military conflict that halted the event for a week.

## WHO Pandemic treaty: A shared commitment, need greater global cooperation, says PM Modi

GNS News Agency, May 20  
New Delhi: The historic WHO Pandemic Treaty adopted today is a shared commitment that requires greater global cooperation, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing the 78th Session of the World Health Assembly in Geneva on Tuesday. Addressing the gathering, via videoconferencing, he highlighted that this year's theme, 'One World for Health,' aligns with India's vision for global health. After three years of negotiations, the Agreement was adopted by consensus by member countries of the WHO at the ongoing 78th World Health Assembly. India is also a signatory to this treaty, which has been in talks since the Covid-19 outbreak, which killed millions of people worldwide. The treaty aims to bridge global healthcare gaps and inequities in case of future pandemics. "The WHO Pandemic Treaty is a shared commitment to fighting future pandemics through greater global cooperation," said PM Modi, while extending his congratulations on the successful negotiations of the treaty.

While the Global South is particularly impacted by several health challenges, PM Modi stated that "India's approach provides replicable, scalable, and sustainable models". He also expressed India's willingness to share its learnings and best practices with the world, especially with the Global South. The Prime Minister emphasised the importance of building a healthy planet while ensuring that no one is left behind. "The future of a healthy world depends on inclusion,



an integrated vision, and collaboration," he said. Further, PM Modi also highlighted India's health reforms ranging from Ayushman Bharat -- the world's largest health insurance scheme, which covers 580 million people and provides free treatment -- to the increased role of technology in improving health outcomes, as well as the rise in Government Health Expenditure, leading to a significant decline in Out-of-Pocket Expenditure of the citizens. "The health of the world depends on how well we care for the most vulnerable", underlined the Prime Minister. Emphasising India's role as the birthplace of Yoga, the Prime Minister also extended an invitation to all countries for the upcoming 11th International Day of Yoga in June. The theme this year is 'Yoga for One Earth, One Health'.

## Operation Sindoor was a 'small act of war', says Congress President Kharge

GNS News Agency, May 20  
Vijayanagara: Congress President and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, on Tuesday, described Operation Sindoor as a "small act of war." "Prime Minister Narendra Modi was supposed to visit Kashmir on the 17th. The intelligence agencies informed him not to visit the Valley, and he got the programme cancelled. If he (PM Modi) knew this, why didn't he inform the tourists through the police when he cancelled the programme scheduled for the 17th?" said the Congress President while addressing Samarpna Sankalpa rally in Hospet town, held to mark the completion of two years of the Congress-led government in the state.

"Had you informed the public about it, these small incidents of war or the ongoing conflict with Pakistan, this could have been prevented," said Kharge about Operation Sindoor. Kharge further alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not utter a single word about the Pahalgam incident. "This cannot be tolerated. We are united as a nation. Caste and religion come later," he said. He alleged that PM Modi is being treated as more important than the nation. "There was information of threats in Kashmir, but he did not share information with the poor," he added. Not only PM Modi, the Congress President said that the Opposition also stands with the nation. "PM Modi cannot take the credit for representing patriotism alone. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi sacrificed their lives for this country. Mahatma Gandhi gave us independence and laid down his life. This is the legacy of the Congress. And you (PM Modi) want to blame us. You file cases against us. You served notices in



the National Herald case through the ED, CBI, and Income Tax departments. You want to bring us down. That will not happen," Kharge claimed. On the issue of representing the country abroad on matters of terrorism, Kharge said, "Even though the delegation was selected without informing Congress, we agreed without raising objections. This is how we stand with the nation." He added that Congress got the Constitution under the leadership of Ambedkar and Nehru. "Congress must protect it. Mere words are not enough. Everyone must be included," he said. Kharge also referred to a BJP minister targeting Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, a defence spokesperson, and alleging links to Pakistan. "What punishment should be given to that minister? She is being targeted just because her name is Qureshi. PM Modi should first seek their resignation. They should be removed from their positions," said the Congress President.

## Bhatti visits Bengaluru to study underground power infrastructure model

GNS News Agency, May 20  
Hyderabad: Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka visited Bengaluru on Tuesday for a review of the city's large-scale underground cabling initiative undertaken by the Bengaluru Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM).

The visit was part of the Telangana government's ongoing efforts to modernize urban infrastructure and improve power supply systems. During the visit, presentations were made on the Bengaluru Overhead (OH) to Underground (UG) Power Conversion Project. The project, launched in 2018–19, has already converted over 7,400 kilometres of 11kV OH lines and thousands of kilometres of low-tension lines into UG or aerial bunched (AB) cables. A key innovation has been the laying of Optical Fiber Cable (OFC) ducts along the UG cable routes to enable future telecom leasing as a revenue stream. Later in the day, the Deputy Chief



Minister visited a pilot site in Malleshwaram (15th Cross) where an Underground Distribution network, including underground Transformer (DTR) system has been implemented.

## BRS NRI wing gears up to celebrate party's silver jubilee in Dallas on June 1

GNS News Agency, May 20  
Hyderabad: All arrangements have been made for grand celebration of the BRS party's 25th anniversary at the DR Pepper Arena in Dallas, USA, on June 1. Party working president KT Rama Rao will be the chief guest at the silver jubilee celebrations. BRS NRI global coordinator Mahesh Bigala visited the venue to review the preparations along with BRS NRI USA advisory board chairman Thanneeru Mahesh and local BRS leaders. Speaking on the occasion, Mahesh said this event was not just a celebration, but a platform to showcase the spirit of the Telangana movement to the world. The event will include

colourful cultural programmes, music, dance performances, and traditional games, organised by the Telangana Cultural Arts Council. Telugu and Telangana communities across the US have extended their support and are expected to attend in large numbers. "This will be a memorable event in the history of BRS in the US," Mahesh said, adding that BRS supporters and affiliated organisations from different States in the US are coming together to make the programme a success.



# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Islam and education

The importance of education, particularly female education, has long been a subject of global discourse and advocacy. Harriet Martineau once said, "Women, like men, must be educated with a view to action, or their studies cannot be called education."

This insight underscores education as not merely an intellectual pursuit, but as a transformative tool for empowerment and progress. Yet, in many parts of the world, especially in India, where female literacy remains at 65.6% — well below the global average of 79.7% — the fundamental right to education is still not realised for millions of women. Amidst such disparity and historical injustice, Islam emerged more than 1,500 years ago as a guiding light — championing education not only for women but for all of humanity. At a time when ignorance prevailed and societies routinely denied knowledge to the marginalised, Islam revolutionised the social fabric by declaring education as a universal obligation.

The Prophet of Islam (PBUH) stated, "It is the duty of every Muslim man and every Muslim woman to acquire knowledge" (Ibne Majah). This declaration forms one of the earliest, most inclusive mandates for universal education known to mankind. It placed education at the heart of Islamic civilisation, regardless of gender, race or status. The Quran itself begins with the command "Iqra" (Read), signalling that the pursuit of knowledge is the foundation of faith and progress. Islam did not merely encourage education — it institutionalised it. Mosques doubled as schools, scholars were revered and centres of learning thrived in cities like Baghdad, Cordoba and Cairo during the Golden Age of Islam. This rich intellectual tradition gave birth to advancements in science, mathematics, medicine, literature and philosophy — impacting both East and West, and laying the groundwork for the modern world.

## SVU Pays Tribute to Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu on His 68th Death Anniversary



"May 20, Indian Chronicle, Rayalaseema coordinator" Sri Venkateswara University paid rich tributes to Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu, the eminent freedom fighter and the first Chief Minister of Andhra State, on the occasion of his 68th death anniversary. The commemorative event was held at 10:30 AM near his statue at Administrative Building on the University campus. "Prof. Ch. Appa Rao, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, garlanded the statue of Prakasam Pantulu and addressed the gathering. In his address, he said: "Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu Garu was a towering personality whose fearless patriotism, moral integrity, and progressive thinking left an indelible mark on the history of Andhra Pradesh. He was not only a freedom fighter but also a visionary statesman who laid strong foundations for the development of the region, particularly in the field of education. "It was during his visionary leadership as the first Chief Minister of the newly formed Andhra State that Sri Venkateswara University was conceived and established in 1954. His foresight in locating a premier higher education institution in the Rayalaseema region demonstrated his commitment to balanced regional development. "Even today,



SVU stands as a living testimony to his ideals — of empowering youth through quality education, fostering research that addresses societal challenges, and promoting values of justice, equity, and service. As we remember him today, let us rededicate ourselves to upholding the noble principles he espoused and work towards creating a more enlightened and equitable society. "Prof. M. Bhupathi Naidu, Registrar, also paid floral tributes and remarked: "Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu Garu was a symbol of fearlessness, honesty, and statesmanship. His unyielding commitment to the cause of education and social justice paved the way for institutions like ours to flourish. As a university born from his vision, we bear a moral responsibility to nurture students who are not only academically sound but also socially conscious. "Prof. Naidu also reaffirmed SVU's dedication to academic excellence, inclusive growth, and nation-building aligned with the values of such great leaders. "Faculty members, non-teaching staff, research scholars, and students participated in the solemn event and paid homage to the legendary leader whose life and legacy continue to inspire generations.

## Mandal-Level Summer Training Program Commences at Government High School, Manthani.

"PS Ashokan" Indian Chronicle "Manthani May 20" "As part of the in-service professional development for teachers, a Mandal-level summer training program commenced at the Government High School in Manthani. This five-day intensive training initiative was formally inaugurated by the Mandal Educational Officer, Smt. Dasari Lakshmi. "In her inaugural address, she emphasized that the training, organized under the aegis of the School Education Department as part of the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) mission, aims to deepen pedagogical understanding among primary school teachers. She highlighted that the sessions are designed to focus on critical teaching-learning processes and content-specific methodologies. She urged all participating educators to engage earnestly with the training, assimilate the insights provided, and translate them effectively into classroom practice in the forthcoming academic year. She reiterated the need for a committed and student-centered approach to ensure equitable, quality education at the foundational level. "The training encompasses academic enrichment in core subjects—Telugu, English, Mathematics, and Environmental Science—delivered by experienced Resource Persons. In addition to subject-based instruction, the program also covers significant thematic areas such as conducting effective Parent-Teacher Meetings, the integration of Artificial Intelligence in education, and the strengthening of school libraries. "Manthani Mandal comprises 43 primary and 9 upper primary schools, with a total of 91 Sec-



ondary Grade Teachers (SGTs) actively engaged in foundational education. All of these teachers have enrolled and are participating in this professional training initiative. "The team of Resource Persons includes Sri Erram Ramesh, Sri Eerla Ramesh, Sri Lokey Raj Pavan, Sri B. Chandrasekhar, Sri N. Lakshmaiah, Sri K. Lakshman, Sri B. Kishore, and Sri M. Ramu. Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs) Smt. T. Mallanna, Smt. K. Supraja, Smt. M. Radhika, and Smt. A. Swapna are also actively involved in facilitating the sessions.

## Minister Should Intervene in the RTC Hired Bus Drivers' Strike: CITU District Committee Member Budida Ganesh



"RTC hired bus drivers have been on strike for the past two days, demanding their rightful claims. Today, CITU District Committee Member Budida Ganesh, SFI District President Arla Sandeep, DYFI District President Gorrela Suresh, and KVPVS District Vice-President Manthani Lingayya expressed their support for the strike. "On this occasion, Budida Ganesh stated that the hired bus drivers are not making unreasonable demands. They are only asking for implementation of the agreement, including salary hikes, provision of two sets of uniforms, and free bus passes for all. He added that since the introduction of free bus services, drivers have been burdened even more. The bus

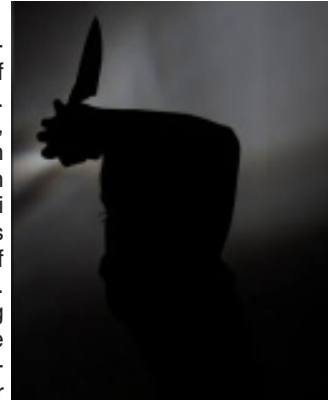
owners, whose agreements have expired, are refusing to increase wages, leaving the drivers to struggle with meagre earnings. "He emphasized that if the strike continues, it will cause severe inconvenience to the public visiting for the Saraswathi Pushkaralu. Therefore, keeping the Pushkaralu in view, IT Minister Mr. Sridhar Babu should intervene in the issue and help resolve the strike. He also demanded that the RTC management step in, invite both the hired bus owners and drivers' union representatives for talks, and take steps to resolve the drivers' issues. "Union President Mahesh, leaders Satish, and others participated in this event.

## Suspecting wife of infidelity, NRI travels from Dubai to Nizamabad to kill her

Dubai: In yet a case of murder on suspicion of an extramarital affair, a Gulf NRI allegedly killed his wife in daylight in Nizamabad on Monday morning.

The gruesome incident unfolded in full view of their children in their home. Muddangula Gangadhar, native of Bodhan in Nizamabad, was working in UAE and his wife Anjali along with two daughters were living in Armur town of the same district. Gangadhar was suspecting his wife, ever since she moved to Arumur citing better education facilities for their children some time ago and had filed for divorce as well. Gangadhar recently reached Nizamabad from Dubai.

He confronted Anjali alleging an extramarital affair, according to the police, and slit her throat, apart from repeatedly stabbing her in the neck despite their children's screams. Anjali collapsed on the spot and died of her injuries before any assistance could arrive. Gangadhar attempted to flee the scene, but was chased down by locals and restrained until the police arrived.



## Hyderabad's new skywalk at Mehdiapatnam likely to operate from July



GNS News Agency, May 20

Hyderabad: Work on the city's newest iconic skywalk at the busy Mehdiapatnam junction is progressing briskly, and the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) plans to complete the work within three months.

The fabrication of steel pedestrian skywalks between Humayun Nagar Police Station and Rythu Bazar and from Gudimalkapur Traffic Junction to Mehdiapatnam bus bay has been completed, and lifts are under way. Work on a foot-over-bridge connecting Mehdiapatnam Rythu Bazar and the bus bay (Defence area) towards Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital, are in progress. The Ministry of Defence gave its nod in 2024 January to build the skywalk on its 2,500 sq yards of land at Mehdiapatnam. As per the schedule, the proposed skywalk was supposed to be completed in March 2023, but the same got delayed.

The 390-metre long elevated skywalk has five entry and exit points at Rythu Bazar, Defence compound wall (Military Garrison), bus bay area (Mehdiapatnam), near Humayun Nagar Police Station, and at Gudimalkapur Junction. "The cost of the skywalk project is Rs 38 crore and it is scheduled to be completed by August," said an HMDA official. Officials said the skywalk also has 21,061 sq ft of commercial space and coffee shops, gateway corners, and lounge snacks are planned on the proposed skywalk. The swanky skywalk has 13 elevators, two intermediate tunnel walks, and stretches. It is expected to cater a heavy footfall of 30,000 in a day and ensure pedestrian safety in addition to easing traffic congestion at Mehdiapatnam junction.

The skywalk is built in glass and steel, and hosts a range of facilities, including six access points at a height of 6.15 metres from the ground, officials said. The 380-metre bridge will be supported by suspension cords and has 13 elevators with a combined capacity of 450 passengers. An exclusive elevator chair is proposed for the physically challenged. The LED strip lights along the arch, cables, and walkway tunnels will be built to elevate the skywalk area's beauty. HMDA executive engineer, Hari Krishna, said "the skywalk is likely to be ready and opened to the citizens by July end." The Mehdiapatnam skywalk will stand as another unique engineering achievement after the city's first skywalk at Uppal, a senior MA&UD official described.

## Panic prevails as fire breaks out in building on Chatrinaka main road



GNS News Agency, May 20

Hyderabad: Panic prevailed for a while at Chatrinaka main road in the old city when fire broke out on the second floor of a G + 2 floors building on Tuesday afternoon. No casualties were reported in the incident. According to the fire officials, the fire broke out in the kitchen of the house and soon spread into the entire house. On noticing the fire, the occupants rushed downstairs from the building and alerted the fire department. Two fire tenders from Chandrayangutta and Moghalpura fire station reached the spot and doused the fire within half an hour. The cause of the fire is being ascertained.

## Kakinada Rural MLA Offers Prayers at Sri Vari Temple



"(May 20, Indian Chronicle, Rayalaseema coordinator)" Kakinada Rural Janasena MLA, Pantham Nanaji, along with his family, had a darshan of Lord Venkateswara Swamy, the revered deity of Kali Yuga. "On Tuesday morning, during the Naivedya Virama (offering break) at the temple, arrangements for their darshan were made by the temple authorities. Following the darshan, officials presented them with Teertha Prasadam (holy water and offerings) at the Ranganayakula Mandapam inside the temple. Janasena Party's 44th Ward President and City Secretary, Sai Dev Yadav, accompanied them.

## Telangana to reduce academic load on degree students with new syllabus, fewer credits



GNS News Agency, May 20

Hyderabad: The academic load on Telangana degree students is expected to come down as new syllabus for undergraduate programmes will be rolled out from the forthcoming academic year i.e., 2025-26. The Telangana Council of Higher Education is working on introducing a new syllabus for degree courses with fewer credits, which means less syllabus and academic burden on students. If the proposal fructifies, students who secure 120 credits will be awarded their degrees. Presently, for degrees to be granted, students need to earn 150 credits in the three years of the course work. As part of the syllabus revision, major reshuffling is being done on how credits are distributed among different subjects. The number of credits allotted for the languages, first language English and second language (Telugu/Hindi), are expected to come down from 20 to 12. Similarly, the credits for electives are likely to be reduced from 30 to 22. The TGCHC is making these changes as per the recommendations of the University Grants Commission, which set uniform credits of 120 for degree programmes offered by higher educational institutions across the country. The Council, which has already begun the syllabus revision exercise, is holding consultations with universities officials and boards of studies on proposed changes in the credits system. A meeting with universities vice chancellors will be conducted shortly during which a final decision will be arrived at. Meanwhile, the proposal to reduce credits in English language did not go down well with Osmania University's English department. During an emergency annual departmental meeting with all the campus, constituent, government, private and autonomous colleges on Monday, English professors and lecturers strongly pitched for retaining the existing 20 credits for English language in degree programmes.

