





# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Congress not doing enough

SENIOR Congress leader P Chidambaram has drawn the nation's attention to the comatose INDIA bloc, which has been ceaselessly sinking into oblivion. He is not sure whether this Opposition alliance, which was formed almost two years ago, is still intact. Though he is hoping (against hope) that the bloc can "still be put together", Chidambaram has heaped praise on the BJP, stating that there has never been any political party so formidably organised. That won't be music to the Congress' ears, especially at a time when the Modi government is basking in the success of Operation Sindoor. And the BJP has every reason to be happy about the discord in the rival camp. Enjoy premium journalism at ₹1/dayUnlock exclusive stories and in-depth reportsGet sharp opinions and expert analysis that matterRead without interruptions—ad-free on web and appReceive curated daily news briefs in your inboxFreedom to cancel your subscription anytime

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## Delhi Assembly just passed a single Bill in all of 2024: Report

GNS News Agency, May 19

Delhi assemblyDelhi only passed one Bill — The Delhi Goods and Services Tax (Third Amendment) Act, 2024 — while states, on average, passed 17 Bills throughout the year

The Delhi Assembly passed only a single Bill in 2024 — the least number of Bills passed by any state or union territory Assembly in India. This finding is from a report released on Monday by non-profit organisation PRS Legislative Research on the functioning of state legislatures.

Delhi only passed one Bill — The Delhi Goods and Services Tax (Third Amendment) Act, 2024 — while states, on average, passed 17 Bills throughout the year. This GST Bill was also passed on the same day it was introduced in the Assembly, making Delhi one of the eight states that passed all Bills on the same day they were introduced into the Assembly. The seven other states were Bihar, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Puducherry, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. In 2024, 62 out of the 70 legislators in the Delhi Assembly were from the AAP, and the remaining eight were from the BJP. The report, titled Annual Review of State Laws 2024, also points out that last year, the national capital's Assembly session, along with Tamil Nadu's, lasted the longest without the session being prorogued. Proroguing refers to ending a session of the Assembly. Delhi's Assembly session continued from February to December last year. The Delhi Assembly met for 25 days in 2024, higher than the national average of 20. Odisha met for the highest number of days (42), followed by Kerala (38). The average sitting days of Assemblies across the country also fell from a high of 28 in 2017 to 20 in 2024. As per the report, Delhi's amendment to the GST Bill was among 60% of Bills across the country that received the Governor's assent within a month. Of the Bills passed in 2024, 18% got assent after more than three months (this includes Bills awaiting assent as of April 2025). States where a high proportion of Bills got assent after more than three months include Himachal Pradesh (72% of Bills passed), Sikkim (56%) and West Bengal (38%). Devansh Mittal is a trainee correspondent with He studied political science at Ashoka University. He can be

## Dr. P. Prakash receiving PhD award from Prof. G. Prabhakar (Guide, Geology Dept) & Principal, University College of Science???

GNS News Agency, May 19

Hyderabad: Prathapani Prakash, the third son of Prathapani Krishna Murthy and Suvarnam, a native of Chinna Gudur Mandal Head Quarters in Mahabubabad District, obtained his "PhD in Geology" from the Department of Geology at Osmania University, Hyderabad. His doctoral research, is supervised by Prof. G. Prabhakar—Professor of Geology and Principal—University College Science at Osmania University. His research focused on "Integrated Remote Sensing and GIS Studies for Groundwater and Surface Water Management in Raghunathapalli Watershed, Jangaon District, Telangana state, India". Dr. Prakash has professional expertise, in the application of Remote Sensing and GIS technologies in the domains of Water Resources and Earth Sciences. Previously, he was involved in the World Bank-funded "JalNirmal Project" in Karnataka and also contributed to the Rajiv Gandhi Drinking Water Mission mapping projects (Telangana and Andhra Pradesh). For the past 13 years, he has been working as a Scientific Officer at the Telangana Remote Sensing Applications Centre (TGRAC) under the Planning Department of the Government of Telangana. In this context, he expressed his heartfelt gratitude to his Guide, Prof. G. Prabhakar; Prof. I. Pandu Ranga Reddy.



## Prajavani applications should be resolved quickly““Mulugu spokesperson,



Mathipal, Indian Chronicle : District Collector G. Sampath Rao has instructed the concerned officials to give high priority to the applications received in Prajavani and resolve them quickly. Additional Collector Sampath

Rao said that complaints and requests from the public were received in the Prajavani program organized at the Collectorate meeting on Monday. Speaking on the occasion, the Additional Collector said that people are approaching Prajavani seeking solutions to various problems and they want their applications to be resolved quickly. Pending applications on the Prajavani portal should also be resolved. Out of 37 applications received in Prajavani on Monday, 10 were land issues, 09 were for the housing department, 02 for pension, 01 for employment, and 15 were related to other departments. He directed that they be transferred to the concerned officials immediately in the meeting and resolved. SC Corporation Officer Ravi, Civil Supply Officer Faizal Hussain, Civil Supply Manager Rampathi, DSCO Officer Laxman Naik, DCO Officer Sardar Singh, BWO Officer Sirisha, District Panchayat Officer Devaraj, Electricity Department Officer Nageswara Rao, Lead Bank Manager Jayaprakash, various district level officers, revenue staff and others participated in the program.