## Employment avenues to be created through vocational training, says Minister Sridhar Babu.



“PS Ashokan” Indian Chronicle “Manthani May 20” Ramagundam, May 20: “Minister for IT, Industries and Legislative Affairs, Mr. Duddilla Sridhar Babu, on Tuesday said that skill development initiatives were vital in enhancing employment opportunities for the youth, especially in industrial regions. He was speaking after inaugurating a Skill Development Training Centre set up by the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, at the Mine Vocational Training Centre (MVTC) in the Adriyala Project Area, Ramagundam-3.” “Speaking at the event, Mr. Sridhar Babu noted that vocational training was crucial for improving employability among the region’s unemployed youth. The training centre, which offers 38 courses in various trades, would serve as a significant step in equipping young individuals with market-relevant skills, he said.” “The Minister urged the youth to make effective use of the facility and focus on acquiring comprehensive skills, rather than merely aiming for certification. He said that the Telangana government had already established a Skill University, and that a statewide skill survey would soon be undertaken to assess

existing capabilities among unemployed youth and to match them with suitable job opportunities.” “Describing the skill centre as a model initiative, Mr. Sridhar Babu suggested that SCCL consider upgrading it into a formal vocational institute and explore the possibility of recruiting directly from the trained pool in future.” “Ramgundam MLA Mr. Makan Singh Raj Thakur attended as Guest of Honour. Earlier, Mr. Narendra Sudhakar Rao, General Manager, RG-3 Area, who presided over the programme, explained SCCL’s ongoing efforts to provide free training to unemployed youth from surrounding localities.” “Among those present were Peddapalli District Collector Mr. Koya Sri Harsha, Additional Collector Ms. J. Arunashree, SCCL General Manager (HRD) Mr. Gunjapadugu Raghupathi, Ramagundam-1 GM Mr. D. Lalith Kumar, Adriyala Project GM Mr. Kolipaka Nageshwar Rao, Recognised Union General Secretary Mr. K. Raj Kumar, union leader Mr. Kota Ravinder Reddy, Officers’ Association General Secretary Mr. P. Narasimhulu, RDO Mr. Suresh, SVOTGM Mr. B.V. Satyanarayana, besides officials from various mines, departments, and elected representatives.

## Drying paddy on roads turn into death traps for motorcyclists in Telangana's Karimnagar

GNS News Agency, May 20

Karimnagar: The practice of drying paddy on roads is turning into a life threat for people moving on motorcycles, with many hitting paddy heaps without noticing them. While three persons died, many were injured within a span of 10 days in such incidents in the erstwhile Karimnagar district. A 32-year-old person, Nerella Ranjith Kiran, died when the bike he was riding hit a paddy heap near Mallapur of Thimmapur mandal on Saturday night. A native of Mugdumpur, Ranjith met with the accident while returning from Mallapur along with his friend Sadij. While Ranjith died on the spot, Sadij sustained injuries.



Another youth died in a similar incident at Mallareddypet, Ghambiraopet mandal of Rajanna-Sircilla district on May 14. Sheik Khaleel and his friend Shekhar met with an accident while riding a bike from Lingannapet to Mallannapet. While Khaleel died on the spot, Shekhar sustained serious injuries. Ten days ago, a couple, Sammi Reddy and Manemma, sustained serious injuries when the bike they were travelling on hit a paddy heap between Mamidalapalli and Pachunur. Though Sammi Reddy recovered from the injuries, Manemma died after four days while undergoing treatment in a hospital in Hyderabad.

In the latest incident, three persons Kancha Kumar, his wife Pavani and their son Raghava, sustained injuries when their motorcycle rammed a paddy heap near Valbapur of Veenavanka mandal on Sunday night. Despite the police warning against drying paddy on the roads, farmers are

drying the crop on roads in many places. Earlier, farmers used to engage labourers to harvest the crop and shift it to the market only after drying it in the field itself. Nowadays, drying the crop has become a big problem since harvesters have been engaged to harvest the crop. It is not possible to dry paddy in the field if the crop was harvested with the help of harvesters, since the ground turns slushy. With officials at paddy purchasing centres asking farmers to bring the crop to the centres only after drying, farmers are now searching for alternate places since a majority of them would not have adequate space in their houses. These roads have become an alternative source. In some areas, farmers reserve roads well in advance by placing empty fertilizer bags as competition for drying paddy on roads has increased.

## Harish Rao asks Congress Govt to release hiked salaries to mini Anganwadi workers in Telangana



GNS News Agency, May 20

Hyderabad: Former Minister and senior BRS MLA T Harish Rao criticised the Congress government for its unjust treatment of mini Anganwadi workers and for depriving them of their hiked salaries for the last year. He demanded that the government pay salaries as per the increased pay grade and also credit the arrears into their accounts immediately. Harish Rao shot a missive to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, charging the Congress government with political opportunism. He pointed out that 3,989 mini Anganwadi workers who were serving in the most remote rural and tribal belts were subjected to financial and emotional hardship due to erratic policy implementation. He reminded that the previous BRS government had issued orders upgrading mini Anganwadis to Anganwadi status in September 2023, but implementation was stalled due to the election code. The former Minister said the Congress government merely reissued the same order in December 2023 for political mileage. After briefly paying a hiked salary of Rs 13,650 for three months, the government reverted to the old mini Anganwadi pay scale of Rs 7,800 from April 2024 onward.

“Which government reduces an increased salary? How

can the government justify it?” he asked. Harish Rao stated that confusion continues, as the government reissued the old GO in April this year. Yet, the enhanced salaries were disbursed only in eight districts this May. “Mini Anganwadi workers are not campaign tools. They are grassroots workers serving the poorest. It is absurd to make them suffer financially and emotionally,” he said. He demanded that increased salaries to mini Anganwadi workers be paid retrospectively from January 2024, with helpers appointed immediately wherever needed.

## Lakshadweep atolls shaped and reshaped by natural phenomena, biological and human activity: IITGN study

Lakshadweep sediment study, IIT Gandhinagar coral research, Agatti Kavaratti lagoon sediments. The study paints a detailed picture of how these islands are being shaped and reshaped by natural phenomena. Researchers from the REEFS Lab at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar (IITGN), who studied the processes, which form and maintain two of Lakshadweep’s atolls — Agatti and Kavaratti — in Kavaratti, particularly near a dredging channel, observed a noticeable shift in sediment composition. The shift is marked by a decline in coral clasts and an increase in contributions from Halimeda and molluscs, concluding that human activity has left its mark on these delicate systems. The researchers, through fieldwork and analysis, found that more than 95 per cent of the lagoon sediments in Agatti and Kavaratti consist of biogenic material, composed mainly of coral, mollusc, and foraminiferal fragments, which are less than 2 mm in size. These sediments, known as biotrital grainstone, reflect a system primarily driven by biological productivity rather than inorganic processes. Interestingly, unlike these atolls, the ones in the Maldives show a greater contribution from calcareous algae such as Halimeda, marking a distinct difference in sediment sources across the atolls.

## Pakistani gunmen must be driven out of the country“



— Salute to the three services — Grand Tiranga rally in Mulugu— Leaders of political, public and student organizations participated with national flags “Mulugu representative, Mahipal, Indian Chronicle: In retaliation for the attack by gunmen on Indians in Pahalgam, Kashmir, people organized a huge rally in Mulugu in support of the attacks by the three services on Pakistan. Leaders of various political, public, caste and student organizations participated. People from the trade and business sectors closed their shops and participated in the Tiranga rally. Speaking at the Tiranga rally, Pesaru Vijay Chandra Reddy said that no matter who tries to attack the country, all Indians will support the soldiers with open arms. He made it clear that Pakistan is adopting a dual policy and that no matter how many conspiracies anyone hatches, all Indians are one. On this occasion, a rally was held from Tirumala Talkies in Mulugu to the area hospital, displaying national flags and a huge banner. They chanted slogans like Bharat Mata Ki Jai and

Vande Mataram and sang songs praising the services of the soldiers. On this occasion, security measures were taken under the leadership of Mulugu CI Suresh and SI Venkateswarlu. On this occasion, children performed in the guise of national leaders. Similarly, women also participated in large numbers.

Former MP Sitaram Nayak, Porika Govind Nayak, Dubasi Ramesh, Sirikonda Balaram, Chintalapudi Bhaskar Reddy, Vasudeva Reddy, Kotha Surender, Sanikomm Ramesh Reddy, Chennai Vijay, Nagarapu Ramesh, Satish, Raj Kumar, Rayanchu Nagaraju, Vankudothu Jyoti, Porika Vijay Ram, Gandrakota Kumar, Ajmira Krishnaveni Nayak, Vankudothu Swaroopa, Gadam Kumar, Aakuthola Chandramouli, Kondi Sambasiva, Bhukya Jawahar Nayak, Pittala Madhu, MD Shafi, Gadam Devender, Karupothula Yadagirigaud, Kaviraj, Aadepu Kiran, Banala Raj Kumar, Sunny, K. Kutumba Rao, Bhaskar Reddy, and others participated.”

## Deprived teachers move Calcutta HC against CM’s relief for Group C and D staff

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had announced a monthly ex gratia allowance for Group C and Group D staff from the 2016 School Service Commission (SSC) panel who lost their jobs, following a Supreme Court order last month. On Tuesday, teachers deprived of a salary approached the Calcutta High Court, challenging this decision. The matter was mentioned before Justice Amrita Sinha, who granted permission to file the case. Speaking to The Indian Express, counsel Sudipto Dasgupta, who mentioned the matter, said, “(The ex gratia payment) is unconstitutional and violates the right to equality and the right to life. It goes against the Supreme Court order.”

The state government had announced the ex gratia decision following a cabinet meeting. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had stated from Nabanna, “Under a scheme of the West Bengal Labour Department, Group C will receive Rs 25,000 and Group D will receive Rs 20,000, effective from April 1, 2025.” “The families who have lost their jobs are in great difficulty. The matter is currently sub-judice. We will file a review petition before the Supreme Court on its previous verdict and await its order, with which we will surely abide. But until that verdict is received, they will get this allowance,” Banerjee told reporters.

She added that a special fund, the West Bengal Livelihood and Social Security Fund, had been created. A few weeks ago, Chief Secretary Manoj Pant held a meeting with



representatives of Group C and D employees, during which the Chief Minister also addressed them virtually and assured them of the allowance. On April 3, a Supreme Court division bench comprising Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar dismissed 25,753 teaching and non-teaching staff employed in state-run and state-aided schools, upholding a Calcutta High Court order. Two weeks later, the Supreme Court allowed teachers of Classes IX to XII to return to their posts and instructed the state government to restart the recruitment process, to be completed by December 31. However, no such relief was extended to the Group C and D staff.

## MMRDA gets Rs 1,500-crore for Ramabai Nagar slum redevelopment

GNS News Agency, May 20

slum development, MMRDA, Ramabai Nagar, Indian express The redevelopment of Ramabai Nagar is one of the largest urban rejuvenation projects ever carried out in Mumbai and seeks to turn densely populated slums into structured, secure and dignified housing clusters.

Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) has secured a Rs 1,500 crore loan sanction from Bank of Maharashtra to be redeveloping Kamraj Nagar and Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar in Ghatkopar. This will be the first phase of the Rs 8,498-crore Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) project. The project, which aims to rehabilitate about 17,000 slum dwellers with free 1 BHK houses of 300 sq ft, is MMRDA’s first initiative in slum redevelopment. The project involves constructing residential units, in addition to creating necessary amenities like gardens, health centres, and educational facilities.

The redevelopment of Ramabai Nagar is one of the largest urban rejuvenation projects ever carried out in Mumbai and seeks to turn densely populated slums into structured, secure and dignified housing clusters. According to MMRDA officials, the initiative marks a change in attitude from short-term relief to long-term community development with improved infrastructure and higher living standards at its core.

“This redevelopment scheme is a shining example of our government’s vision of developing an equitable, future-ready Mumbai where every citizen has a right opportunity to thrive,” Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis said, underlining the state’s determination to solve long-pending slum issues through active governance and sustainable funding mechanisms. “Our vision is to uplift communities by pro-



viding not just housing, but dignity and security. It reflects our resolve to drive inclusive urban growth that leaves no community behind,” he added. Groundwork for this redevelopment was conducted during the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government’s tenure, which had suggested redeveloping Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar as part of a larger scheme to engage different government agencies in making Mumbai slum-free. The plan was brought up by CEO of the SRA and approved later by then Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who also heads MMRDA, said the funding will bring transformative change to thousands of families in slum pockets. “The Rs 1,500-crore loan approval is a strong endorsement of the Government of Maharashtra and MMRDA’s shared vision for transforming lives through infrastructure,” he said, highlighting the effect of improved housing on well being in the community.

The Rs 1,500 crore loan is one part of a larger funding plan under which Rs 3,916 crore will be mobilised through institutional loans.

# Show cause notice to contractor at Kala Ghoda parking lot for charging double from four-wheeler owners



GNS News Agency,May 20

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Tuesday issued showcause notices and lodged a complaint against a contractor responsible for maintaining the civic body's public parking lot at Kala Ghoda in front of the Jehangir Art Gallery.Issuing a statement, civic authorities said the contractor was charging double the specified rate of park-

ing charges from owners of four-wheelers.According to the BMC's tariff, parking a two-wheeler in a civic-body owned parking lot costs Rs 20 per hour, while the cost of parking a four-wheeler is Rs 70 for an hour."During our inspection, we discovered that the contractor was charging four wheeler owners Rs 150 for every hour, which was more than double the amount as mentioned in our tariff. We also noticed that the contractors were allowing parking at areas where 'No Parking' boards were displayed and the marshals employed there were not wearing uniforms as well," said a civic official on Tuesday.Civic officials said they carried out a 'sting operation' after they received multiple complaints of the parking contractors charging exorbitantly.

Civic officials said besides lodging police complaints, a penalty of Rs 10,000 has been imposed on the contractor for fleecing citizens. In addition to this, a separate penalty of Rs 4,000 was also imposed on the contractor for allowing parking of vehicles at the 'no parking' site. Another penalty of Rs 1,000 was imposed on the marshals since they were not wearing uniforms.

# City, campus, or curriculum: A look at what drives college choices for Pune Class 12 students for higher studies

GNS News Agency,May 20

As the admission season gains momentum, thousands of Class 12 students who have cleared their board examinations find themselves at a decisive turning point — choosing the right college for graduation. This decision, often seen as the gateway to academic and personal growth, is influenced by multiple factors. But what really tips the scale — the strength of academics, the appeal of the city, or the campus atmosphere?For a large section of students, academic reputation remains the top priority. Vaishnavi Rakpate, an Arts student, believes that quality education is non-negotiable. "For me, the faculty and academic records matter more than the city or the crowd. I want a degree that opens doors," she says, emphasising her focus on academic excellence over other factors.

Shrushti Ghumare, a Class 12 Science student from Fergusson College, Pune, echoes this sentiment. She has applied to reputed colleges known for offering strong Finance programmes. "Even if the campus isn't very glamorous, I'll go where there are experienced professors and where alumni have done well. That gives me confidence in the curriculum," she explains. For students like Ghumare, a solid academic foundation and a clear path to career opportunities are critical decision drivers.However, for many others, the location of the college is equally important. Big cities often offer greater exposure, access to events, and real-world learning opportunities. Shivraj Thakur, a Science student, has his eyes set on Delhi, the national capital. "It's not just about the college, but it's the exposure too. I want to attend events, workshops, and meet professionals. Metro cities just offer more beyond textbooks," he says. The energy and resources available in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore are seen as catalysts for both academic and extracurricular growth.Beyond academics and geography, campus culture is emerging as a strong influence. Students nowadays are seeking an environment that supports personal development and offers a vibrant student life. Grishma Kadam, a student from Versatile School and Junior College, highlights the importance of campus ambience.

"It is important to have a good environment along with education. This time is crucial and cannot be gained back. It's not just education, I want experiences too," she says. "Colleges come with more networking opportunities and internships. That matters as much as classroom teaching,"



she adds, pointing to the growing importance of soft skills, peer learning, and co-curricular engagement.Masum Agarwal, another student preparing for graduation, places equal weight on ambience, reputation, and placements. "For me, along with the curriculum, the college should have a good reputation and provide good placements. Even the events play a major role as they give practical exposure to students," he says. Her view reflects the preference for institutions that balance academics with opportunities for professional and personal development.Yet, not all decisions are based purely on aspiration. Practical considerations such as affordability, safety, accommodation, and proximity to family often factor into the final choice. Lakmi Shitale, a commerce student from MM College, points out this dilemma. "My parents want me closer to home. It's a balance between my aspirations and their concerns," she says. Her situation is not uncommon, as many students find themselves aligning their ambitions with familial expectations.Ultimately, choosing a college is not a one-dimensional process. Students today are increasingly making informed choices based on a mix of academic interests, city dynamics, campus culture, career prospects, and emotional factors. The weight of this decision is acknowledged by most students who see their college years as more than just a phase of study, it is a time of transformation.As Science student Shreya Gaikwad aptly puts it, "Choosing a college isn't just about a degree, it's choosing a new life. And that life should feel right in your gut."In a landscape of expanding options, students today are no longer looking at just where they get in, but they're asking where they will thrive.

# Anita Anand sworn in as Canada's first Hindu Foreign Minister

GNS News Agency,May 20

In a landmark moment for Canada's Indo-Canadian community, Anita Anand, Member of Parliament (MP) from Oakville East, has been appointed Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, becoming the first woman of Hindu heritage to hold this prestigious portfolio. Sworn in on May 13, with her hand on the Bhagavad Gita, Anand headlines a diverse cabinet under Prime Minister Mark Carney, which includes three other Indian-origin leaders: Maninder Sidhu as Minister of International Trade, and Ruby Sahota and Randeep Sarai as Secretaries of State.Anita Anand, 58, born to Indian immigrant parents — a Tamil mother, Saroj, and a Punjabi father, S V Anand, both physicians — has shattered glass ceilings throughout her career. Raised in Kentville, Nova Scotia, Anand's academic journey took her to Queen's University, Oxford, and the University of Toronto, where she earned a law degree and later became a distinguished professor. Her political ascent began in 2019 when she was elected MP for Oakville, becoming the first Hindu woman in Canada's House of Commons.

Anand's ministerial record is formidable. As Minister of Public Services and Procurement (2019–2021), she spearheaded Canada's Covid-19 vaccine procurement, earning global praise for securing millions of doses. She later served as Minister of National Defence (2021–2024), overseeing military modernization and Canada's support for Ukraine. Her appointment as Foreign Minister, replacing Mélanie Joly, positions her as a key architect of Canada's global diplomacy amid tensions with the US over trade and security.Maninder Sidhu: Trade Champion from Brampton?Maninder Sidhu, 42, MP for Brampton East, steps into the role of Minister of International Trade, a critical portfolio as Canada navigates US tariff threats under President Donald Trump. Born in Punjab, India, Sidhu immigrated to Canada as a child, growing up in Brampton's vibrant Punjabi community. A business graduate from the University of Toronto, he worked as a real estate professional and community organizer before entering politics.

Elected in 2019, Sidhu has been a vocal advocate for small businesses and trade diversification, particularly with India and the Indo-Pacific. His Punjabi heritage and fluency in Punjabi have strengthened ties with Brampton's South Asian electorate. As a Liberal MP, he served on the Standing Committee on International Trade, preparing him to lead Canada's trade strategy. "Maninder's grassroots connection and trade expertise will drive economic growth," said Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown.Ruby Sahota: Tackling Crime in Brampton?Ruby Sahota, 44, MP for Brampton North—Caledon, has been named Secretary of State for



Anita Anand, 58, born to Indian immigrant parents — a Tamil mother, Saroj, and a Punjabi father

Combatting Crime, a role supporting the Minister of Public Safety. Born in Toronto to Punjabi parents who immigrated from Punjab, Sahota's Indian heritage shapes her community-focused approach. A law graduate from the University of Saskatchewan, she practiced immigration and family law before entering politics.

Elected in 2015, Sahota became one of the first Indo-Canadian women MPs. Known for her work on youth engagement and public safety, she chaired the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Her new role addresses rising concerns about gang violence and organized crime in Brampton, a priority for her constituents. "Ruby's legal background and community ties make her ideal to tackle crime," said a local community leader.Randeep Sarai: Advancing Global Development?Randeep Sarai, 50, MP for Surrey Centre, assumes the role of Secretary of State for International Development, supporting Canada's foreign aid and global partnerships. Born in Punjab, India, Sarai immigrated to Canada at age 11, settling in British Columbia's Sikh heartland. A lawyer by training, he founded a successful legal practice in Surrey, focusing on real estate and immigration law.Elected in 2015, Sarai has championed multiculturalism and economic opportunities for Surrey's diverse communities. His work on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration informs his new role, where he will oversee Canada's development aid, including programs in South Asia. "Randeep's journey from Punjab to Parliament embodies the Canadian dream," said Surrey Councillor Mandeep Nagra.The 2025 Canadian federal election saw a record 22 Indian-origin candidates elected to the House of Commons, with 65 candidates of Indian descent contesting across parties.

# Haryana CM Saini leads Tiranga Yatra to honour armed forces for Operation Sindoor



GNS News Agency,May 20

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini led "Tiranga Yatra, ek yatra deshbhakti ke naam" on Tuesday as part of a nationwide BJP programme to honour the Indian armed forces for their role in Operation Sindoor."The historic success of Operation Sindoor has showcased India's national resolve, the bravery of its soldiers and the firm leadership of PM Narendra Modi globally," he said at the Yavanika town park in Panchkula. The yatra began with patriotic slogans and concluded at the Major Sandeep Shankla memorial. A large number of people, including children and women, participated in the 2-km yatra, paying homage to the soldiers of the country.Saini and his cabinet colleagues paid floral tributes to the martyrs at the memorial."Our soldiers have taught a tough lesson to those who threaten the nation. They ensured that the national flag, the tricolour, which symbolises the pride and honour of Mother India, never

bowed down. Tiranga Yatra is not just a celebration of Mother India's pride, but a tribute to the self-respect and valour of the nation. It is an expression of our national unity, consciousness, and pride. The yatra is dedicated to the warriors who responded to the enemy in their own language and continue to inspire us to embrace patriotism in every moment," the chief minister said.

Saini said Operation Sindoor was a symbol of India's national dignity, adding that the nation changed the definition of war with it. Saini said Pakistan had been exposed to the world as a country that sponsors terrorism and fosters its growth.

"In the tragic incident of Pahalgam, Pakistan-sponsored terrorists destroyed the sindoor of our sisters and daughters in front of their eyes. At that moment, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had vowed to eliminate terrorism, and through Operation Sindoor, the Army has taken significant steps to eradicate it," he added.Saini also targeted the Opposition over its demand for a special Parliament session to discuss the recent India-Pakistan conflict. "Today the Opposition has no real issues and has lost its footing. The Opposition had raised questions over the surgical strikes and airstrikes, and now they are demanding a special session of the Lok Sabha after Operation Sindoor. However, during the all-party meeting, the Opposition was provided with full information about Operation Sindoor," he said.State BJP president Mohan Lal Baddoli said, "The bravery and courage displayed in this battle by our armed forces are being honoured today as we salute our courageous soldiers through this yatra."

# Focus and self-study mantras of success, say young achievers who aced Class XII Boards

GNS News Agency,May 20

Students from Panchkula and Chandigarh achieved remarkable results in their Class XII examinations, as the CBSE results were declared on Tuesday, showcasing their hard work and consistency across various streams. The academic excellence was a result of focused self-study and consistency, as many shared their inspiring personal journeys.Shreya Garg from KBDV Secondary School, Sector 7, Panchkula, scored 99.4 per cent marks in the commerce stream, with perfect 100 each in accountancy and business studies and 99 each in applied maths, English and economics. She aims to become a chartered accountant. Her Class X score was 99.2 per cent. "My focus was consistency, not long hours," said the 18-year-old fiction reader and painter. Her father Devraj Garg runs a crockery business, while her mother Renu Garg is a homemaker.Equally remarkable was Manas Sidher of Bhavan Vidyalaya, Panchkula, with 99.2 per cent marks. He earned 100 marks in food production, and 99 marks each in accounts, business studies, English and economics. The Manimajra resident now plans to join SRCC at Delhi University."Completing daily targets helped me stay on track," he said. Manas's father, Dr Jitendra Kumar, teaches mathematics, and his mother Meenu is a librarian. He scored 96 per cent in Class X.

From the science stream, Akshita Jain of Bhavan Vidyalaya scored 99.2 per cent marks. She scored 100 each in chemistry and maths, 99 each in physics and English, and 98 in music, all through self-study. "I didn't rely on coaching, just discipline," said the Sector 15, Panchkula, resident, who aims to crack JEE Advanced. Her Class X score was 98.8 per cent.Her father Vishal Jain, is a Vice-President at ICICI Health Insurance, while her mother Shravika Jain works with HSPV, Panchkula.In the medical stream, Aarav Goel of Sri Guru Harkrishan Model School, Sector 38, Chandigarh, secured 99 per cent (495/500). Son of neurosurgeon Dr Rajeev Goel and gynaecologist Dr Pragya Goel, Aarav aspires to become a doctor like his parents. His brother is pursuing MBBS at GMCH, Chandigarh. The 18-year-old enjoys cricket, crafts, and music.Charmi from St Joseph's Senior Secondary School scored 98.8 per cent. She had 93.6 per cent marks in Class X. She focused on NCERT texts, sample papers, and past year's questions. A Kurali resident, Charmi hopes to become a criminologist."I didn't use help books at all," she



said. Her father Hitesh is a businessman, and her mother Preeti, is a homemaker. She enjoys sketching, painting and films.From Sacred Heart School, Nandika Sarin scored 98.2 per cent marks, with 100 marks each in physics and chemistry.The 18-year-old daughter of doctors Jatin and Rimpi Sarin, Nandika, plans to pursue a medical career in research or teaching. A Bharatnatyam dancer and film enthusiast, she believes in complete dedication.Scoring 96 per cent without any coaching, Ishika Panghal of Bhavan Vidyalaya, Panchkula, relied purely on self-study. The daughter of Colonel Balwan Singh, a Kargil war veteran, and homemaker Yamuna Panghal, Ishika, aspires to become a doctor. She lives in Sector 6, Panchkula, and had scored 97.6 per cent in her Class X boards. Her brother, Lieutenant Dev Panghal, is in the Indian Army. Ishika enjoys dancing, swimming, painting, and reading.In the arts stream, Manya Sharma of Sacred Heart scored 95.6 per cent marks. Her father, Jiten Sharma, serves as Special Secretary in the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Inspired by her elder sister Somya, a law graduate, Manya aims to serve in the judiciary."Helping my mother while studying taught me time management," said the 18-year-old. Her mother, Sadhna Sharma, is a homemaker.Jastej Singh Chhina, a Class XII medical student and topper of St John's High School, Chandigarh, is a resident of Sector 64, Mohali. He steadily increased his study hours with a focus on consistency. Now awaiting his NEET results, the 18-year-old, who enjoys playing guitar and badminton, aspires to pursue a career in medicine.Whether driven by academic ambition or family legacy, these students highlight how consistency, discipline, and a strong support system can lead to extraordinary success.

# Haryana to probe all abortions of more than 12-week pregnancies

GNS News Agency,May 20

Battling declining sex ratio and amid concerns over illegal pre-natal sex determination and abortions, Haryana's health authorities have now decided to scrutinize all abortions beyond 12 weeks to ensure compliance with legal provisionsThe decision follows alarming statistics — in 2024, the state's sex ratio fell to 910 girls per 1,000 boys, the lowest in eight years.

The Haryana Director General of Health Services issued a directive Tuesday, instructing all civil surgeons to maintain records of abortions beyond 12 weeks and conduct thorough investigations to verify compliance with legal provisions. The directive is part of preparations for a video conference scheduled Wednesday, to be chaired by Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Sudhir Rajpal, where officials will discuss efforts to combat illegal pre-natal sex determination and abortions.A senior official involved in the ongoing crackdown stated that investigations aim to assess whether abortions were legally and medically justified. Under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, abortions up to 20 weeks require approval from one doctor. Between 20 and 24 weeks, opinions from two doctors are required, with terminations permitted only for specific categories, including survivors of sexual assault and women with physical disabilities. "There are concerns that some of these abortions could be driven by the desire for gender selection. Hence we have ordered an investigation by CMOs of such abortions in their respective districts," said Sudhir Rajpal.A Special Task Force (STF) recently uncovered widespread use of illegally procured MTP kits from Goa, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, used by couples seeking sex-selective abortions despite strict bans.To curb such practices, authorities will assign Asha or Anganwadi workers as "Saheli" (female companions) to counsel pregnant women with one or more female children. The Haryana government has identified 62,000 such women and is urging them to avoid illegal gender determination tests, which are punishable offenses.Health authorities are also targeting illegal abortions performed by BAMS and BHMS doctors, particularly female practitioners. Civil surgeons have been directed to maintain a list of such doctors engaged in private practice.In the video conference, the officials will also discuss decoy operations aimed at enforcing the MTP Act, the PNDT Act (which bans sex determination) and the Asisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act

Between May 6 and May 12, Haryana authorities con-



## Battling declining sex ratio and amid concerns over illegal pre-natal sex determination and abortions, Haryana's health authorities have now decided to scrutinize all abortions beyond 12 weeks to ensure compliance with legal provisions.

ducted 19 raids had been conducted across the state over the illegal sale of MTP kits and registered 17 FIRs were registered. In addition, 13 shops had been sealed for illegal practices and 145 MTP kits were seized.After the formation of the State Task Force (STF), 43 FIRs have been registered, 21 shops have been sealed and 6,200 MTP kits have been seized in Haryana.In Panipat, a traditional birth attendant (Dai) sold an MTP kit for Rs 2,000, leading authorities to seize the kit along with additional medicines. Legal action was initiated under the MTP Act. Meanwhile, in Rohtak, a chemist shop was raided after a salesman sold an MTP kit for Rs 1,000—officials confiscated 18 kits, and the shop was sealed. In Manesar, a chemist was booked for supplying an MTP kit illegally, adding to the growing crackdown on unauthorized abortion procedures. In Panchkula, a woman was admitted to a civil hospital in critical condition after taking abortion pills provided by a quack known as "Bengali Baba", prompting immediate police intervention.



# Pakistan High Commission official expelled for espionage, linked to case on leak of Army movements



GNS News Agency,May 20

Amid continuing tensions between India and Pakistan, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) declared an official of the Pakistan High Commission “persona non grata” (PNG), expelling him for espionage. The decision concerning the official, who was not named by either side, was conveyed to Pakistan Charge d’Affaires Saad Warraich, who was issued a demarche, asking the staffer to leave India within 24 hours. “The Government of India has declared a Pakistani official, working at the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, persona non grata for indulging in activities not in keeping with his official status in India,” the MEA statement said, without providing any details of what the staffer is believed to have done.

Sources told The Hindu that the expelled High Commission staffer was linked to two people arrested in Punjab for “espionage activities” by Punjab Police on the weekend for “leaking sensitive information regarding Indian Army movements” to Pakistan. The case is significant given the massive troop movements and cross-border military actions since May 7, including of the Indian Army and Air Force, as well as the build-up of troops along the border.In a statement on Sunday (May 11, 2025), the police in Malerkotla said that the two accused had been giving the information to a “Pakistan-based handler” and receiving

payments through online transactions in exchange. The police said the network of other local operatives connected to them was also being identified, and a First Information Report (FIR) was registered in the case.“This operation marks a significant step in dismantling cross-border espionage networks and reinforces our commitment to national security. Further investigation will be undertaken as per established protocol, with a focus on tracing the financial trail and identifying additional operatives and linkages within the network,” the Punjab Police said in its statement.Pakistan did not respond to the announcement, nor was it clear whether it would retaliate or try to mirror the action. In the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, India expelled defence attaches from the Pakistan High Commission and reduced the permitted staff strength from 55 to 30, and Pakistan had done the same, sending back diplomats from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad and scaling down the mission.Despite the ceasefire understanding in place since Saturday (May 10, 2025), ties between Delhi and Islamabad remained acrimonious. On Tuesday (May 13, 2025), the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a sharp statement responding to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s speech to the nation on Monday (May 12, 2025) night, in which Mr. Modi extolled Operation Sindoor as a major success, and said that India had set a “new normal” for Pakistan’s behaviour, where any cross-border terror attack would be treated as an act of war and Pakistan would face retaliation for it from India.

“Pakistan totally rejects this assertion,” the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement, adding that the norm would be the U.N. Charter, and said Pakistan would “closely monitor India’s actions and behaviour in this regard”, calling on the international community to do the same. Reacting to the statement, the MEA said that Pakistan had “nurtured terrorism on an industrial scale”, and could not “escape the consequences” of its actions. “There is now a new normal. The sooner Pakistan gets used to it, the better,” the Ministry’s spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in response to a question.

# Zelenskyy urges Trump to make Putin meeting happen

GNS News Agency,May 20

Mr. Zelenskyy said in Kyiv that the West should impose massive sanctions if Mr. Putin skips the meeting, emphasising that he would do “everything” possible to make it happen and secure a ceasefire.U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio will be in the US delegation at the talks in Istanbul which “could be some pretty good results,” Mr. Trump said in Riyadh as he started a four-day Middle East trip.The Kremlin has refused to say whether Mr. Putin will travel to Turkiye, after he himself proposed Russia-Ukraine talks in a weekend Kremlin address.“This is his war,” Mr. Zelenskyy said, “therefore, the negotiations should be with him”.Any meeting between Russian and Ukrainian officials would be the first direct negotiations since the early months of Moscow’s February 2022 invasion.Mr. Trump came to office in January promising a swift end to the war, but has become increasingly frustrated at what he sees as the failure of Kyiv and Moscow to compromise over the bloodshed.Mr. Trump said Monday (May 12, 2025) that he was “thinking” about going to the talks.“I do not know the U.S. President’s decision, but if he confirms his participation, I think it would give additional impetus for Mr. Putin to come,” Mr. Zelenskyy told a press conference.