## Congress Leaders Condemn Former ZPTC Putta Madhu's Baseless Allegations

"PS Ashokan"Indian Chronicle"Manthani May 19""Manthani, May 2025 — Manthani Congress leaders Erukala Praveen, Kududula Venkanna, and Manthani Suresh strongly denounced the recent remarks made by former ZPTC Putta Madhu, describing them as politically motivated, misleading, and lacking in substance. They asserted that his comments were driven by envy over the grand success of the once-in-12-years Saraswati Pushkaralu, which the Telangana government organized with dignity and devotion by allocating substantial funds under the leadership of Minister Sridhar Babu." "Responding to the allegation that MP Gaddam Vamsikrishna was disrespected by omitting his image from official advertisements, the Congress leaders clarified that due protocol was duly followed and the MP's photo was indeed included in government-issued publicity material. They condemned the false propaganda as an intentional attempt to mislead the public and damage the image of the Congress leadership. They further reminded that during the 2024 elections, Congress cadres, under the leadership of Sridhar Babu and Srinubabu, campaigned intensely — even in scorching heat — which led to Vamsikrishna's overwhelming victory by over two lakh votes, with a majority of 53,000 votes in Manthani alone. Ironically, they pointed out, Putta Madhu had covertly supported the BJP during the election while claiming to be a Congressman." "The leaders called out Putta Madhu's hypocrisy, recalling his silence when Dalit lead-



ers like Koppula Eshwar and Deputy CM Tatikonda Rajaiah were publicly humiliated or removed from office. They questioned why he never protested or went on hunger strike when grave atrocities took place in the region, including the brutal murder of advocate Vaman Rao and his wife. They demanded to know why justice for Dalit victims never prompted such outrage from Madhu when he held power." "They concluded by stating that the marginalized and underprivileged communities — Dalits, BCs, minorities, and the poor — are closely watching these double standards. "You suppressed the voices of the oppressed, and now you shed crocodile tears in support of a wealthy politician. The public will not forget this duplicity and will respond in due course," they warned." "Youth Congress leaders including Sadhula Srikanth, Nagula Rajayya, Erukala Suresh, Medi Sinu, and Erukala Mohan Sai were present during the press meet.

## Cyberabad Police Extend Support to Deceased Home Guard's Family



"Miyapur May 19 Indian Chronicle A cheque of ₹6.28 lakh was handed over by Cyberabad JP. CT Traffic, Dr. Gajarao Bhupal, IPS, to the bereaved family of the Home Guard Officer. Cyberabad Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic), Dr. Gajarao Bhupal, IPS, handed over a cheque of ₹6,28,000 today., 19.05.2025 to the family of late Home Guard Officer N. Simhachalam of Miyapur Traffic Police Station. The cheque was presented in the presence of Medchal Traffic DCP Gunashekar, Miyapur

Traffic ACP Venkataiah, and Traffic Inspector Prasanth. Home Guard Officer N. Simhachalam (43), a native of Sriakulam, had been serving since 2007. He tragically lost his life in a road accident while on duty on 07.04.2025 under the jurisdiction of Miyapur Traffic Police Station. In a heartfelt gesture, personnel from Cyberabad Police—including Traffic, Law & Order, and other wings—voluntarily contributed to support his bereaved family, which includes his wife, two children, and elderly parents.

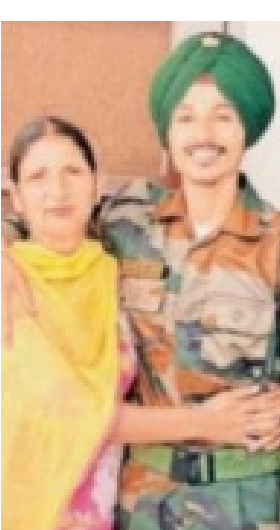
## India's First Amruth Swasth Bharath Launched at Niloufer Hospital



Hyderabad :Niloufer Hospital has etched its name in history with the launch of "Amruth Swasth Bharath," the first AI-based diagnostic tool in India designed for non-invasive blood testing that delivers results in under a minute. This landmark event was held at Niloufer Hospital, located at Red Hills, Lakdikapul, and was graced by esteemed guests including Prof. Dr. Ravi Kumar, Superintendent of Niloufer Hospital, Prof. Dr. Santhosh Kumar Kraleti, Sushena Health Foundation, Member of National Medical Commission, Ms. Karuna Gopal, President, Foundation for Futuristic Cities, BJP National In-Charge, Women Policies & Research and Mr. Harish Bisam, Founder of Quick Vitals, along with various other healthcare luminaries.

During the launch, Prof. Dr. Ravi Kumar shared his enthusiasm, stating, "Amruth Swasth Bharath will revolutionize health diagnostics in India. It is particularly beneficial for children and pregnant women, facilitating regular and accessible health assessments. We take pride in being the first hospital in India to implement this transformative initiative." The launch ceremony showcased live demonstrations of the Amruth Swasth Bharath tool, allowing medical professionals present to experience its efficiency and accuracy firsthand. Mr. Harish Bisam remarked, "With Amruth Swasth Bharath, health monitoring has become as simple as taking a selfie. Our mobile face scanning technology offers rapid access to crucial health information, effectively addressing existing barriers to healthcare access."

## 'Why this silence in our son's case?': Agniveer's family questions Punjab government for not honouring him after his death



GNS News Agency, May 19

The family of Agniveer Akashdeep Singh, who died of a bullet injury on May 15 while on duty in Jammu, has decided not to immerse his ashes until the Punjab government gives him the honour they believe he deserved. Despite the presence of Punjab Assembly Speaker Kuldar Singh Sandhwan at the cremation on May 16, no official statement or compensation has been announced by the state to date, the family has said.

Akashdeep, 20, hailed from Kothe Chahal village in Kotkapura constituency of Faridkot district. He joined the Indian Army two years ago under the Agnipath scheme, which allows youth to serve for a four-year period as Agniveers, and was posted in the Punjab Regiment.