“Putin does not want the war to end, does not want a ceasefire, does not want any negotiations,” Mr. Zelenskyy said, adding however that he “will do everything to ensure that this meeting takes place”.Russian airstrikes killed two people in Ukraine’s eastern region of Kharkiv, which is on the border with Russia, authorities said.Mr. Zelenskyy urged the United States to hit Russia with its “strongest” ever sanctions should Mr. Putin not turn up — saying a refusal would be “a clear signal that they do not want and are not going to end the war”.Mr. Putin’s spokesman refused to say who Moscow would send to the talks.Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that Russia would use the talks to address its key aims and the “root causes” of the conflict — the “de-Nazification” of Ukraine and the “incorporation of new territories into the Russian Federation”.Kyiv and the West reject those narratives, calling Russia’s invasion an imperial-style land grab.Tens of thousands have been killed and millions forced to flee their homes since Russia invaded Ukraine, while Moscow’s army now controls around one-fifth of the country — including the Crimean



peninsula, annexed in 2014.Putin doesn’t ‘dare’ meetRussia did not explicitly respond to Ukraine and the leaders of France, Britain, Germany and Poland calling for Moscow to agree a 30-day ceasefire, though the Kremlin blasted European “ultimatums” in an apparent rejection.German Chancellor Friedrich Merz warned Russia on Tuesday (May 13, 2025) that it would face fresh European sanctions if there was no “real progress” this week towards peace in Ukraine, as he urged Mr. Putin to meet Mr. Zelenskyy.French President Emmanuel Macron said that Europe would impose new sanctions if Moscow did not agree to the 30-day ceasefire.The European Union has already imposed 16 rounds of sanctions on Russia since Mr. Putin invaded Ukraine in February 2022.Mr. Macron, who has developed a warm working relationship with Mr. Zelenskyy, said that “Ukrainians have the clear-sightedness to say they do not have the capacity to retake everything that has been taken since 2014.”The EU’s top diplomat Kaja Kallas questioned whether Mr. Putin had the nerve to show up.“I think it’s a good move if they sit down,” Kallas told a democracy conference in Copenhagen. “But I don’t think he dares, Putin.”Mr. Zelenskyy said he would meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara on Wednesday (May 14, 2025) or Thursday (May 15, 2025) and was ready to meet Mr. Putin either there or in Istanbul.Russian and Ukrainian officials held talks in Istanbul in March 2022 aimed at halting the conflict but did not strike a deal.Contact between the warring sides has been extremely limited since, mainly dedicated to humanitarian issues like prisoner-of-war exchanges and the return of killed soldiers’ bodies.

# Justice comes closer to Rayalaseema

GNS News Agency,May 20

The Andhra Pradesh government has expedited the process of setting up the High Court Bench in Kurnool and has identified buildings to accommodate 15 judges. It may be recalled that the State Assembly had passed a unanimous resolution for the setting up of a High Court Bench in Kurnool in November 2024.The government’s decision to set up a Bench in Kurnool has been welcomed by everyone in the Rayalaseema region, particularly those from the legal fraternity, especially given that the previous YSR Congress Party government, which had proposed Kurnool as the judicial capital, had failed to keep this promise due to various legal issues.

Discontented with the YSRCP government, the legal fraternity had viewed its three-capital proposal as a political move to derail the grand project of Amaravati, the capital city mooted by N. Chandrababu Naidu when he was in power between 2014 to 2019. While former Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy had promised that the three capitals proposal would decentralise development, he was unable to implement it. Now, a High Court Bench in Kurnool will decentralise judicial administration since cases from Rayalaseema constitute an estimated 33% of all cases in the Andhra Pradesh High Court.Unlike shifting the entire High Court from Amaravati to Kurnool, setting up a Bench is a relatively easy process. Though a virtual mode of hearing had been made available earlier, lawyers from Rayalaseema still had to travel for more than 8-9 hours to file mandatory petitions and regular appeals. Now, petitioners from the four undivided Rayalaseema districts of Kurnool, Kadapa, Anantapur and Chittoor will be able to approach the Bench easily, instead of travelling to Amaravati.The Bench will serve other purposes too. As there will be cases pertaining to service matters and labour laws, branches of government departments too will soon come up in Kurnool, taking administration nearer to the people. As a senior High Court lawyer explained, both justice and administration will be brought closer to the people.

The setting up of a Bench is also expected to spur

commercial activity in the region. Kurnool is connected to other regions by road, rail, and air. The presence of judges and government officials, and visits by senior lawyers from various parts of the country, will propel the growth of the region. The hospitality sector is expected to flourish in the region and add to the potential of the tourism sector in and around Kurnool.Meanwhile, advocates from Visakhapatnam have also brought to the fore the demand for a Bench in Visakhapatnam. Advocates from north Andhra say that this demand has persisted since 1993 and that they too will raise their pitch for a Bench. They argue that Visakhapatnam houses several educational institutions for the legal fraternity, such as the Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University, the Andhra University College of Law, and the GITAM School of Law, and therefore merits a Bench. The Visakhapatnam Bar Association has more than 5,000 advocates, including 1,200 women.

Whether the government considers the demand or not, the proposal is unlikely to be opposed by the legal fraternity from other regions. This is because there are States which have multiple Benches of the High Court. In Karnataka, the principal seat is located in Bengaluru, while additional Benches can be found in Dharwad and Gulbarga. In Madhya Pradesh, the principal seat of the High Court is in Jabalpur while additional Benches are located in Gwalior and Indore.The NDA government will find itself in an advantageous position if it completes the process of setting up the Kurnool Bench. The previous government’s announcement that the High Court and other judicial institutions will be shifted to Kurnool had raised the hopes of the people, but nothing finally came of it. This could also be one of the reasons why last year, in the Assembly elections, the voters of Rayalaseema gave the NDA a clear mandate. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) alone clinched 42 Assembly seats in the region that had, until then, been a stronghold of the Congress and later the YSRCP. The TDP and its allies can now further cement their position in the region by developing it in various ways. The setting up of the High Court Bench is a crucial first step towards this aim.

# With a new Pope, an understanding of Catholicism in India



The conclave to elect the new pontiff began on May 7. The election of the Pope takes place through an electoral college composed of Cardinals from around the world. This time, the electoral college included 135 Cardinals from 70 countries, with four Cardinals from India, the country’s highest-ever tally.Among all Christian denominations, Catholics comprise the largest population, forming 15.9% of the global population and a large share of the Indian Christian population as well. The Vatican is a spiritual symbol for this denomination. In this context, this is an analysis of the Catholic denomination, its religious behaviour, and its demographic share among Indian Christians.Chart 1 shows the denomination-wise share of Christians in IndiaAccording to data from the PEW Research Center, about 37% of Christians in India are Catholic, 17.9% are Baptist, 9.5% are Presbyterian, and 24.3% belong to other denominations. About 10% of Christians do not affiliate with any denomination.It shows that nearly 75% of general category Christians, 16.8% of Scheduled Caste Christians, 23.7% of Christian tribal people, 55.5% of Other Backward Classes Christians, and 23.5% of Christians from the Most Backward Classes are Catholic.

Though the majority of Indian Catholics belong to upper castes, for the first time, a Dalit, Anthony Poola, the

Archbishop of Hyderabad, was among the four Indian cardinals who voted for the new Pope. He was appointed as a cardinal in 2022 by Pope Francis.Map 3 shows the State-wise share of Catholics within the total Christian population of each State.A State marked as zero indicates that it has Christians, but no Catholics. A majority of the Christian population in Nagaland and Mizoram is Catholic. In Meghalaya, it is 90.8% and in Goa, it is 58.7%.To measure aggregate religiosity in India, I developed an Aggregate Religiosity Index that captures the religiosity of all major religious groups in India from 1989 to 2023, based on 15 indicators. The findings reveal that all religious groups in India exhibit high levels of religiosity. Tables 4 and 5 provide a breakdown of the most recent religiosity levels (in % terms) among Christian denominations across selected indicators.Table 4 presents the religious behaviour of Christian denominations in India. Figures in %More than 90% of Catholic respondents consider religion important, believe in God and participate in religious festivals. Public expressions of faith, such as wearing a religious pendant (74.6%) and attending services (59.9%), are also common. However, only a small proportion (11.2%) actively follows religious leaders. This suggests that while personal religiosity remains high, institutional influence may be limited.

Table 5 presents the social, democratic, and economic behaviour of Indian Christians. The first column corresponds to Catholics.Within Christianity, Catholics exhibit a comparatively softer attitude towards religion than Presbyterians and Christians who do not affiliate with any denomination. Even Baptists and Christians from other denominations are stricter than Catholics when it comes to opposing inter-religious marriages. Catholics tend to have higher literacy levels compared to members of all other Christian denominations except Presbyterians.Mohd Arshid is a research scholar studying the political economy of religion in India at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, JNU, New Delhi

# Judgment day in EU chief’s Covid vaccine texts case

GNS News Agency,May 20

A top court is to rule on Wednesday (May 14, 2025) on whether the EU failed the transparency test by declining to release text messages sent by Ursula von der Leyen to the head of Pfizer as the bloc tried to secure Covid vaccines.The case before the Court of Justice of the European Union (EUCJ) is seen as a test for the EU Commission president, whose governance has at times been accused of centralised and opaque decision-making.At its centre are elusive exchanges between Ms. von der Leyen and Albert Bourla, chief executive of Pfizer — which was chosen by the bloc as its main vaccine supplier at the height of the pandemic.

The New York Times, which revealed the existence of the messages, sued the commission in 2023 after Brussels declined to produce them following a freedom of information request.The commission argued it could not find the texts because they had not been recorded and archived — something it says is done only when the content is deemed “substantive”.“The commission never denied the existence of text message exchanges,” an EU official said. “What it was argued... is that these exchanges did not contain important information”.The New York Times has asked the lower chamber of the Luxembourg-based EUCJ to quash the commission’s decision not to hand it the messages. The verdict can be appealed.

MaladministrationThe EU moved swiftly after the Covid pandemic emerged in 2020 to secure vaccines for member countries to buy for their citizens and residents at a time of massive global demand for the shots.But many aspects of the procurement from Pfizer have been kept confidential, leading to claims of a lack of transparency — and several legal proceedings in Belgium and with EU courts.“This case presents a very important issue: whether officials may evade public transparency by communicating via text messages rather than more traditional means,”



a lawyer for The Times, Bondine Kloostra, said in her opening arguments in November.Lawyers for the 27-nation bloc have argued the private messages did not constitute part of the vaccine negotiation.They might have involved side issues, such as Ms. von der Leyen and Bourla agreeing to speak on a certain day, at a certain time, they suggested.Commission workers, including its chief, do not have an obligation to record all their emails, texts and instant messaging chats, as this would be “materially impossible”, an EU official said.Emails are automatically deleted after six months, he noted.A duty to archive arises only when such messages contain important information that is not “short-lived” and relates to the commission’s policies, activities and decisions.Such assessment is done in the first instance by the person receiving or sending the texts, so in the case before the court by Ms. von der Leyen.The commission’s lawyer, Paolo Stancanelli, said in November that its services asked to track down the messages after The Times reached out to the EU chief’s cabinet, which replied it was unable to find them.In January 2022, the EU’s ombudsman described this as “maladministration”, saying the messages should have been subject to the EU’s public transparency rules for official documents.

# Israel hits Gaza hospital in raid Hamas says killed journalist

GNS News Agency,May 20

Israel’s military said it struck a Gaza hospital housing militants in a raid that, according to Hamas, killed a journalist being treated after an Israeli attack last month.The strike, which Hamas said happened at dawn, ended a brief pause in fighting to allow the release of a U.S.-Israeli hostage.The military said in a Telegram post that “significant Hamas terrorists” had been “operating from within a command and control centre” at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza’s main city.“The compound was used by the terrorists to plan and execute terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians and IDF (army) troops,” it said.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said the strike killed two people and wounded several others, while the Hamas government media office said journalist Hassan Aslih was “assassinated”.Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the Gaza civil defence agency, said that “the Israeli army bombed the surgery building at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis at dawn on Tuesday, killing journalist Hassan Aslih”.Aslih, head of the Alam24 news outlet, had been at the hospital for treatment after being wounded in a strike on April 7, according to Ismail al-Thawabtah, director general of the Hamas media office.Two other journalists, Ahmed Mansur and Hilmi al-Faqaawi, were killed in that bombing that hit a media tent, it was reported at the time.The Israeli military said the April strike had targeted Aslih, alleging he operated for Hamas “under the guise of a journalist”.

The Committee to Protect Journalists had condemned the attack.AFP footage from Nasser Hospital after Tuesday’s strike showed smoke rising from the facility as rescuers searched through the rubble to the light of torches.A hospital worker who gave his name as Abu Ghali said the Israeli bombardment “does not differentiate between civilians and military targets”.“This is a civilian hospital that receives injured people around the clock,” he told AFP.Israel had paused military operations in Gaza to allow for the release of Edan Alexander, a 21-year-old US-Israeli soldier who had been held hostage since October 2023.Alexander, believed to be the last surviving hostage with US citizenship, was released Monday ahead of a Middle East visit by US President Donald Trump.Israel resumed its military offensive in Gaza on March 18 after a two-month truce in its war against Hamas, which was triggered by the Palestinian group’s October 7 attack.The attack on southern Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,218 people, mostly civilians. .The



Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Monday at least 2,749 people have been killed since Israel resumed its campaign, bringing the overall death toll since the war broke out to 52,862.

## Why do birds fly in V shape?

Just like how takeoff and landing are crucial for an airplane, the same applies to birds. Migratory birds often fly in a V-shape, a process known as bird flight. This unique movement is guided by the principles of aerodynamics, specifically lift and drag, helping them travel efficiently over long distances.Birds like geese and pelicans fly in a V-shape to conserve energy during long migrations. The lead bird works the hardest, facing the most wind resistance, while the ones behind take advantage of the airflow it creates.A study on ibises revealed that these birds follow precise flight patterns, just as scientists predicted! Researchers fitted ibises with trackers and found that they fly about a metre behind and to the side of the bird in front—exactly where the upwash gives them the most lift. Interestingly, the birds don’t stick to one position—some prefer the right, others the left, and they regularly swap places. Unlike airplanes with fixed pilots, these flocks have no single leader!As a bird flaps its wings, the air behind it moves in two ways: some is pushed downward (downwash), while some at the sides is pushed upward (upwash). Birds flying slightly behind and to the side position themselves in this upwash zone, where the rising air gives them a small lift. This reduces their effort, allowing them to fly longer distances with less energy—almost like catching a free ride on the air currents created by their flock-mates!



# Ecology is the world’s permanent economy



The phrase, “Ecology is the permanent economy”, made popular by environmentalist Sunderlal Bahuguna, is much more than a slogan. It is a profound reminder of the foundational truth that human prosperity is inextricably linked to ecological health. It is true that economic development without exploiting natural resources and economic stability without conserving them are impossible. As we face serious challenges such as climate change and the rapid loss of biodiversity, we must ask ourselves whether we have truly understood and embraced this idea.

Striking the right balanceUnderstanding nature’s complexity is at the heart of science. In this pursuit, humans have made tremendous efforts through observation, experimentation, and modelling, as this understanding is crucial for addressing environmental challenges such as climate change and for informing sustainable practices. While these scientific discussions are valuable, there is an even more urgent and fundamental truth we need to focus on: ecology is the real economy — our survival, security and progress depend on it. In simple terms, this might be the clearest way to define sustainability — finding the right balance between protecting the environment and supporting economic development. Without this balance, neither the environment nor the economy can thrive in the long run.

Despite being part of the animal kingdom, human evolution, through the course of civilisation, has led to a growing disconnection from nature. This disconnection with nature has been identified as a reason for the ongoing biodiversity loss (the recent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services or IPBES Transformative Change report). In the early stages of human history, a nomadic lifestyle compelled individuals to rely on and exploit natural resources solely for their basic, day-to-day survival needs. Over time, this individual-centric resource use evolved into collective consumption aimed at meeting the needs of growing communities. As human societies expanded and organised themselves into nations, this demand scaled further to cater to the needs of entire countries. Eventually, this progression gave rise to global competition, where nations began to exploit nature not only to satisfy present demands but also to secure resources for future development. Unlike humans, no other species in the animal kingdom exhibits this pattern of large-scale, anticipatory exploitation of natural resources. Other

animals live in harmony with their environments, taking only what they need for immediate survival, without disturbing the long-term balance of the ecosystems they inhabit.

The ever-intensifying cycle of human consumption and global competition has placed an unprecedented strain on the planet’s ecosystems and significantly accelerated the pace of climate change — a natural phenomenon now dangerously amplified by human activities. In response to these growing environmental challenges, nature-based solutions have been widely advocated in global conservation efforts. These approaches aim to leverage the inherent resilience of ecosystems to mitigate climate impacts, restore biodiversity, and support sustainable development. However, a paradox emerges: we continue to exploit nature to satisfy our needs and greed, while simultaneously relying on the same natural systems to act as a buffer against the consequences of such exploitation. This dual dependence risks creating deeper ecological imbalances and may further complicate the ability to address the climate crisis effectively. In this context, rather than merely attempting to understand the intricate complexity of ecological systems from a scientific standpoint, it is far more critical to recognise a fundamental truth — that ecology is the permanent economy. Acknowledging this principle shifts our perspective from short-term exploitation to long-term stewardship, positioning ecological health not as a constraint, but as the very foundation of human survival, economic stability, and climate resilience. This realisation is not just timely — it is essential to confronting the ongoing environmental crisis and shaping a sustainable future. It is only through this reframing that humanity can move from reactive conservation to proactive planetary sustainability. The climate crisis is not just a scientific challenge. It is a moral and existential reckoning with the ecological foundations of our existence. The need to reconnect with nature

Climate change and change in distribution patterns of biological diversity are not new for planet earth. However, the rate at which it is now occurring is detrimental to the planet’s biological diversity, including people, due to past unsustainable developmental activities by humans. Therefore, the change we need must come from within. Since all developmental activities across the globe are aimed at fulfilling human needs, adopting a sustainable lifestyle is every individual’s responsibility in order to ensure the success of global sustainability initiatives. To achieve this, we must realise that humans are an integral part of nature. Though technological advancements have distanced modern lifestyles from nature, one unique natural trait that humans possess is the power to reconnect with nature using emotion (which still lives within us). Thus, future conservation efforts should be designed to strengthen our emotional bond with nature. To ignite this, a realisation that “ecology is the permanent economy”, is more imperative than merely understanding the ecological complexity that exists in nature. P. Ragavan is a scientist with an interest in taxonomy, ecology and the biogeochemistry of mangroves and seagrasses. He is working on the conservation and management of mangroves and carbon dynamics in the blue carbon habitats of India. The views expressed are personal

## Boom in foreign university branch campuses: Can they deliver quality education?



There has been much debate in India about attracting foreign universities to set up branch campuses in India since the University Grants Commission (UGC) established regulations in 2023. A few have set up shop: two Australian universities — Deakin University and the University of Wollongong — in Gujarat’s GIFT City, and the U.K.’s University of Southampton in Gurugram, near Delhi. The momentum has continued to grow in recent months, with institutions such as the University of Surrey, Queen’s University Belfast, and Coventry University announcing plans to establish campuses. Australia’s Western Sydney University is reportedly exploring a presence in Noida, near Delhi.

In another landmark move, the Illinois Institute of Technology recently received formal approval from the UGC to establish a campus in Mumbai, making it the first U.S. university to receive such authorisation. The University of Western Australia has also signalled its intention to open campuses in Tamil Nadu as well as Maharashtra. All these developments mark a significant turning point in India’s higher education sector. Deakin and Wollongong, which already began classes last year, and the University of Southampton, which is going to welcome its first batch of students this academic year, have moved ahead quickly, too quick perhaps. While this rapid pace may signal strong intent and enthusiasm, it also raises many concerns. Challenges to the ‘branch’ idea

Globally, transnational education is navigating an increasingly uncertain landscape. This may be one of the most difficult global environments for universities to establish branches. The country with the largest number of overseas university branches globally, the U.S., is in complete disarray due to the attacks on higher education from the Trump administration. The last thing on the minds of most American university leaders are foreign initiatives. Therefore, the Illinois Institute of Technology’s decision to establish a campus in India should be seen only as a rare exception in the current landscape. The other major English-speaking countries—the UK, Australia, and Canada—all face severe financial challenges. European universities may be more interested.

Even institutions willing to enter the Indian market will have to overcome numerous domestic challenges. A major issue for foreign university branch campuses entering India is navigating India’s highly competitive higher educa-

tion landscape. While foreign branch campuses may carry significant prestige in their home countries, most of the foreign institutions seeking to enter the Indian market are not top schools in their own countries. In India, they risk being seen as just one among several “elite” options available to students. These branch campuses follow a market-driven model, offering programmes in high-demand fields such as Business, Computer Science, and Data Analytics. While this approach may be financially strategic, the narrow academic focus risks making them indistinguishable from India’s better-performing private colleges and universities, which already offer similar programmes. Therefore, the real challenge is not merely to meet demand, but to establish a clear academic identity. Without this, they risk being perceived as little more than diploma mills, ultimately undermining the reputation of the very universities they represent. It is also relevant that most of the branches already established or planning to be established are not comprehensive universities with diverse offerings and research focus, but rather are small specialised schools.

India already boasts renowned public institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), which are actively expanding their global engagement and research capabilities. Notable collaborations—like IIT Delhi with the University of Queensland and IIT Bombay with Monash University—have set strong precedents for international research partnerships. Furthermore, a growing number of elite and semi-elite private universities in India now offer joint and double degree programs in collaboration with foreign institutions. In this dynamic environment, foreign branch campuses cannot rely solely on the strength of their international brand.

No substitute for substanceA concerning trend among some international branch campuses already established in India is their disproportionate reliance on marketing strategies—digital campaigns and branding exercises—often at the expense of academic investment. While marketing has its place, it cannot substitute for substance. Today’s students and parents are increasingly discerning. They closely examine publicly available information on faculty credentials, curriculum design, industry relevance, and student support systems. Flashy campaigns without academic depth or meaningful student engagement will not build lasting trust.

## In India, education without employment



In defending the educational policies of the present government, it has been claimed that education has been freed from the shackles of previous governments: Atal Tinkering Labs, coding right from middle school, the recruitment of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe teachers, and the empowerment of Muslim girl students. But primarily, it is stated that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 “will enable an educational renaissance”. In all these utterances, the seminal point that is forgotten is that our educational system remains clueless about the shape-shifting marketplace — namely, the employability of our graduates as a workforce.

Education has many purposes. It enables, it enervates and elevates. As Vivekananda said, education empowers one to stand on one’s own feet. After 75 years of foolishly gambling excellence for equity, India has squandered both. Young people are unable to find meaningful employment that is commensurate with any training that they may have received. The degrees they have are not worth the paper on which they are printed. It is irrelevant that these problems were created or ignored by the Congress pot or the Bharatiya Janata Party kettle. The present lawfully elected government has the responsibility to cleanse these Augean stables. Never mind that the NEP 2000 is the fourth such document that was supposed to do this after the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948); the Kothari Commission (1966) and the Officers’ Commission (1985). A good education is one with an optimum of depth and breadth. Depth alone imparts the technical expertise for employability. Breadth provides flexibility in a rapidly changing Artificial Intelligence-driven ecosystem, where those in the job market need to constantly re-train themselves to avoid extinction.

A high rate of educated unemploymentThere is barely any evidence, four years on, that any of the NEP recommendations have been put into effect. In 2025, India’s overall graduate employability rate is 42.6%, which is practically the same as the 44.3% of 2023. Similarly, knowledge-intensive employment in the year 2023 only stands at 11.72%. Multiple entries and exits, a hallmark of NEP, have only created low-quality and poorly paying e-commerce jobs.

The high rate of educated unemployment today shows that education in India is actually disempowering students. The NEP is a retreat to the Vannevar Bush model of the mid-20th century U.S. without its financial cushioning. The NEP is outdated and financially unviable in the India of 2025. With lip service paid to ‘new’ ideas such as Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), mother tongue learning, changing history textbooks, flexible curricula and a complete absence of methodology to effect its recommendations, the NEP is a dead fish in the water. It depends on course choice alone to correct imbalances, notwithstanding that the course content itself may be unworkable. It is noteworthy that there was not a single member from industry or the business sectors in the committee that drafted the NEP. A good university seamlessly integrates breadth with depth. It is claimed that there has been a remarkable improvement from the past in that 11 Indian universities are ranked in the top QS World University Rankings (WUR) 500, clearly echoing the selective narrative of Nunzio Quacquarelli, CEO of QS, who was generous in his praise of India, while releasing WUR 25. Mr. Quacquarelli quoted the 318% increase in the performance of Indian universities, as the highest growth among the G-20 nations, quietly avoiding mention of both India’s low ranking (above 100) and low publication quality. To wit, India’s Category Normalized Citation Impact (CNCI) rank (an indicator of publications quality) during 2008-19 which was 17th among 19 countries in the G-20, inched up

admirably to 16th position in 2024. Such ‘increases’ have been touted by the Ministry in its Press Information Bureau press release of February 13, 2025. It has also been claimed that this is the year when Indian universities showcased the highest performance improvement among all G-20 nations. It is unbelievable that in this digital era, the government has failed to recognise and understand the commercial implications of QS, THE and similar agencies and the reasons for their skewed and deceptive analyses.

A missing transparency on projects

Mega research projects were carried out with great fanfare and amidst a media blitz in the past. These included the New Millennium project (CSIR-NMILL), the \$10 Akash tablet project, and the IMPRINT (IMPActing Research INnovation and Technology) project (MHRD).

These projects were in the limelight for years, but the public is not aware of the emergence of the intended products or processes from these projects, on which hundreds of crores of taxpayer money has been spent. It does not matter whether these projects were initiated or shut down by the Congress or the BJP. What we, as taxpayers, want to know is if these projects were value for money.

India’s Global Innovation Index (GII) represents the innovation capabilities of India. Our ranks in 2014, 2015 and 2024 were 76, 81, and 39. Malaysia and Türkiye lead India in GI with ranks of 33 and 37, respectively. The GI reveals the world’s top S&T clusters in two innovation metrics: published patent applications and published scientific articles. India has four clusters with ranks of 56 (Bengaluru), 63 (Delhi), 82 (Chennai) and 84 (Mumbai). The Bengaluru cluster is often touted as an unparalleled rival to Silicon Valley, particularly with respect to the numbers of startups and Unicorns. However, its 56th rank needs to be compared to the sixth-ranked Silicon Valley cluster. In terms of cluster intensity of the top 100, Bengaluru at 94 followed by Chennai at 96, Delhi at 98, and Mumbai at 99 pale in comparison to San Jose-San Francisco (Silicon Valley) at 2 and Cambridge at 1. The number of Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) applications per capita and scientific publications per capita for the Silicon Valley cluster are 7885 and 9211, respectively. The corresponding numbers for the Bengaluru cluster are 313 and 1077. Samsung Electronics (South Korean) is the leading patentee in Bengaluru. No further comment is necessary.

The subject of start-upsThere is no point talking about start-ups, when we do not know what they mean. Start-ups in China, the U.S. and Israel tackle semiconductor technology, how to refine rare earth elements with ecological sensitivity and how to make metformin cheaper. In contrast, our government lauds new apps that hawk food products. India cannot have start-ups without indigenous technology. It cannot have indigenous technology without indigenous science. It cannot have indigenous science without indigenous quality education, sans political agendas. Two-wheeler kiranas are not startups.

Contrary to the thinking of the Education Ministry, the University Grants Commission (UGC) remains an instrument of control. It always has been and there is no justification for this antediluvian organisation to have both regulatory and financial control over universities. Can the UGC present a single piece of hard data showing that changes in pedagogy and syllabus have had a positive effect? In other words, how relevant are these changes, if any, to industry, skilling, and employability? India would probably be better off if the UGC was shut down. Sitting UGC chairs, vice-chancellors, directors and ministers need not appear in national dailies peddling their policies and propaganda ad nauseam. Their job is to execute policy, not talk about it, and to ensure decent employability for the youth. It is our job, as independent academics, to write in the newspapers, if they do not do their job. “When stupidity is considered patriotism, it is unsafe to be intelligent” — Isaac AsimovGautam R. Desiraju is Professor Emeritus, Indian Institute of Science and Distinguished Professor, UPES Dehradun, with a citations-to-publications ratio of 102.5. Mirle Surappa is INSA Senior Scientist at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, former Vice-Chancellor, Anna University, former Director, IIT Ropar and former Dean, Indian Institute of Science.

## A death that spotlights irrigation problems

On March 13, 2025, Kailash Arjun Nagare, a 2020 Young Farmer Award recipient, from Maharashtra, died by suicide, citing unaddressed irrigation demands. While India reports the highest water usage in agriculture globally, access to water for irrigation remains a contentious issue. Nagare’s death points towards the inequity in distribution, with social inequalities, water governance mechanisms, and policies determining the contours of allocation. The problem of water scarcity in India is thus multifaceted, indicating the co-existence of actual physical shortage with economic scarcity due to inequitable access and management.

Untenable expansionThe agricultural sector accounts for almost 80% of the water withdrawal in India. Every year, 688 billion cubic metres of water is consumed by the farm sector, the highest in the world. Irrigation is an inevitable input for increasing agricultural production. However, its expansion has been highly untenable. The majority of the area under water-guzzling crops such as rice, wheat, and sugarcane is currently in the water-scarce north-west and sub-tropical belts of the country. According to a study published in Nature Water (2024), India alone accounted for 36% of global unsustainable irrigation expansion that happened between 2000 and 2015, with environmental and socio-economic implications.

Even as irrigation has been proven to drive economic prosperity, various studies have reported that uneven progress has reinforced existing inequalities, between and within States. Considering that ground water is the dominant water source for irrigation in India, property rights, energy pricing policy, and the existence of well-functioning water markets have remained critical in determining water access to farms. Accordingly, while inequity has declined in canal, tank, and well irrigated systems, it has increased in the tube well irrigated system. Marginalised groups, especially women, are also disproportionately affected by increasing deprivation and decline of water tables with climate change intensifying disparities. The environmental and financial consequences of aggressive groundwater extraction have also been profound. Due to over extraction, almost 17% of India’s groundwater assessment units are deemed ‘over-exploited’ while 3.9% are in a ‘critical’ state. Intensive pumping has also resulted in massive energy consumption resulting in excessive carbon emissions. As per the latest data, 45.3–62.3 MMT of annual carbon emissions is attributed to groundwater irrigation, which constitutes 8-11% of India’s total carbon emissions. The operat-



ing efficiency and water use efficiency has also remained sub-optimal in Indian agriculture. While irrigation systems in India report an operating efficiency of 38%, in developed countries it is 55%. Coupled with misaligned cropping patterns and inefficient water use practices, irrigation water productivity (IWP) has also remained low in the major irrigation belts of the country. For example, Punjab, which claims the highest land productivity in rice, has one of the lowest IWPs for the crop. Similarly, in sugar cane, Tamil Nadu records the highest land productivity with IWP being dismally low. Besides water wastage, the adoption of non-optimal water management practices have been causing other negative externalities such as high GHG emissions as well. For example, with continuous flooding of rice as the major water management practice, paddy rice is the biggest contributor to global cropland emissions.

Considering the over-exploitation of ground water resources, impending water scarcity and environmental externalities, further attempts to improve the irrigation system of the country should be built on efficient water-saving technologies, improved irrigation efficiency, and alternative sources of irrigation. While change in cropping patterns and ground water usage regulations through policy decisions should also be aimed at in the medium and long term, advancing irrigation technologies and practices based on sustainable intensification should be prioritised. Better irrigation efficiency may be aimed through the improvement of conveyance and application efficiency of irrigation systems. In geographies where water withdrawals and GHG emissions have been highest, alternative water management technologies such as alternate wetting and drying, which can result in significant water saving and reduced emissions, may be popularised.

# The Teesta dam and the long shadow of climate change



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Addressing the growing threat of forest fires

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

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

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



fluctuated over time. In 2019-2020, it received ₹46.40 crore, followed by ₹32.47 crore in 2020-2021, ₹34.26 crore in 2021-2022, and ₹28.25 crore in 2022-2023. The budget projection for 2023-2024 was ₹51 crore, which was revised to ₹40 crore. The planned allocation for 2024-2025 is ₹50 crore. This shows the need for more steady support. On the technology front, the existing Forest Fire Alert System cannot distinguish between forest fires and other types of fires, delaying ground-level validation and response. India could use advanced predictive modelling to help identify high-risk areas based on climatic and geographic data. This must be supplemented by using drones equipped with thermal imaging cameras to monitor fire-prone areas, assess damage, and guide firefighting efforts. States such as Tamil Nadu and Odisha have already piloted such initiatives, which could be scaled nationally. In addition, there is merit in also exploring how relevant and existing data from the Forest Survey of India, the India Meteorological Department, and the Indian Space Research Organisation can be integrated and analysed for better forest fire management.

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

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



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Bandipur is rich in wildlife, including tigers and elephants, and fire prevention measures are taken seriously to protect the habitat. Bandipur is rich in wildlife, including tigers and elephants, and fire prevention measures are taken seriously to protect the habitat. | Photo Credit: M.A. SRIRAMA

Authorities in Bandipur are bracing for a scorching summer in the coming weeks and have launched awareness campaigns in local villages and hamlets surrounding the tiger reserve to emphasise the importance of preventing forest fires during the season.

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

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

People in general are more aware now in terms of both physical and mental health due to the widespread dissemination of information on the internet, say doctors. People in general are more aware now in terms of both physical and mental health due to the widespread dissemination of information on the internet, say doctors. | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Have you ever seen a list of symptoms on social media and thought you had a mental disorder? It turns out that many people especially youngsters, have begun diagnosing themselves with mental health disorders after checking out symptoms on social media or through internet search engines.

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

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

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



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

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

# Why mainframe education is key to thriving in Hybrid IT

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

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

## Retail inflation rate eases to near six-year low of 3.16% in April



Retail inflation rate slipped to a 69-month or near six-year low of 3.16 per cent in April, primarily due to moderation in prices of food items including vegetables, pulses, cereals, meat and fish, data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) showed. This marked the sixth month of a downward trajectory in retail inflation, the lowest inflation level after July 2019 and the third successive month of inflation rate remaining below the Reserve Bank of India's band of 4+/- 2 per cent for medium-term inflation targeting.

Food inflation, based on the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI), moderated for the sixth consecutive month, easing to a 42-month low of 1.78 per cent in April from 2.69 per cent a month ago and 8.7 per cent in April 2024. Vegetables recorded a deflation of 10.98 per cent in April, the sharpest pace of decline since February 2023, while pulses also recorded a deflation of 5.23 per cent in April as against a deflation of 2.73 per cent in the previous month, marking the fastest fall in prices over six years.

The meat and fish segment registered a fall in prices to (-) 0.35 per cent after a gap of 22 months in April 2025, while the cereals inflation slipped to a 35-month low of 5.3 per cent due to better kharif output. "The easing of food inflation would help in bringing relief to households and the consumption demand as we begin the new fiscal," Paras Jasrai, Associate Director, India Ratings and Research said.