Speaking to The Indian Express, his father Balwinder Singh said, "We are upset with the Punjab government's approach. No announcement has been made so far. Speaker Kuldar Singh Sandhwan did come to our house and even attended the cremation, but there has been no word from the chief minister." Akashdeep's mother Kamrajit Kaur said, "My son died while on duty.

"The contrast in treatment is shocking. Why is this silence in our son's case?" asked Akashdeep's father. When contacted, Poonamdeep Kaur, Deputy Commissioner, Faridkot, said, "The Army has initiated a court of inquiry to determine the exact cause of death, which reportedly was due to a bullet injury to his head." Kaur said the tehsildar visited the family when the body was brought back, and the sub-divisional magistrate of Kotkapura had attended the cremation. "The cause of death is under inquiry by the army, and as such, we await the findings. I am not aware of any precedent regarding compensation for Agniveer deaths by the state," she said.

## Devotees Throng Kaleshwaram for Saraswati Pushkaralu“Lakhs take part in sacred ritual; traffic woes mar arrangements“



"PS Ashokan"Indian Chronicle"Manthani May 19""Kaleshwaram, May 19:"The temple town of Kaleshwaram is witnessing an overwhelming spiritual congregation as the Saraswati Antargami Pushkaralu, which commenced on May 15, continues with religious fervour and large-scale public participation. The sacred event, observed once every twelve years, is drawing lakhs of devotees from Telangana and neighbouring states including Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh." "On Monday, marking the fifth day of the Pushkaralu, a significant spike in pilgrim turnout created a festive atmosphere across the Triveni Sangam, where the rivers Godavari, Pranahita, and the invisible Saraswati are believed to converge. Devotees took the holy dip, a ritual held sacred in Hindu tradition, seeking spiritual purification and divine blessings." "Following the ritual bath, pilgrims proceeded to offer prayers at the Sri Kaleshwara Mukteshwara Swamy and Sri Saraswati Mata temples. However, the massive influx has posed serious logistical challenges. Roads leading to the ghats witnessed heavy traffic jams, and vehicles were seen stranded for hours. Despite the authorities establishing a temporary bus terminal three kilometres away from the riverfront, devotees are forced to walk long distances, leading to widespread inconvenience." "Special arrangements have been made for dignitaries, but ordinary pilgrims expressed dissatisfaction with crowd management and transportation facilities. "The arrangements are inadequate. Elderly devotees and families with children are finding it particularly difficult to reach the ghats," a pilgrim lamented." "Adding prominence to the day's proceedings, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Bandi Sanjay Kumar, performed the holy dip in the Saraswati River. He was accompanied by senior BJP leader Chandrupatla Sunil Reddy." "The Pushkaralu will continue until May 26, with further crowds expected in the coming days. Authorities are under pressure to improve infrastructure and ease congestion as the event progresses.







# Over 130 dengue and chikungunya cases till April, Pune steps up vigil ahead of monsoon



GNS News Agency, May 19

At least 71 dengue and 60 chikungunya cases were reported this year from Pune district's rural areas. Ahead of National Dengue Day (May 16), health authorities have stepped up awareness campaigns to combat and control the spread of dengue fever. "We want to promote community participation in the dengue awareness programmes and spread correct information about treatment and control measures," a district health official said.

Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral disease transmitted between humans by the Aedes mosquitoes. The disease manifests as a flu-like illness with symptoms including high fever, headache, vomiting, muscle and joint pains and a characteristic skin rash. According to the World Health Organisation, occasionally it develops into a potentially lethal complication called severe dengue. District Malaria Officer Dr Aparna Chavan emphasised the need to control

mosquitoes in and around one's home, besides using insect repellents. "This year we sent 895 suspected blood samples of patients who had reported to primary health centres to the National Institute of Virology for further investigation. A total of 71 samples tested positive for the dengue virus while 60 samples tested positive for the chikungunya virus," she said. According to Dr Chavan, strict instructions have been issued to screen people with symptoms at primary health centres and blood samples of suspected cases are sent for lab investigations. Once dengue is confirmed, surveillance is stepped up at around 200 homes from the affected person's residence. "Entomological surveillance is also conducted and efforts are taken to spread awareness about preventing vector-borne diseases," Dr Radhakishan Pawar, Deputy Director (Health), Pune, said. In Pune Municipal Corporation areas, health department officials said that of the 116 suspected cases this year, eight each had tested positive for dengue and chikungunya. Instructions have been issued to conduct container surveys and ward offices are directed to avail of adequate medicine stocks from the headquarters, Assistant Health Officer Dr Rajesh Dighe said. Dr Nina Borade, Chief Medical Officer, PMC, said that a circular dated May 10 was circulated asking ward offices to step up awareness across ashram shalas, old-age homes, schools and colleges apart from undertaking surveillance activities. As per official data, authorities had reported 382 dengue-positive cases from Pune city in 2024, while there were 310 such cases from the district's rural areas. Health authorities reported 220 confirmed dengue cases from these rural areas under 13 tehsils in 2023. The city reported 272 confirmed dengue cases in the same year.

# Mumbai University starts admission process for PG courses, first merit list to be out on June 17

GNS News Agency, May 19

Mumbai University's admission process for post-graduate (PG) courses has begun. While the registration for admissions has already begun, according to the schedule officially announced by the varsity, the first merit list will be out on June 17, and the lectures are scheduled to start on July 1. In line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, these admissions will be through the online portal on the basis of prescribed merit. "The online system, which includes a wide variety of subjects across all four faculties, is designed to be user-friendly and transparent. Students can apply online through the university's official website. A video link is available on the website to help students understand the registration and application process," stated the note shared by Mumbai University to announce the commencement of PG admission, attached with a schedule to be followed by all departments and colleges.

As per the PG admission schedule, online registration and application submission began on May 13 and will continue until June 3. Online document verification will begin on June 9, and the provisional merit list will be out on June



10. Students are given time until June 12 to register their grievances, following which the first merit list will be out on June 17. Dr Pooja Raundale, Director of the Board of Examinations and Evaluation, has urged all academic departments, affiliated colleges, autonomous colleges, and recognised institutions under Mumbai University to adhere to the admission schedule.

# Jobless teachers in Bengal break main gate of SSC headquarters: 'Won't sit for exam again'

GNS News Agency, May 19

A massive protest broke out on Thursday between the Bidhannagar Police and jobless SSC teachers who had called for the "Bikash Bhawan Abhijan." Over one thousand teachers — identified as "not specifically tainted" and allowed to return to schools until December — have been staging a sit-in outside Bikash Bhavan, the education department headquarters in Salt Lake, since Wednesday afternoon. They are protesting against the school education department and the School Service Commission (SSC) for filing review petitions before the Supreme Court allegedly without consulting them. One protesting teacher said, "The state is not taking any initiative. Why should we take responsibility for the sins of others?" Another protester added, "We had not given bribes, then why should we suffer? Why should we give exams again? We had given the exam and got the job. Just because of some others, why should we have to suffer?" The protesting teachers raised slogans demanding justice.



A large contingent of Bidhannagar Police, along with RAF and combat force personnel, were deployed at the site. Tear gas was kept ready. Bidhannagar Chairman Sabyasachi Dutta was allegedly manhandled by teachers. Speaking to the media, he said, "I had come for my official work. The state is looking into their demands, but no one is above court orders. They only know whom they gave the money to—how can I say anything? We respect their feelings." As police and his bodyguards escorted him to his car, teachers shouted "Chor!" (thief). Many teachers lay down in front of the vehicle. One of them said, "Let them drive the car over us or shoot us. Our life is in complete uncertainty. We have our jobs till December, but what will happen after that?" Protesting teachers also said, "They are protecting the thieves. We will break down the gates. We must be reinstated with dignity. What is wrong with our demands? The goons of political leaders are coming and beating us up." There were allegations that supporters of Sabyasachi Dutta also assaulted teachers, reportedly using

helmets during the altercation. Around 26,000 teaching and non-teaching staff recruited through the SSC lost their jobs following a Supreme Court order on April 3. The state government had assured them of support and a legal battle on their behalf. A meeting was held with Education Minister Bratya Basu, during which the state promised that a review petition would be filed, and that unemployed teachers would be kept informed of every legal step taken. However, the protesting teachers allege that these promises were not kept. They claim that the Supreme Court had instructed the recruitment process to begin by May. Last week, the education department and the SSC filed a review petition against the Supreme Court's April 3 order, which called the entire recruitment process by the SSC in 2016 "tainted." Among the protesters are 15,403 teachers identified by the commission as "not found to be specifically tainted," from a pool of 17,206 teachers. This identification followed the Supreme Court's April 17 modification of its earlier order, made after an appeal by the state secondary education board. These teachers will continue to receive their salaries until December. The remaining 1,804 teachers have been barred from returning to schools. On April 17, the Supreme Court directed the state government and the SSC to submit affidavits by May 31 detailing the fresh recruitment process to fill the vacant posts.

# Karnataka mulls freezing number of computer science seats in engineering colleges

GNS News Agency, May 19

Taking a leaf out of the Telangana model, the Karnataka Higher Education Department is exploring options of freezing the enhancement of Computer Science Engineering (CSE) seats in engineering colleges to address concerns about unemployment and an imbalance between engineering disciplines. Higher Education Minister Dr M C Sudhakar has cited Telangana's similar restriction, upheld by the Telangana High Court, as a precedent. The move aims to curb the rapid increase in CSE seats, which has led to an oversupply of graduates amid a potential industry downturn and a decline in demand for traditional engineering fields like civil and mechanical. Dr Sudhakar said, "Several colleges in Karnataka are indiscriminately increasing computer science seats, often by converting civil and mechanical engineering seats, which have reduced demand, into CS seats. If this trend continues, we'll have lakhs of engineering graduates from CS and related disciplines. Eventually, the industry will face a crisis, where most of them could be left unemployed." Recently, the Telangana High Court dismissed a batch of writ petitions filed by private



engineering colleges that challenged the government's decision to reject proposals for increased CS intake for the 2024-25 academic year. The court upheld the state's authority to regulate engineering education. For the 2024-25 academic year, Karnataka had 1,32,309 engineering seats across 245 colleges, with around 45,000 in CSE and related courses. The surge, attributed to relaxed All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) norms, has seen some colleges offering 1,500–2,000 CSE seats, often by converting seats from other disciplines.

# Woman, daughter-in-law arrested for drug peddling near Nurpur in Himachal Pradesh



GNS News Agency, May 19

Drugs (Apprehended woman Champa, her daughter-in-law Sakshi (second and third in sitting position from right) in police custody immediate after their arrest at their house at Chhanni village in district Kangra. The Himachal Pradesh Police Wednesday arrested a woman and her daughter-in-law for alleged drug peddling from their home in the Chhanni village in Indora in the Nurpur police district. The police seized 17.91 grams of heroin from their possession. The arrested have been identified as Champa, 56, and Sakshi, 29. The police said the role of a

male family member is currently under investigation.