Going ahead, a favourable monsoon should help keep inflation in control, raising expectations of a rate cut by the

RBI in the upcoming June monetary policy review meeting. "A record rabi harvest and robust pulses output indicated by the Union Ministry of Agriculture's Second Advance Estimates, and the forecast of a favourable monsoon for the upcoming kharif season should keep food inflation in check this fiscal. Given the current inflation trajectory, a further 25-basis point rate cut is expected in the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy review in June," a CRISIL report said. While the overall inflation in FY26 is seen below 4 per cent, the cumulative rate cut in FY26 would depend on the pace of decline in inflation and evolving inflation-growth dynamics, economists said.

The decline in retail inflation was sharper in rural areas than urban areas, which is expected to increase the recovering rural demand. Rural retail inflation was recorded at 2.92 per cent in April as against 3.25 per cent in March, while urban inflation declined to 3.36 per cent in April from 3.43 per cent in March. Food inflation in rural areas eased to 1.85 per cent in April from 2.82 per cent in March, while that in urban areas moderated to 1.64 per cent in April from 2.48 per cent in March. The declining trend, however, was not uniform as fuel and light and core inflation saw an uptick. Fuel and light inflation rate rose to 2.92 per cent in April from 1.48 per cent in the previous month.

Core inflation — the non-food, non-fuel segment of inflation — remained firm at 4.1 per cent in April, the highest level since November 2023, indicating signs of demand being steady, Jasrai said. Retail inflation (excluding vegetables and pulses) shot up to an 18-month high of 4.4 per cent in April, he said. Some economists differed on the view that the lower inflation print will lead to a rate cut, saying that while the headline inflation print is within RBI's forecast for Q1, it will take note of the fact that the decline is mainly due to lower food prices. "While 3.2% is within RBI's forecast of 3.6% for Q1, the central bank will be cognizant of the fact that the number has come down mainly due to vegetables which have a weight of 6 per cent in the index. Excluding this component keeps inflation at the target rate. Therefore, this factor will be kept in mind. It does look like that this number may not trigger a rate cut given that there would be time to evaluate both the monsoon and tariff issues before taking a final call in August. Inflation would likely be low in May and June too due to the base effect," Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda said.

## Chegg to lay off 22% of workforce as AI tools shake up edtech industry

Chegg said on Monday it would lay off about 22% of its workforce, or 248 employees, to cut costs and streamline its operations as students increasingly turn to AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT over traditional edtech platforms. The company, an online education firm that offers textbook rentals, homework help and tutoring, has been grappling with a decline in web traffic for months and warned that the trend would likely worsen before improving.

Google's expansion of AI Overviews is keeping web traffic confined within its search ecosystem while gradually shifting searches to its Gemini AI platform, Chegg said, adding that other AI companies including OpenAI and Anthropic were courting academics with free access to subscriptions. As part of the restructuring announced on Monday, Chegg will also shut its U.S. and Canada offices by the end of the year and aim to reduce its marketing, product development efforts and general and administrative expenses.

The majority of the resulting charges of \$34 million to \$38 million are expected to be incurred in the second and third quarters. Chegg expects cost savings of between \$45 and \$55 million in 2025 and \$100 to \$110 million in 2026



due to the restructuring. It also reported first-quarter results on Monday, saying subscribers declined 31% in the period to 3.2 million. Revenue declined 30% to \$121 million, as its subscription services revenue fell by nearly a third to \$108 million. In February, Chegg sued Google saying Google's internet search engine was eroding demand for original content and undermining publishers' ability to compete with its artificial intelligence-generated overviews, thereby causing a drop in visitors and subscribers.

## The right to repair movement in India



What is the Repairability Index? What does 'planned obsolescence' with respect to electronics mean? How different is the right to repair movement in the U.S. as compared to India? How are consumer advocates and electronic manufacturers responding to the Index?

The story so far: The Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA) last week announced that a report for a "Framework on Repairability Index (RI) in Mobile and Electronic Sector" had been submitted to the government. Under the RI, consumer electronics and electronic appliances would be assigned a score depending on how easy they are to repair by evaluating products under criteria like availability of spare parts, cost of repair, software updates, and availability of information.

Why is there a focus on repairing products?

The home appliance industry is full of examples of products like washing machines and air conditioners which if purchased several years ago work for a long time without any problems, while the newer ones face frequent failures. While "planned obsolescence" — selling consumers less durable products intentionally so that they come back to buy a newer model — is often cited as a reason for this, there is often a simpler reason: companies are cutting corners on raw materials and manufacturing, under the strain of increasing metal costs and price competition. Attero Recycling CEO Nitin Gupta said in an interaction with The Hindu in 2023 that the "amount of metal content on [appliance] units" had come down, and that shortages in materials like copper have led to leaner engineering choices. India is a net importer of metals, Mr. Gupta said, increasing pressures to maintain existing electronic products.

These developments have made repair a much bigger issue in many electronics, and a looming factor for consumers to consider when purchasing a product. This isn't a uniquely Indian problem. U.S. lawmaker Marie Gluesenkamp Perez recently described a draft law she had introduced requiring appliance makers to display average annual maintenance and repair costs alongside the price of a product, and said that longer-lasting older appliances (and

potentially newer ones built to last) like washing machines were a form of "durable wealth" as they last longer. Prolonging the life of an appliance ties into other priorities, like promoting e-waste recycling (part of what Indian officials have described as a "circular economy," where parts and metals go back into a value chain, a long-held but inadequately achieved aim), and regulating the demand for "virgin" metals that have been freshly mined. The main impetus, however, is likely the end-consumer benefit of having longer-lasting products. Since the processing power of smartphones and computers in particular have not grown as much in recent years as in the 2010s, ecological and economic imperatives align on making sure that consumers have products that last, or at least products that can be repaired cheaply and quickly.

What is the right to repair?

Consumer groups around the world have been fighting for the right to repair, a broad umbrella term referring to greater flexibility for a consumer in terms of how they can get their products repaired. In India, the DoCA has launched a right to repair portal, which lists the authorised service centres of various manufacturers and repair literature published by them. This is a non-confrontational interpretation of the right to repair. In the U.S., consumer groups have rallied around the term to resist companies that seek to monopolise the repair of their products, such as by restricting access to spare parts, and penalising customers who choose third party repair services. Protections for such customers have emerged from the American right to repair movement, but the Indian interpretation aligns closely with equipment manufacturers' insistence that the availability of authorised service channels are sufficient. With the RI framework, the government indicated that it would work to pursue such scoring "without causing any impediment to the industry with regard to innovation and ease of doing business". Electronics makers have strenuously fought some right to repair legislations in the U.S., cautious of the business impact of losing repair revenue, which has emerged as a key revenue stream in some sectors. McDonald's ice cream machines are a commonly cited example, as they break down frequently and franchisees have only been permitted to have them repaired by technicians of the Taylor Company, which makes the machines.

The committee that drafted the RI framework was dominated in membership by industry groups and electronics manufacturers. However, that does not mean that the deliberations and the report's outcome will completely favour them, like the right-to-repair portal did. Pushpa Girimaji, a consumer rights advocate and lawyer who has closely tracked the intricacies of the right to repair, was part of the committee; Ms. Girimaji recently described a manufacturer's refusal to offer repair on an aging lift as "highly exploitative and a violation of the consumers' right to choice," and hit many of the key notes that consumer advocates elsewhere have advocated for, including accommodation of third party repair services.

## Two effective hacks to get rid of cockroaches from your kitchen: 'They are unhygienic and spread diseases'



On social media, MasterChef Pankaj Bhadouria often shares tips and tricks from her kitchen to help us navigate the culinary world. However, the kitchen isn't just about the food. A lot more goes into its maintenance and upkeep, which adds to the cooking experience. Hygiene is a top priority, and preventing food contamination from cockroaches becomes essential to keeping your kitchen clean and tidy. "Cockroaches are a big menace in the kitchen! They are unhygienic and spread diseases," Bhadouria stated on Instagram, before sharing two handy tips to keep these pests at bay.

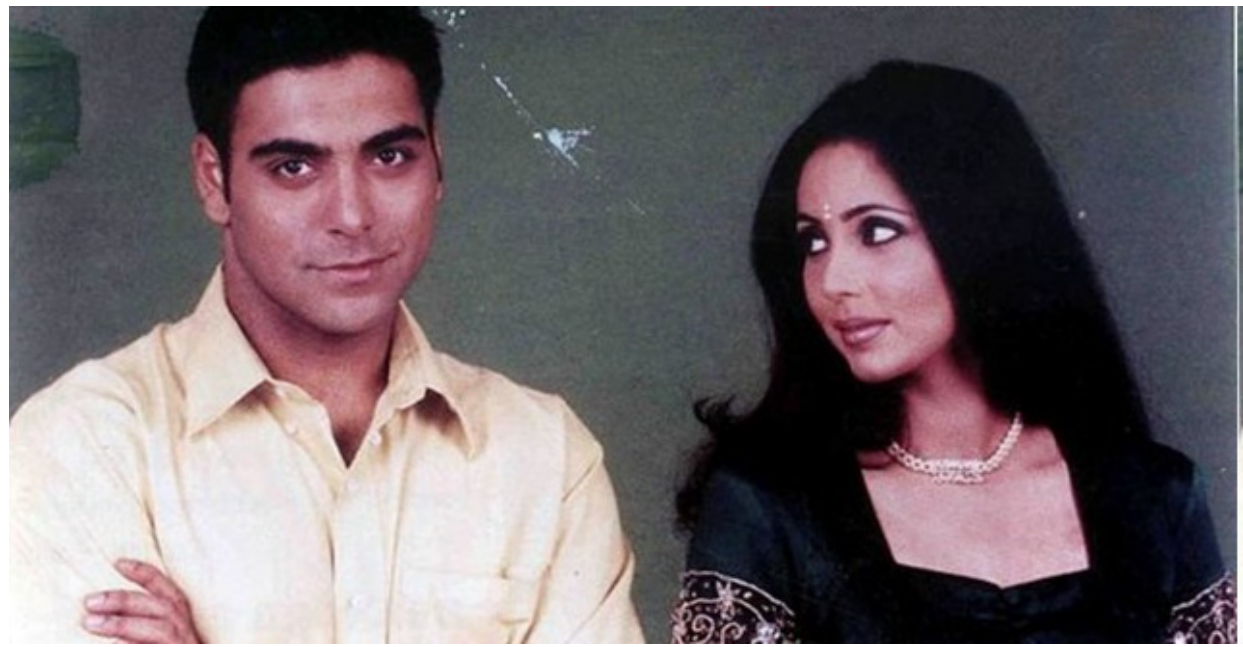
According to her, the most effective way to get rid of cockroaches is to use boric powder. "In a small bowl, take equal quantities of boric powder and powdered sugar. Sprinkle this mixture in specific corners around the kitchen that are infested by cockroaches," said the chef, explaining that the temptation of sugar would lure in insects, and the boric acid would kill them.

She recommended taking baking soda and powdered sugar and repeating the process above. Let's understand

why these hacks can come in handy. Deepak Sharma from the India Pest Control Company told indianexpress.com that boric acid, which comes in gel and powder forms, is the most common ingredient for pest control. "Since boric acid has an electrostatic charge, it clings to a cockroach's body as the insect walks through a treated area. While grooming itself, the pest ingests this powder, which attacks its nervous system," he clarified. However, boric powder's effectiveness depends on its correct application. "Homeowners must track the pests' activity to find the right spots to lay down a layer of dust. Hence, knowledge of the pests' signs and habits makes treatments more likely to succeed," said Sharma.

It is essential to remember that boric acid does not affect cockroach eggs. "Even though adult roaches may respond to treatments, their young often remain safe in hard-to-reach spaces to grow and multiply," said the expert. However, he emphasised that boric acid alone won't stop the pests. "Practice exclusion tactics to keep more of the insects from moving in. Cleaning drains and sealing cracks that the pests use for hiding places or to obtain entrance into the home helps prevent new infestations," he added. Previously, celebrity chef Ananya Banerjee shared that food contamination caused by cockroaches can lead to stomach issues, digestive discomfort, and even infections. Getting rid of them requires a combination of cleanliness, natural repellents, and preventive measures. "Wipe drawers regularly with a vinegar and water solution (1:1 ratio). This is to remove food particles and odours. Avoid leaving food crumbs or spills inside drawers. Store food in airtight containers to prevent attracting roaches," the culinary expert had shared. "You can also try some natural DIY hacks to keep cockroaches at bay, such as placing dried bay leaves across your kitchen since their strong smell keeps roaches away. Cloves, cinnamon, and neem leaves also do the trick. Mix a couple of drops of neem oil in water and spray it in the room for added effect," shared Banerjee.

## 'They were almost starving themselves': Gautami Kapoor on how the entire family joined husband Ram's weight loss journey; impact of collective dieting on emotional health



Dramatic weight loss stories often draw admiration, but the emotional and behavioral toll they take on individuals and families is rarely spoken about. Actor Ram Kapoor's recent transformation, from 140 kg to 85 kg in a year, has stirred conversation not just for the numbers, but also for what it took behind the scenes. His wife, actor Gautami Kapoor, spoke about their family's sacrifices during this period. "We have been in the midst of some crazy controversies this year. But let me tell you, it's been really, really hard. It's been a journey not just for Ram, but for all of us as a family. We stopped socialising, stopped going out, and stopped ordering food from outside — something we used to love," she said in a chat with Hautherfly.

Gautami revealed that their daughter Sia lost 38 kilos before Ram began his intense weight loss plan, which included extreme measures like 24-hour and 48-hour fasts. "But what really pushed him was Sia. She started her weight loss journey before Ram, and I think that motivated him deeply," she said. Their son also lost ten kilos during the same period. While acknowledging the collective motivation, she admitted, "My daughter warned me not to say anything. But they were almost starving themselves — Sia, Ram... they were determined."

When a family embarks on weight loss, how can they maintain a healthy emotional balance and relationship with food?

Dr Sapare Rohit, consultant psychiatrist at Maarga Mind Care, tells indianexpress.com, "When an entire family undertakes lifestyle changes like weight loss, it can foster strong support and shared motivation. However, the

challenge lies in ensuring these changes don't compromise their emotional well-being or relationship with food. Food is not just fuel; it's deeply tied to culture, emotion, and connection. Eliminating social outings or food-related rituals can unintentionally create a sense of isolation or even guilt around enjoyment." He adds that the key is balance. Families can intentionally introduce new food traditions that are both health-conscious and joyful, like cooking together, exploring healthier versions of favorite dishes, or designating certain days for mindful indulgence.

How risky are extreme fasting methods like 24-hour or 48-hour fasts when done frequently?

Ashlesha Joshi, senior nutritionist at Tone 30 Pilates, tells indianexpress.com, "While intermittent fasting can offer certain metabolic benefits when practiced in moderation and under guidance, extended fasts for the sake of rapid weight loss can lead to issues like electrolyte imbalance, fatigue, muscle loss, and a slowed metabolism." From a nutritional standpoint, she says, the body requires a steady supply of nutrients to support brain function, hormonal balance, and energy levels. "Frequent extreme fasting can disrupt these processes and trigger binge-eating cycles, poor mood regulation, or even disordered eating patterns in the long run." What's especially concerning is the social media-fueled pressure to achieve dramatic results in short periods. "Quick fixes rarely address the underlying habits that contribute to long-term health. Sustainable weight loss requires a more balanced approach that prioritises nourishment, consistency, and mental well-being over extremes," Joshi asserts.

## 'A little psychedelic...': Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, says she turned to Ayurveda and adaptogenic mushrooms during pregnancy

Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, recently opened up about turning to ancient Indian health practices during her pregnancies, sparking fresh curiosity about the safety and efficacy of alternative wellness tools during this sensitive time. Speaking on her podcast Confessions of a Female Founder, Meghan revealed, "During my pregnancies, I had an ayurvedic doctor, and so much of it was about seeing food as medicine." Her comment points to a growing trend where expectant mothers seek natural approaches to health and healing, often merging traditional wisdom with modern lifestyles.

In a conversation with Hannah Mendoza, co-founder of the superfood drinks brand Clevr Blends, Meghan also spoke about her belief in the power of adaptogenic mushrooms — non-psychoactive fungi believed to support stress relief, energy, and sleep. "I think a lot of people, when they

hear mushrooms think 'oh okay she's just being hippy dippy and grounded' and all these things. [If people] aren't familiar with adaptogens, you can go to this place of 'oh it's feeling a little psychedelic and super woowoo' [but they are] part of our natural ecosystem and dietary system," she said.

Describing them as a "food trend" with genuine wellness potential, Meghan emphasised their ability to make people feel different "in a really safe way." But, how safe is it for pregnant women to follow Ayurvedic dietary principles, and what are some common precautions? Dr Rajshree, B.A.M.S, tells indianexpress.com, "Ayurveda isn't a one-size-fits-all set of rules. During pregnancy, it focuses on warm, nourishing, easy-to-digest foods — think ghee, rice, moong dal, and cooked fruits. The goal isn't detox. It's stability. But just because something is 'Ayurvedic' doesn't mean it's automatically safe.

## Ruben Amorim pays for friends, family of 30 Manchester United backroom staff to watch Europa League final after club refuses to



With Manchester United reportedly refusing to pay for the costs of club staff members' friends and family to attend the Europa League final against Tottenham Hotspur, club manager Ruben Amorim has stepped in and offered to bear the costs of 30 members of the backroom staff. Football clubs usually offer to pay for friends and family members of the backroom staff to attend big-ticket finals. But with United currently undertaking a raft of severe cost-cutting measures, the club have allegedly told their coaches, physios and support staff that there will be no complimentary tickets for next week's final at Estadio San Mamés. Instead, staff members were told they could purchase up to two tickets from the club's allocation of 15,000 seats for the game.

The New York Times reported that even Manchester

United's players have only been granted two complimentary tickets for their family members to attend the final.ESPN reported that in contrast to United's approach, Paris Saint-Germain, who will play in the UEFA Champions League final, have confirmed that they will foot the bill for 600 members of staff to attend their final against Inter Milan in Munich on May 31.Earlier in the year, Manchester United had cut jobs and had closed the staff canteen at Old Trafford. It had also stopped the free lunches being offered to staff and instead offered them fruit. At Manchester United's Carrington training base, players receive lunch as gratis while staff members are now offered soup and bread. Manchester United's drastic financial belt-tightening measures come after five straight years of financial losses for the club.Both United and Tottenham are looking at the Europa League final as a face-saver for a season of woe where they are currently in 16th and 17th spots in the Premier League, just above the relegation spots.

Amorim had gone as far as saying that he felt "embarrassed" by United's results on the football pitch this season.The United head coach said it was "hard to accept" the team's woeful domestic campaign."It's my fault, I'm responsible. If we cannot change that really fast, we should give our place to different people," he said.United has suffered more defeats this season than in any campaign since the Premier League was launched in 1992. The joint-record 20-time English champion is also certain to record its worst-ever points total in that period, as well as its lowest finish.

## How Carlo Ancelotti's move from Real Madrid to Brazil got awkward

GNS News Agency,May 20

Carlo Ancelotti is swapping Real Madrid for Brazil in one of the biggest moves in world football. The problem is, neither he, nor Madrid, want to talk about it. As coaching switches go, they don't come any bigger than this.But when news broke on Monday that Ancelotti was leaving the sport's most successful and iconic club team to take charge of its most successful and iconic national team, there was an awkward silence.

Madrid chose to ignore the announcement by the Brazilian soccer federation and was still to publicly acknowledge it 24 hours later. There was silence, too, from Ancelotti, who didn't even provide a quote for his new employer when it published its official statement. That left an uncomfortable vacuum until Ancelotti finally confirmed his departure during a scheduled news conference on Tuesday, which he only took part in because he was supposed to preview Madrid's upcoming match against Mallorca."If I didn't have this news conference today it would have been a fantastic day. But in this news conference I have to explain things that I don't want to explain," the Italian coach said.Becoming coach of record five-time world champion Brazil should be among the proudest moments of Ancelotti's career. He will be the first foreign coach of Brazil at a World Cup — taking charge of the team of Pele, Ronaldo and Neymar; and the most iconic yellow jersey in soccer.But even for Ancelotti — who is famed for his cool demeanor on the sideline, cigar smoking and the odd raised eyebrow — his reaction has been understated.The 65-year-old Ancelotti — who has won a record five Champions League titles as a coach — begins his new job later this month with a view to leading Brazil to next year's World Cup.With three more rounds of the Spanish season to go, Ancelotti said he did not want "anybody asking me about other things, because I respect



this jersey a lot and I want to respect it until the last day."The announcement came after Madrid's 4-3 loss to Barcelona over the weekend all but confirmed the defending Spanish champion would surrender its league title.

Barcelona needs just two points to be crowned champion and can complete the job against Espanyol on Thursday.Ancelotti's exit has been long-trailed, with departing Bayer Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso widely expected to replace him. So news of the deal will not have come as a surprise to Madrid, which was involved in the negotiations to release Ancelotti early from a contract that had another year to run.But its silence has been notable, with no messages of congratulations or thanks to a coach that won two Champions League titles and the Spanish title in his second spell at the club.Ancelotti also coached Madrid from 2013-15, which saw him win another Champions League.Despite Ancelotti's future being confirmed, Madrid has not been pushed into responding with an announcement of its own succession plans."Real Madrid will release the statement when they want. There's no problem whatsoever. They'll do it at the appropriate time for Real Madrid and there's nothing further to add," Ancelotti said.

## R Ashwin's Virat Kohli tribute: 'India will miss the Test batsman, the captain and the soldier...'

GNS News Agency,May 20

A lot can be said about his batting but what stood out about him was his energy levels. His energy levels in his batting, captaincy, competitiveness... Sometimes I would be tempted to ask him 'what did you eat today before coming to the game?!"

But the retirement does raise a question in me: Did Virat Kohli have one or two years more of Test cricket in him?Was his energy levels a reason? Did he think.."hey I don't have the mental capacity to handle it." To fight fight.. not many speak about it but the search for excellence is set by the personal benchmark set by ourselves. People will criticise us based on the benchmarks set by oneself. But looking at it from team's point of view, that reduced benchmark can also be a useful thing in the bigger picture. Sometimes as they say you can't buy experience — that's been there, done that. I can tell you even when Virat kohli wasn't playing, his energy in mid-wicket, short cover, slip would be missed. It's not as if he would suggest something and the wicket would fall. But his presence and involvement in the game mattered.I remember a Test in Edgbaston (2018) where he played a great knock. He was dropped at slips, then an outstanding hundred. Also an impact knock in the second innings.. we lost that game closely.. but apart from his knocks what I remember was the bowling in the first innings. Joe Root was batting superbly. Virat ran back from short midwicket frantically — there was a fielder at cow corner — and he actually fell down while retrieving and throwing the ball. The ball would fall on the stumps and Root was run out. Sorry if am mistaken about the batsman if it was Root or Bairstow (it was Root, indeed runout by Kohli on 80). He would gesture a mic-drop moment.

I don't intend this as derogatory but the thought that ran in my head: "the ball didn't have momentum. Perhaps a second run wasn't there or it could have been run but in a Test match to show this kind of intensity to pull off a game-breaking moment, I wanted to ask him: who are you man...who are you?" (" Yaaru da nee, yaaru da nee?!" ) What do you eat?"Ashwin hailed Kohli's Centurion Test hundred in 2018 as one of his personal favourites. (BCCI) Ashwin hailed Kohli's Centurion Test hundred in 2018 as one of his personal favourites. (BCCI)

As a bowler who would bowl 40 overs, it's not easy to retain that kind of energy but even as a batsman how many can do this kind of manic energy? I have said there are two people like this: David Warner and Virat Kohli. There is also AB de Villiers who has kept a lot. I saw. VVS Laxman's video where he says being a soldier of the team and being a leader of the team, to bring energy like this can sometimes be taken for granted. I have felt that when he wasn't playing. That absence of energy in the Test team. That's



Ravichandran Ashwin delivered a glowing tribute for his former India teammate Virat Kohli on his Test retirement.

something the team will definitely miss. Only the person who is going to attempt to take that burden is going to know the weight of that burden.

There have been reports that people are trying to talk him out of retirement. Why? Because he is the poster boy of Test cricket. When we toured Australia, they marketed him to promote the series. England would do the same. With all these formats, I don't know if anyone can match his longevity performance.It's an extraordinary feat and a feat that Virat Kohli should really be proud of. He just didn't promote Test cricket but brought the intensity and changed work ethics. For that, I have to offer a big salaam to him.Two of my personal favourite knocks was his 235 against England in Mumbai, where we gave them an innings defeat. A fabulous knock. Another one was at Centurion in South Africa in 2018. The pitch had cracks and batting wasn't easy.. a fantastic 150-odd. We couldn't win that but only a batsman in prime like Virat could have done. Last two years, the pitches have been a bit harder..as a captain he has led to wins in Australia. I can't forget his knock in the pink-ball test in Adelaide (2021), he made 70-odd before a run out after mix-up with (Ajinkya) Rahane.All in all, Virat Kohli the Test batsman, Virat Kohli the Test captain, Virat Kohli the soldier of the Indian team will be missed. There is no doubt.Considering the importance of the England Test series, post-Rohit retirement, I genuinely thought they would give Kohli the captaincy as stop-gap captain. As it would be difficult for Jasprit Bumrah to be captain as it would be really tough for him to play five Tests. They are saying Shubman Gill might lead, but whoever does these are massive shoes to fill.I think Rishabh Pant is also a candidate as he has been one of our best Test batsmen.But I feel we haven't addressed the leadership vacuum, not just now but historically. We haven't promoted the second or third in command. Looks like it would be a young captain. My best wishes.

## Virat Kohli 'one of the greatest Test batters ever' but India have talent to fill his shoes, says James Anderson



GNS News Agency,May 20

England fast bowling great James Anderson has hailed Virat Kohli, with whom he shared a storied rivalry, as one of the greatest batters to ever play Test cricket. The 42-year-old however feels that India have the pool of talent that can fill up the gap left by even someone of Kohli's stature.

Kohli retired from Test cricket on Monday, bringing the curtains down on a glorious career in which he finished as India's fourth highest run scorer of all time in the format. His decision came just days after longtime teammate and captain Rohit Sharma also retired from the format. "Great players. There will be a new captain because Sharma has re-

tired. Kohli, one of the greatest Test batters that's ever been. There's big shoes to fill there but they've got a huge amount of talent in their squad," said Anderson on TalkSport. "You just have to watch the IPL. They are bringing players into Test cricket from the IPL now who are just so attacking, aggressive, and fearless."

The rivalry between Anderson and Kohli often took centre stage during Test series between India and England for more than a decade, particularly when the former played at the latter's home. Anderson's devastating spells had resulted in Kohli having one of his worst series of all time in England in 2014 and the former India captain then hit back by scoring nearly 600 runs the next time India played in the country in 2018.FILE: Virat Kohli in action for India. Kohli and Rohit's retirements come with just over a month remaining for India's five-Test tour of England. Anderson stated that England should be wary of underestimating India and focusing on the Ashes that is coming later this year. "It's a huge year with the Ashes coming but it is important to get some momentum going."If I'm being honest, looking back at my career, that happened too much where, 18 months out from an Ashes the management and even the players starting to look towards that and actually forgetting what's in front of you. India is going to be such a tough challenge even at home. They are a strong side," said Anderson.

## 'Move we'll question for ages': How one move from Gukesh forced him to lose from a drawn position vs Alireza Firouzja

GNS News Agency,May 20

Gukesh contemplates his next move against Alireza Firouzja in their round 6 encounter at the Superbet Chess Classic 2025 tournament in Bucharest. (INSET) The decisive move from Gukesh which led to the loss. (PHOTOS: Lennart Ootes via Grand Chess Tour, Lichess)Gukesh contemplates his next move against Alireza Firouzja in their round 6 encounter at the Superbet Chess Classic 2025 tournament in Bucharest. (INSET) The decisive move from Gukesh which led to the loss. (PHOTOS: Lennart Ootes via Grand Chess Tour, Lichess)

Of all the words in the chess vocabulary, zugzwang is probably the one that chess players find the most irritating (Or the most pleasing). The word is a gift to the sport from the Germans, and refers to a situation in a chess battle where you get arm-twisted into making a bad move — because no good ones are possible. It's one of those excruciating moments in chess where you wish you could be allowed to pass on a move because the only moves you can make significantly weaken your chances. Reigning world champion Gukesh Dommaraju lost his round 6 clash against Alireza Firouzja at the Superbet Chess Classic 2025 in Bucharest late on Tuesday after a blunder on move 53 with his dark-squared bishop, which allowed the French-Iranian grandmaster to arm-twist him into a zugzwang which then led to a resignation with checkmate unavoidable. Defeat to Alireza in round 6 means that Gukesh is still without a win in the entire tournament in Bucharest. The world champion has lost twice now at the event, and is currently 10th in the 10-player standings. Since he became the youngest world champion in the history of the sport at the age of 18 last year, Gukesh has had limited success on the chess board. He did almost win the title at Tata Steel Chess in Wijk aan Zee at the start of the year. He was denied there after losing the final game to Arjun Erigaisi, and then losing to Praggn in a tie-break. Since then, he's played in two Freestyle Chess events where there has been little reason to celebrate. But those were freestyle chess events — a variant of the sport that players have called a completely different sport altogether.

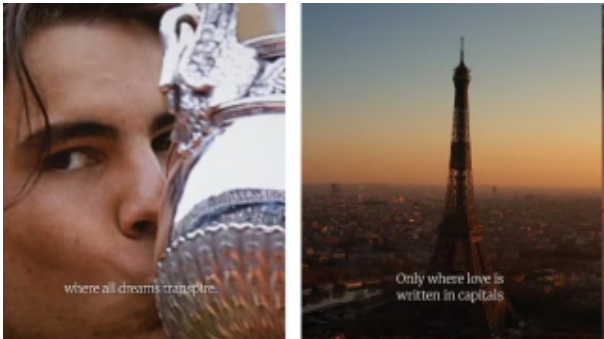
In fact, on the live broadcast of the game on the Saint Louis Chess Club YouTube page, grandmaster Peter Svidler who was analysing games, had declared, "This is not going to go anywhere for a while". He had just signalled to the broadcast team behind the scenes to switch the



graphics to the game between Fabiano Caruana and Bogdan-Daniel Deac. And then, Gukesh shifted his bishop to g5, and changed the contours of the game."Sir, what are you doing, sir?" said a stunned Svidler, who has been working as a trainer for another member of India's golden generation, Praggnanandhaa, since last year."Why would you (do that), why would you remove it from the long diagonal? Why isn't the bishop on the long diagonal? I do not understand," he shrugged."That bishop to g5 is a move we will question for the ages," said Seirawan. "The bishop was on a magnificent square. This is the world champion we are talking about, walking into an obvious zugzwang. Bishop to g5 was totally uncalled for. That's it! That blunders the pawn!"

What Seirawan meant was, as soon as Gukesh had shifted his bishop to g5 rather than putting it on e5, or even c3, it allowed Alireza to plant his rook on b7, threatening Gukesh's only remaining pawn on f7. Gukesh moved his pawn forward by a square, which allowed his rival to slide his rook behind the pawn. Now, Gukesh had no option but to move his bishop away from protecting his pawn, and as soon as he did, Alireza rook gobbled it up while also delivering a check on Gukesh's king. After some desperate dodging, Gukesh surrendered 13 moves later.Before that error from Gukesh, he and Alireza had played out a rollercoaster middlegame that saw the Frenchman, playing with white pieces, hold an edge as early as the 18th move after the world champion opted not to castle his king to safety and tuck it away behind a column of two doubled pawns. But Gukesh had managed to maneuver his way out of trouble as his opponent had courted time trouble by the 23rd move and then squander his edge right around the 30th move, when Gukesh spent his time well to find moves that kept him alive.

## Rafael Nadal makes a French Open comeback... but only for trailer of Roland Garros



The King of Clay Rafael Nadal won't be playing at Roland Garros this year, but his voice is the star of the tournament's official teaser trailer.Nadal is also set to be felicitated during the tournament that it's director Amélie Mauresmo has promised will be "exceptional".But first, his voice is being heard. In the 45-second clip, that ends with a tight close-up of him, posted to Roland Garros' social me-

dia channels two weeks ahead of the start of the main draw, Nadal reads a poem to go with dreamy visuals from the tournament."Only where love is written in capital letters, only the clay where champions fight, only the glide, the power, only the endurance until the night, only where tennis and everyone rhyme, only where hats fit all heads, only where the clay marks passion in red, only where rituals leave a trace, only a stage for courage and fire, only here where all dreams transpire, only at Roland-Garros," Nadal says in his narration.Talking about honoring Nadal at the French Open, French Open director Amélie Mauresmo said: "Rafa has left his mark on the history of the French Open in so many ways, that's why a tribute ceremony will be held in his honor. We want the tribute to be special, exceptional. We want it to be a surprise for everyone.""We wanted to do the tribute last year, to be transparent, but he refused at the time," Mauresmo added. "He wasn't sure that it was his last Roland Garros. Now that he is retired, he is happy to receive it."Nadal holds the record for the most French Open titles with 14. His last appearance at the tournament was in 2024 when he lost to Alexander Zverev in the first round.

## Mansi Singh beats Nivetha at All India Senior ranking badminton tournament

Hyderabad: Kavi Thangam of Tamil Nadu shocked sixth-seeded Ravi of Haryana 21-18, 21-12 in the men's singles Round 32 match of the Yonex-Sunrise All India Senior ranking badminton tournament at Jwala Gutta Academy of Excellence here .In women's singles, top-seeded Mansi Singh of Uttar Pradesh scored a hard-fought 19-21, 21-10, 21-14 win against M. Nivetha of Tamil Nadu.In women's doubles Round 16, Shreya Balaji and S. Deeptha of Tamil Nadu shocked second-seeded Muskaan Khan (Karnataka) and Sakshi Phogat of Rajasthan 17-21 21-16 21-14.

The results: Men's singles: Round 32: D.S. Saneeth

(Ktk)bt T. Harshan (AP) 21-8, 21-14; Kavin Thangam (TN) bt Ravi (HAR) 21-18, 21-12; Sanskar Saraswat (RAJ) bt Naren Iyer (KTK) 21-18, 21-17; Rohan Kumar Anandas Raj Kumar Kumar (TG) bt Gautam Arora (HAR) 21-17, 21-19; Lakshay Sharma (PNB) bt Aditya Joshi (UTR) 21-12, 19-21, 21-17; Nicholas Nathan Raj (KTK) bt K. Lokesh Reddy (TG) 21-16, 21-19; K. Tarun Reddy(TG) bt Bala Pranay Pragada (AP) 30-28,22-20; Suryaksh Rawat (UTR) bt Sai Chran Koya (AP) 21-17, 23-25, 21-14.Doubles: Round 16: Anjan Buragohain & Ranjan Buragohain (RBI) bt Krish Desai & Ian Lopes (MAH) 21-18, 21-12; Deep Rambhiya & Pratik Ranade(MAH) bt A. Ganesh Kumar & Arjunkrishnan .