A police officer said, "The women were apprehended based on secret information regarding drug peddling in Chhanni, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Damtal police station. A raid was conducted at the house of the two women suspects. Heroin was found in their possession. We were also informed that one of the women had been previously involved in drug peddling. The investigation is ongoing." Sources said additional material, including foil paper used for packing heroin for supply to people with drug addiction, was also recovered from the house. A decoy customer was reportedly used to confirm the presence of narcotics at the location. A case has been registered under sections 21 and 29 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act at the Damtal police station. Himachal Pradesh has been grappling with a persistent drug menace, particularly involving the peddling of heroin, locally known as chitta. On January 11 this year, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu revealed that the state has witnessed a 340 per cent increase in NDPS Act cases over the last 13 years, from 2012 to 2025. He also noted that the proportion of heroin-related cases doubled, from 29 per cent in 2019 to 50 per cent in 2023.

Speaking virtually at a regional conference on drug trafficking and national security in Delhi recently, CM Sukhu said the Himachal Pradesh Police had confiscated properties of drug peddlers worth Rs 16 crore in the past three years, including property worth Rs 9 crore seized in 2024 alone.

# How a newly constructed Mumbai building held clues to rape case of minor who could not hear or speak

GNS News Agency, May 19

The Crime Branch team then asked for a list of all the under-construction labourers who worked at the spot around the time. The Crime Branch team then asked for a list of all the under-construction labourers who worked at the spot around the time. It was a routine monthly meeting of Mumbai police officials in 2017. As cases were reviewed, and unsolved cases were brought up, Crime Branch officials heard about a case that had left senior Mumbai police officers exasperated. It was the rape of a 14-year-old hearing- and speech-impaired girl.



The Crime Branch decided to take over, and officials were quickly apprised of the facts of the case. In December 2016, the 14-year-old minor from the northern suburbs of Mumbai was taken to a hospital after she complained of a stomach ache. The girl was four months pregnant and had allegedly been raped. The police were informed, following which a rape case was registered against unidentified accused. Even as the girl's family decided to terminate the pregnancy, the local police began investigating the matter. But there were communication barriers as the girl could not speak, and the police could not make much headway. When the Crime Branch stepped in, they decided to use the services of a speech therapist who could communicate with the girl in sign language. An officer who investigated the case said that every time they spoke to the girl with the help of the speech therapist, she would point to the newly constructed building located opposite the building where she resided. "We

realised that the building was somehow linked to the incident. We found that the building was under construction around the time that the girl had been raped," the officer said. The Crime Branch team then asked for a list of all the under-construction labourers who worked at the spot around the time. "While we could contact all the other labourers — they were also produced before the girl — there was one person, identified as Akhilesh Basfur, a 20-year-old working at the site, who had left for Uttar Pradesh soon after the incident came to light," the officer said. When the police tried contacting Basfur on the number available with the contractor, they found the phone was switched off. Suspecting he was linked to the incident, a Crime Branch team went to his village in UP and brought him to Mumbai.

# After Operation Sindoor, X account in Canada posts fake news related to Col Sofiya Qureshi; Karnataka Police issue a warning

GNS News Agency, May 19

After a post falsely claiming that supporters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) vandalised the home of Colonel Sofiya Qureshi in Belagavi, Karnataka, surfaced on X, the district police chief said Thursday that the account holder has been warned, and security has been provided to her family. Soon after Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, along with Wing Commander Vyomika Singh and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, briefed the media on Operation Sindoor, social media posts, including fake narratives, went viral on social media.



An X handle, @uddinanis867, with verified blue tick, posted, "Breaking: Disturbing attack on Muslim Indian Army officer's family. Col. Sofiya Qureshi, the newly appointed spokesperson of the Indian Army, has become the latest target of RSS-led hate. According to credible sources, Sofiya's family home in Belagavi (Konnur village) was attacked around 3 am by RSS extremists". The Indian Army has reportedly restricted Col. Sofiya's movement, and her entire family has been moved to Delhi for safety, as her name is now allegedly on the RSS hit list," it added. Soon after it went viral, Bheemashankar S Guled, Superintendent of Police, Belagavi, said there was no such incident, and also warned action against the account holder. Guled said the fake message came to light after the district's social media monitoring cell noticed it. "I issued a warning to initiate legal action for spreading the fake news. He immediately removed the post," he added.

During their investigation, the police found that the X account holder is from British Columbia, Canada, but said they are yet to get clarity on whether the person is an Indian

citizen living in that country. Col Sophiya Qureshi is married to Major Tajuddin Qureshi of the Mechanised Infantry, who hails from the Konnur village in the Belagavi district. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah, alluding to Col Sophiya Qureshi, said earlier this week that those who widowed India's daughters were taught a lesson by Prime Minister Narendra Modi using "their own sister". Shah's remarks triggered a row, with the Congress alleging that it was a reference to Colonel Sophiya Qureshi. Hours after the Madhya Pradesh High Court directed the registration of a First Information Report (FIR) against Shah, the Supreme Court Thursday expressed displeasure over his remarks. The top court was hearing Shah's plea to quash the High Court order. "A person holding such a public office is expected to uphold certain standards. Every sentence uttered by a minister has to be with responsibility... When this country is going through such a situation... just because you are a minister..." Chief Justice of India B R Gavai said.

# Digha tourism soars as Jagannath Dham welcomes 2 million visitors in 15 days

GNS News Agency, May 19

Despite ongoing debates over its establishment, the newly inaugurated Jagannath Dham temple in Digha has quickly emerged as a major pilgrimage and tourist destination, drawing massive crowds and giving a strong boost to tourism in West Bengal. Within just 15 days of its pran pratistha (consecration), the temple has attracted an estimated two million visitors—60 to 70 percent of whom are from neighboring Odisha. "The temple is a major attraction, and we are witnessing incredibly long queues. In just 15 days, approximately 20 lakh people have visited this sacred place," said Radharaman Das, Vice President of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) to The Indian Express.

Highlighting the unifying power of faith, he added, "Interestingly, a significant portion of the devotees, between 60 to 70 percent, are from Odisha. The devotion to Lord Jagannath transcends any perceived conflict; all are united in their bhakti. The lines resemble those at Tirupati Balaji." The temple's strategic location has also played a key role in its popularity. "Pilgrims visiting the revered Chandreshwar Mahadev Jyotirlinga in Odisha are now conveniently extending their trip to Digha, enjoying the coastline and offering prayers at the new Jagannath Dham," Das said. Temple trust members describe a vibrant spiritual atmosphere, with nightly kirtans (devotional singing) drawing hundreds of thousands. Many attribute the surge in footfall to the West Bengal government's tourism initiatives, which appear to be paying off despite the intense summer heat. However, the growing number of devotees has also raised concerns about crowd control, as acknowledged by a senior police official. Suprakash Giri, President of the Purba Medinipur Trinamool Youth Congress Committee and a temple trust member, views the temple's popularity as a win for Bengal's tourism. "The narrative pushed by the Odisha government appears politically motivated. On the ground, we are witnessing a remarkable influx of visitors from Odisha. This development is a tremendous boost for tourism in Bengal," he said. "Earlier, visitors typically stayed in Digha for two days.



# Noida restricts use of flower pots on balcony parapets of housing societies



GNS News Agency, May 19

The Noida Authority has asked all flat owners to remove the flower pots from the parapets of the balcony, officials said on Thursday. The decision was taken in the aftermath of the incident in Pune, where a child died after a pot placed on a balcony railing fell over him, said Greater Noida Chief Executive Officer M Lokesh."It (flower pots)

can fall on anyone, even while watering the pots or because of the wind. As of now, we are not going to take any fines. It is a sensitive issue. Residents should comply with it because it is a sensitive issue," the CEO said.

According to the notice, the step has been taken not to repeat the Pune incident that led to the death of the child playing in a housing society's compound."The incident is very unfortunate and so that the similar incident is not repeated in future that is why it is expected from the constituted Apartment Owners Association (AOA) of all the group housing societies in Noida to act against and remove all the flower pots kept on the parapet of the balconies," the notice read that has been issued by the Noida Authority.It further stated that if any such accident is repeated, the entire responsibility will be on the president of the AOA and in the absence of an AOA, the responsibility will fall on the builder who has constructed the group housing society."In case of accident, the Noida Authority will register an FIR against the AOA president, builder, and the owner of the flat," the notice read" My team has started to go and check if the order is being implied or not and ensuring it," said the CEO.

# Hooghly’s heritage takes to water: Kolkata port plans floating cafés and museums

GNS News Agency, May 19

The Syama Prasad Mukherjee Port, Kolkata (SMPK), is offering a new opportunity to hospitality brands, tourism operators, and innovators to revolutionise tourism along the Hooghly river.The port invites proposals to repurpose three historic pilot launches—P.L. Rupsa, P.L. Hooghly, and P.L. Gopal—into floating spaces for culture, leisure, and tourism. These vessels, once key to guiding ships on the Hooghly since the late 1990s, are ready for a second life as cafés, museums, and public attractions."Inspired by the success of ventures like 'Bengal Paddle', SMP Kolkata envisions converting heritage vessels into floating cafés, museums, cruises, and event spaces. This initiative aims to preserve maritime history while enhancing community participation," said Sanjay Mukherjee, Senior Public Relations Officer at SMPK.



assets.Mukherjee added, "SMP Kolkata is also offering free berthing at the Kolkata Dock System (KDS) for retrofitting, along with complimentary jetty space for passenger and staff movement during operations. This is part of a broader mission to revive Kolkata's riverfront by blending culture, tourism, and commerce, while honoring its maritime heritage."The project marks a bold step in reimagining Kolkata's riverfront. By turning historic vessels into floating landmarks, SMPK aims to merge tradition with innovation — a push for sustainable tourism.

# Punjab influencer denied bail after 71 suffer adverse reactions to hair oil for baldness

GNS News Agency, May19

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has denied anticipatory bail to a social media influencer who promoted a homemade hair growth oil that allegedly caused adverse reactions in more than 70 people during a camp in Punjab's Sangrur.The incident took place on March 16 at the Kali Mata Temple in Sangrur, where Amandeep Singh applied his oil on attendees, claiming it could combat baldness. Within hours, 71 people reported burning sensations in the eyes and swelling on their faces. They were treated at Civil Hospital, Sangrur, where the senior medical officer diagnosed the reaction as severe contact dermatitis. Doctors warned that if the eyes' corneas had been affected, some victims could have lost their vision.



Shakespeare — "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind; and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind" — the judge said, "This is yet another unfortunate example of internet-famous, unqualified quacks taking advantage of the common man's insecurities."The court stressed that products should be released only after ensuring safety and understanding possible side effects. "Advertising tall, misleading claims without scientific backing must be condemned," the judge said, adding that the state had a responsibility to protect public health and maintain trust in the market.

With the bail plea dismissed, Singh now faces arrest as the investigation continues under charges including Section 124 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, and Section 7 of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954.