## Regina Cassandra wants to play more North Indian characters: ‘Not knowing the language is an excuse, Bollywood has bigger issues to deal with’



Regina Cassandra has been working in the Tamil film industry for 20 years. She’s also appeared in Telugu films, but made her Hindi film debut only five years ago in Shelly Chopra Dhar’s Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga (2019). Since then, she’s made a mark with shows like Rocket Boys, Shoorveer, Farzi, and Jaanbaaz Hindustan Ke, and more recently this year, with films like Jaat and Kesari 2: The Untold Story of Jallianwala Bagh, where she played the wife of Akshay Kumar. In an exclusive interview with SCREEN, Regina talks about making inroads into Bollywood, whether she’s equipped to do North Indian characters, and starting her Bollywood journey with a queer character.

This year, we’ve seen you play the villain in Vidaamuyarchi and Jaat. Would you say you’re in your evil era?

(Laughs) I don’t think I’m in my evil era. I’ve always been about balancing, and Kesari 2 would also prove that. Back in 2022, when I was doing Rocket Boys, I also did an item song (“Saana Kastham” in Telugu film Acharya). I’ve always wanted to be a versatile actor. Proving yourself in this industry is not very easy, unless you get the opportunity to. And I’ve only been blessed enough to get the opportunity to play different roles. To my luck, the industry is constantly changing in favour of women doing different kinds of roles.

Balancing is great, but how do you make limited screen-time roles like the ones in Kesari 2 or Farzi your own?

At the end of the day, you’re expected to do the job you’re assigned to the fullest. The audience has also become really smart and sensitive. Thanks to social media, Instagram, Twitter or Reddit, people have become very aware of what’s going on, whether it’s how much a film has made to where an actor is from. Sometimes, people within the industry don’t know a South actor or from any other language. But the audience does! At the end of the day, you make films for the audience. I think it’s a compliment when the audience or the reviewers say they wanted to see more of me. That’s a big win. It’s something I’ll take home happily. And that’s been a unanimous case with my films where my role is smaller than other actors. It’s not even a moment of pride for me. I just feel blessed that people are so accepting of my work. When they talk about my screen presence, I feel like I’m on the right path.

In Kesari 2, we see you as the partner of a complex man. In the scene when Akshay Kumar’s character says, “Let’s go home,” you don’t oppose it, but just quietly support his decision. How did you crack that chemistry with him?

I’ve played pretty strong yet subdued parts in the past.

## ‘Aishwarya Rai’s lookalike Sneha Ullal was recommended by Salman Khan’s sister Arpita’: Directors deny there was any ulterior motive



Filmmakers Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru, who worked with Salman Khan on the film Lucky: No Time for Love, recalled how newcomer Sneha Ullal was cast in the film. At the time, comparisons were made between Sneha and actor Aishwarya Rai. These comparisons hounded Sneha for the remainder of her short-lived career in the film industry. In an interview, the filmmakers said that it wasn’t a conscious decision to cast someone who looks like Aishwarya in the film. Salman and Aishwarya were rumoured to have dated just before the film’s release.

In an interview with Hindi Rush, the filmmakers were asked about Sneha’s uncanny resemblance to Aishwarya, and if casting her was deliberate strategy. They said, “It wasn’t a strategy. We wanted to cast a newcomer, and Arpita (Khan, Salman’s sister) said that there is a very pretty girl at her college, and asked if we’d want to audition her. The role was of a schoolgirl whose parents are working in an embassy. She needed to have the vibe of someone who has lived in Europe. She suited the role.”

They said that they realised how the narrative was shaping up gradually, but emphasised that they cannot compare anyone to someone as beautiful as Aishwarya. Radhika added, “We would notice a resemblance sometimes while shooting, but there are so many people who look like others. We never thought that the similarity was all that striking, but when the campaign started and people started pointing it out, that’s when we noticed. It would be a lie to say that we didn’t think about it, but we it wasn’t a big deal. It’s a good thing to be compared to Aishwarya!” In the past, Sneha has said that the narrative around her appearance was spun by publicists. “I am so comfortable in my own skin and all those comparisons didn’t bother me. Also, that was also their PR strategy on how to describe me. That thing actually emphasised the entire comparison. Otherwise, it may not have been such a big deal,” she claimed in an interview with agency IANS. Incidentally, another actor launched in a Salman Khan film had to contend with comparisons to someone he was said to have dated and broken up with. Actor Zarine Khan has been fielding com-

parisons to Katrina Kaif for years. Appearing on Bharti Singh’s podcast, Zarine said last year, “Life after Veer was very bad for me, I got a lot of criticism. The film was a life-changing moment for me. Initially, I felt very happy that I was being compared to Katrina Kaif, but within the industry, things kept getting worse. For me, who used to be overweight, being compared to Katrina was huge, but it all backfired. I felt like a lost child in the industry, plus there was hesitation. I didn’t know most people here but they started to feel I was arrogant because Salman Khan launched me.”

She was a support system at the end of the day. There’s a lot of power in silence, and in silently supporting the people you love. It’s sometimes the only way you can be there. You can’t change anything or make the person feel a different way.

From Rocket Boys to Kesari 2, you’ve often been cast as a South Indian character. Do you think the Hindi film industry will ever cast South Indian actors like you as North Indian characters?

Will they, I don’t know. Should they, yes. Because Bollywood is pretty unpredictable. In fact, I’d love for them to cast me as a Punjabi. The South has always been welcoming of North Indians, especially female actors. In Bollywood, technicians have been from the South.

But that’s more to do with skill. Do you think language becomes a hurdle?

I feel that’s just an excuse. It’s something we can work on. We’ve got bigger issues to deal with. You’re telling me dubbing for an actor or getting them to go through classes isn’t possible? It’s not about the lack of an actor wanting to put in the effort. I know I can look like a North Indian as well. It’s not that I’m not trying. I’ve auditioned for North Indian characters. I’ve also asked directors to henceforth not change my characters to South Indian, especially if they’ve written them as North Indian characters. Regina Cassandra as Mrinalini Sarabhai in Rocket Boys. Regina Cassandra as Mrinalini Sarabhai in Rocket Boys.

You did play a North Indian character, Kuhu, in your debut Hindi film, Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga. Right?

Yes, in fact, those are the kind of directors I really admire because she wanted to work with me just because of my work. She didn’t think how I’d figure out the accent. And I dubbed for myself! I’m a big ally of the LGBTQ+ community. I’d do anything to shout out my support. So that film really spoke to me. Sonam Kapoor and Regina Cassandra in Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga. Sonam Kapoor and Regina Cassandra in Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga. Now, we see Mammootty play a queer character in Kaathal: The Core (2023). But do you think there were any queer parts in South Indian films five years ago? Although Hindi cinema is considered huge and rational, South Indian films touch a chord because the audience is very accepting here. There’s not just the run-of-the-mill stuff. We love our commercial films, and have enough of them here, but we have a great balance too. The South has done it way before. In fact, there was a film of mine in the South in which I played a lesbian, much before I did Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga. It was directed by Venkat Prabhu, but it didn’t happen. I hope it sees light of the day. We’ve worked really hard to put it out. Nawazuddin Siddiqui is an actor all of us unanimously look up to. Having him in a film makes you instantly intrigued about what it’s about. Again, I’m very blessed to be a part of such cinema.

You’re also a part of Mookuthi Amman 2 with Nayanthara. Are you looking forward to that?

Yes, we’re starting in June. We’ve just one day’s shoot of look tests and promotional stills. The whole canvas is very appealing. It’s a Sundar C film, he’s all about fantasy. My role in it is pretty crazy! It’s something I’ve never done before at all. I love that 20 years into my career, I can say it’s something I’ve not done before.

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## ‘Vodka never stopped flowing at Salman Khan’s party, Russians were rolling down stairs; Bhai was rock-solid’: Radhika Rao, Vinay Sapru recall epic bash

Filmmakers Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru, best known for the sleeper hit Sanam Teri Kasam, recalled stories about working with Salman Khan on several musical sequences in his movies. In a new interview, the narrated a story from the sets of Lucky: No Time for Love, which marked the debut of Sneha Ullal. They said that the Russian crew members on set were extremely proud of their ability to hold their alcohol. When they were invited by Salman to a party, the directors advised them not to go because they knew that the crew wouldn’t be able to handle it. But the Russians didn’t heed their advice, and paid a price for it.

Appearing on the Hindi Rush YouTube channel, the filmmakers recalled, “We told them not to go. We told them that they wouldn’t come to work the next day. They said, ‘We are Russians, nobody can out-drink us.’ We said, ‘All the best, this is Salman Khan’s party, don’t underestimate...’ The vodka never stopped flowing, and the people kept drinking. They wanted to prove that they are the best in the world when it comes to vodka consumption.” Radhika said, “There were people who rolled down the steps; Russian crew members. When they came the next day, half of them were late, half of them were holding their heads. Russians are very disciplined, they don’t like to be unprofessional. They said that the most shameful thing was that Salman never even swayed. He was standing like a rock. They said, ‘All of us were rolling down, throwing up, and he was also drinking with us but nothing happened to him!’”

## Reddit feels Aamir Khan’s Sitaare Zameen Par remake is a frame-by-frame copy of Campeones trailer: ‘Another remake after Laal Singh Chaddha’



Aamir Khan’s Sitaare Zameen Par is an official remake of Campeones. Aamir Khan’s Sitaare Zameen Par is an official remake of Campeones. Aamir Khan Productions unveiled the trailer of RS Prasanna’s coming-of-age sports comedy Sitaare Zameen Par on Tuesday evening. While it’s a spiritual sequel to Aamir Khan’s 2007 directorial debut Taare Zameen Par, the lesser known fact is that it’s an official remake of Javier Fesser’s 2018 Spanish film Campeones. A Reddit user compared the trailers of both the films, and pointed out striking similarities. These include Aamir’s character of the coach drinking while driving and bumping his car into a police van in the middle of the road, just like Javier Gutierrez’s character in the original. Both are then penalized by the court to

## Ex-girlfriend Cassie Ventura makes 5 disturbing claims about escorts, abuse, drugs; says, ‘I was humiliated, beaten’

Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs, the disgraced American music mogul, had his first encounter with his ex, Cassie Ventura, months after a CNN video showed him beating and abusing her. Diddy’s sex trafficking trial that began earlier this week saw Cassie take the stand on May 13 and give an emotional, tear-filled testimony against the rapper, sitting behind the Brooklyn bars on accusations of trafficking, racketeering, and other abuse-related crimes. The investigation into his alleged ‘freak-off parties’, accused of coercing both men and women into non-consensual sex, is still ongoing. During her testimony, Cassie, who is pregnant with her current husband’s child, made startling claims, including how her ex-boyfriend Diddy abused her, controlled every part of her life, and forced her into disturbing sex acts during their long relationship. Back in December 2023, Cassie was the first to come up with the abuse complaint against the Bad Boy record producer but settled the case outside the court just a day later, but that move opened a floodgate of accusations against the rapper one after another, and now hundreds of cases have been filed against him, followed by a Homeland Security raid at his Miami and L.A. houses.

Cassandra Ventura, better known as singer Cassie, who dated Combs for a long time, said she first met Diddy when she was 19. At the time, Cassie was still trying her luck in the world of music, and Diddy was already a big music mogul in his 30s. After they met, he signed her to his record label, and their romantic relationship soon began. According to the BBC, Cassie misunderstood the situation, thinking she was the only one, but later came to know that Diddy was dating other women too. The 38-year-old, who is pregnant with her third child, told the court that the rapper covered all her expenses, including her house, her cars, her phones—but all of it came with a cost. Once he lost his anger control, he would seize every device. “Control was everything,” Cassie said. “From the way I looked... to what I was working on.” And soon, the control took a physical abuse form, and she alleged that the mogul would “bash on my head, knock me over, drag me, and kick me.”

There have been long-standing rumours about Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs’ alleged parties that used to run all illegal things—from drugs to trafficking—under the guise of high-profile parties attended by various Hollywood A-listers as well. During the trial, Cassie detailed those parties, saying Diddy would make her sleep with male escorts or strippers while he watched. According to her, the first time she was forced into this act was within a year of their relationship starting, but she went along as she had earlier revealed “falling in love” and didn’t want to upset him. But she added how the act left her feeling humiliated. Some of these sessions lasted days. “I felt pretty horrible about myself,” she said, “It made me feel worthless.” Cassie admitted to taking drugs to cope with the situation. “The drugs were a way to not feel it for what it really was,” she said. “Having sex with a stranger I didn’t want to be having sex with.”

According to Cassie, Diddy would sometimes call escorts from New York, LA, Vegas, even Ibiza, and used to pay them in cash depending on their performance. Cash prizes ranged from \$1,500 to \$6,000 and more. They found these escorts through stripper agencies and Craigslist. Not only this, but the disgraced rapper would also instruct her to choose the man sometimes, order her to dress according to his choice, and decide the lighting, everything. “If Sean wanted something to happen, that was what was going to happen,” she told the court. “I couldn’t say no.”

Earlier, Diddy’s attorney tried to paint Cassie in a mutually violent light while clarifying the CCTV footage where the rapper was seen brutally beating his then-girlfriend. Speaking about the same, Cassie revealed that the incident captured on the camera was during one of the times the couple was having one of those ‘freak-offs’, and she decided to leave because she had a movie premiere scheduled that week and didn’t want to have sex with an escort, and that didn’t sit well with Combs who started abusing her physically. When asked by the court exactly how many times he slapped her to the ground, she said, “too many times to count...” Among the hundreds of lawsuits filed against Diddy, few mention the involvement of former record

train a bunch of mentally challenged kids for a basketball tournament. Other similarities include the coach’s character throwing the basketball straight into the face of one of the kids, as the others shield their faces in the next shot. The bouncing boards of the protagonist are the same too — his friend and his mother — but his wife (played by Genelia D’Souza in Sitaare Zameen Par) — doesn’t feature in the trailer of the Spanish original. “After the Forest Gump fiasco, he should have stayed away from remakes or adaptations,” commented another Redditor, referring to Aamir’s last film, Advait Chandan’s Laal Singh Chaddha (2022), the official Hindi remake of Robert Zemeckis’ 1994 cult film Forrest Gump, starring Tom Hanks. Laal Singh Chaddha didn’t work at the box office. “Perfectionist in copying the film frame by frame,” claimed a Redditor, while another one pointed out, “Look at his filmography again. He has remade the godfather, kramer vs kramer, on the waterfront, forrest gump.

A lot of them have scenes lifted frame by frame. I still love Ghulam, akele hum etc. The point is he’s had a lot of practice,” referring to Aamir’s films Aatank Hi Aatank (1995), Akele Hum Akele Tum (1995), Ghulam (1998), and Laal Singh Chaddha respectively. However, several others also defended Aamir. “Official remake hai bhai toh of course usme konsi nayi baat hai (If it’s an official remake, then what’s the harm?),” wrote a Redditor. “You’re acting like people in India have all seen Champions and it’s a massive hit here. No one gives a shit if it’s a remake as no one has seen the original, all that matters is if it’s a good film,” argued another. Campeones has already been remade in English as Bobby Farrelly’s Champions in 2023, starring Woody Harrelson as the coach. Meanwhile, Sitaare Zameen Par, which will launch 10 newcomers as the mentally challenged kids, also stars Dolly Ahluwalia as Aamir’s mother. Sitaare Zameen Par is slated to release in cinemas on June 20.



executive, former NFL player, and convicted felon Suge Knight. The Death Row record founder was also one of Diddy’s biggest rivals in the music industry. Describing one of the alleged incidents, Cassie told the court how she was asked to handle a gun after Diddy suddenly left in the middle of a freak-off when his bodyguard tipped him about Suge Knight hanging out at a nearby diner. She begged him, “Please don’t do anything stupid,” crying and screaming in fear.

The court asked Cassie why she ever agreed to take part in these acts, to which, according to BBC, she paused for a moment and then whispered, “I wanted to make him happy.” She described her first freak-off, where Diddy called a LA-based stripper and gave her ecstasy and alcohol to get through it. Afterwards, she said she felt “dirty and confused,” but also told herself, “OK, he’s really happy with me, so I guess I did something right.” The freak-offs started happening almost weekly. She added, “I just didn’t want to make him upset. I just didn’t want to make him angry and regret telling me about this experience that was so personal.” The last one, she said, happened between 2017 and 2018. By then, she was relying on MDMA and cocaine just to stay awake and get through it. Cassie’s testimony is expected to continue. She might be cross-examined by Diddy’s legal team next. Meanwhile, Diddy has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

## Jason to star in psychological thriller 'Sponsor'



Los Angeles: Actor Jason Segel, best known for his role in the sitcom “How I Met Your Mother”, will headline the psychological thriller “Sponsor”. According to the entertainment news outlet Variety, the upcoming film will be directed by James Ponsoldt. It will also reunite Segel and Ponsoldt, who have previously worked in the series “Shrinking”. “Sponsor” features Segel in the role of Peter, who makes a big mistake by deciding to drive after the party while being drunk. What follows is a terrible accident that leaves him with a choice to either go to prison or take on a recovery program. “We set out to explore what happens when support becomes control, when the person you turn to for salvation slowly becomes your worst nightmare,” Segel and Ponsoldt said in joint statement.