# Cancer patients face delays, shortage at Chandigarh’s Sector 48 hospital

GNS News Agency, May19

Even as the union territory administration continues its efforts to strengthen the cancer hospital in Chandigarh Sector 48, patients at the healthcare facility suffer from a system riddled with delays, unpredictability, and infrastructural shortcomings.Meant to decongest the Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) in Sector 32 as well as decentralise oncology services, the South Campus hospital appears to have shifted the burden onto patients instead.For many, the most pressing issue remains the erratic functioning of OPD (outpatient department) services."We have been visiting the hospital for two days, but there is no certainty about the OPD schedule. Sometimes the doctor is available, sometimes not. Nobody tells us anything," a woman, accompanying her husband for chemotherapy, said on the condition of anonymity.She fears "speaking up against the hospital authority may lead to further delayed/ denied care".Amidst limited diagnostic services at the hospital, patients are also forced to turn to private laboratories.



“After consultation, they asked me to get my tests done, but at a private lab outside. Why should I have to pay more when I am already at a government hospital?” another patient, frustrated with the lack of in-house pathology and radiology, asked

the PGIMER (Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research) for further treatment. "Woh kehte hain yahan machine nahi hai, PGI chale jao," another caregiver said.Meanwhile, hospital sources said the healthcare facility is in a "phased development stage", and equipment installation as well as staff deployment are underway as part of the ongoing expansion plans."We shifted to increase the utility; more services would be provided here," said Dr G P Thami, medical superintendent at GMCH-32, dismissing concerns about the workforce shortage. "I disagree with the claims of staff shortage here." On being asked about a timeline for full operations, Thami claimed: "No time frames. We work at the earliest."Requesting anonymity, a hospital staffer said: "We were shifted here for better services, we hope we will provide them."

# Why are merger theories gaining prominence in Maharashtra?



GNS News Agency, May 19

In May 2024, NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar had indicated a strong possibility of some regional parties merging with Congress post Lok Sabha polls. Though Pawar Sr stopped short from predicting the merger of his own party NCP (SP) into Congress, his bold assertions in the middle of Lok Sabha elections had created a flutter. Later, he clarified that he only pointed to ideological commonality between NCP(SP) and Congress.Then came the 2024 Lok Sabha results, which showed NCP (SP) emerge with flying colours winning eight out of ten seats contested. The victory was, however, short lived as six months later in the Assembly polls, the party suffered a body blow as it was limited to wins on just ten seats out of the 82 seats it contested.

Exactly, a year later in May 2025 Sharad Pawar has once again dropped a broad hint of a possible merger between his own party NCP (SP) and NCP led by his estranged nephew deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar. Albeit, he has also indicated that the final decision will rest with the working party president and his daughter Surpriya Sule on whether she wants to sit in opposition. This time the statement comes ahead of the crucial local bodies elections post monsoon in Maharashtra.With decks cleared for local bodies elections this year, Maharashtra has turned into a potential battle field setting the stage for newer permutations and combinations. At the outset there are broadly two poles — Mahyuti versus Maha Vikas Aghadi. The three parties each in ruling Mahayuti and MVA which fought the 2024 Lok Sabha and Assembly polls may not remain intact when it comes to local bodies including 29 municipal corporations, 257 nagar parishads, 26 zilla parishads, 289 panchayat samitis. Amidst this theory of political mergers have resurfaced. First it was played out between estranged Thackeray cousins — Shiv Sena and MNS where they expressed willingness to come together for welfare of Maharashtra. Now, its Pawar's playing a merger game.Everybody who has closely watched Pawar Sr power play will vouch that his remarks are never casual. Sharad Pawar does what he does mindfully keeping a larger objective in mind. And this has been well established in state and national politics.

Officially, Ajit Pawar has categorically denied the merger talks with NCP(SP) categorically. Even Sule has never given any consent to the merger. Yet, from both sides

# MP Engineer Rashid seeks bail, challenges framing of charges at Delhi HC

GNS News Agency, May 19

The Delhi High Court on Thursday sought a response from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in a plea by Jammu and Kashmir MP Abdul Rashid Sheikh alias Engineer Rashid, appealing against a trial court's order refusing him bail. A special NIA trial court in Delhi had denied Rashid, an MP from Baramulla, regular bail on March 21.A division bench of Justices Subramonium Prasad and Harish Vaidyanathan Shankar issued notice to NIA and kept the matter next for July 29.In another plea, Rashid challenged before the Delhi High Court the framing of charges against him in the NIA case. However, the plea was filed with a delay of around three years (1,104 days). The bench also issued notice on an application seeking condonation of the delay.Briefly taken up by the bench, senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for the NIA, opposed the condonation of delay, submitting that delay beyond 90 days cannot be condoned. On the other hand, Rashid's counsel argued that the limitation of 90 days is not sacrosanct, especially in matters of life and liberty.

Rashid, who defeated Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in the Baramulla seat by over 2 lakh votes in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, has been lodged in Delhi's Tihar Jail since 2019 in a case of alleged terror funding.Rashid was arrested in 2019 under the Unlawful

there are groups suggesting through subtle indications that NCP and NCP (SP) have kept the coming together an open ended issue.A senior party functionary who has closely worked with both Pawar Sr and junior revealed, " Why and what he does only he knows. But in the latest case there is a possibility that a sizable section which is restless being out of power are exploring alternatives in the Ajit led NCP faction." Unlike Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, local bodies elections have altogether different dynamics and it always works to the ruling party's advantage. So, to avert further exodus from the organisation, a merger formula may have been floated. Secondly, it could also be a ploy to test the ground reality.

At 84 yrs, Pawar Sr reckons holding the turf at grass roots against the dynamic Ajit is going to be a daunting task. With BJP on strong footing having emerged as the single largest party with 132 seats in assembly polls, Pawar Sr knows regional forces splintered into multiple parties will not have easy going. In that sense, Ajit Pawar also will have to rely on overt or covert support from non-BJP electoral outfits to consolidation his own organisation specially in western Maharashtra. Being in power, Ajit Pawar can exploit the possibility of intra coalition contest within the MVA atleast for now.After the 2014 Assembly polls BJP for the first time emerged as the single largest party with 122 seats out of 288. The assembly polls saw multi corner contests with the undivided Shiv Sena, BJP, Congress and NCP contesting elections separately.The BJP fell short of 23 seats to reach the halfway magic number of 145 mandated for formation of government in Maharashtra. Given the strained relations with long standing alliance partners over seat sharing before polls, BJPs concerted efforts to get Uddhav Thackeray on board were in process. Officially, Shiv Sena had chosen to play an opposition role. Seizing the opportunity, Sharad Pawar who led NCP (undivided) suo moto declared support to the BJP much to everybody's shock. The NCP supported BJP from outside. At that time the explanation given was Pawar Sr wanted stability in state and welfare of people.However, this also marked the beginning of distancing and distrust between Shiv Sena and BJP. Though they reconciled their differences to become government (2014 to 2019), its impact was known five years later post 2019 Assembly polls when Uddhav Thackeray joined hands with Congress, NCP to form MVA by dumping BJP.Apart from that there have been twice attempts of proximity between BJP and undivided NCP (2017 to 2019). Post 2019 Assembly polls, Ajit Pawar pledged party's support to form a government led by Fadnavis. However, the experiment failed as the BJP-NCP coalition was short lived for just three days.



Activities (Prevention) Act. According to the NIA, he used various public platforms to "propagate the ideology of separatism and secessionism", was closely associated with various terrorist organisations, and wanted to "legitimise" the United Jihad Council, a platform of anti-India militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir.On May 30, 2017, the NIA registered a case against Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed and other "secessionist and separatist" leaders who, according to the NIA, "received and collected" funds through hawala channels in "connivance with active militants of...terrorist organizations Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Dukhtaran-e-Millat, Lashkar-e-Taiba" to fund "terrorist activities" in Jammu and Kashmir. Rashid was booked as part of this case.

# Bhayanderpada Flyover opens for public use, how it will ease traffic congestion in Thane

GNS News Agency, May 19

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde Wednesday inaugurated the Bhayanderpada Flyover on Ghodbunder Road in Thane in the presence of Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik and Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) senior officials.The flyover is built on the path of the upcoming Metro Lines 4 and 4A and combines road and Metro infrastructure within one corridor. Once the Metro is operational, the bridge will give easy access to nearby Metro stations and increase public movement.According to officials, the flyover will not only ease traffic but also encourage the region's economic growth. The residents of Thane will benefit as the flyover is poised to limit the traffic bottlenecks, thereby saving fuel and time, they said.The flyover features a 391-metre slope from the Thane side, a 20-metre underpass, a 189-metre slope on the Borivali side, and extends up to 601 metres. With a 2+2 lane road and a 20 metre underpass, the facility has been planned to handle more than 73,000 passenger cars daily. The flyover features a separate pedestrian underpass for safe road crossing and minimised surface-level traffic.Dr Sanjay Mukherjee, Metropolitan Commissioner, MMRDA, said, "The inauguration of the Bhayanderpada underpass and flyover marks another step toward



tends up to 601 metres. With a 2+2 lane road and a 20 metre underpass, the facility has been planned to handle more than 73,000 passenger cars daily. The flyover features a separate pedestrian underpass for safe road crossing and minimised surface-level traffic.Dr Sanjay Mukherjee, Metropolitan Commissioner, MMRDA, said, "The inauguration of the Bhayanderpada underpass and flyover marks another step toward building an efficient, integrated transport system in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. We are committed to creating infrastructure that supports sustainable urban living." The flyover will also enhance traffic flow between the important urban and industrial areas, such as Thane, Bhiwandi, Navi Mumbai, JNPT, Borivali, Vasai-Virar, and even Gujarat. In particular, the area between Gaimukh and Waghbil, which has had a perennial congestion problem with heavy freight trucks and office-goer traffic, will now witness significant relief.According to officials, the local public of Ghodbunder Road, Bhayanderpada, Waghbil, Brahmrand, Kasarvadavali, and Thane East will directly gain benefits.

They said that smoother, faster, and safer travel will enhance the quality of life and contribute to the area's economic activity.



# Iran wants to learn from India's cheetah revival efforts



GNS News Agency, May 19

Iran, working to save its rapidly declining cheetah population, has shown interest in learning cheetah management from India, according to information received through an RTI application.Rajesh Gopal, chairman of the government's Cheetah Project Steering Committee, shared this information during a meeting of the panel in February.

"In a recent meeting, Iranian officials have expressed their interest in learning cheetah management in India," the minutes of the meeting quoted Mr. Gopal as saying. He also suggested that the International Big Cat Alliance, an India-led initiative, could reach out to other cheetah range countries interested in learning about cheetah conservation and management.However, when asked if Iran had formally approached India in this regard, a senior official of the National Tiger Conservation Authority said, "there is no such proposal at this juncture." The government's "Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetahs in India" also mentions that India would be willing to assist Iran and the global conserva-

tion community in efforts to protect the critically endangered Iranian cheetah.

The cheetah is the only large carnivore that became extinct in India, primarily owing to over-hunting and habitat loss. The last known cheetah in the country died in 1948 in the Sal forests of Chhattisgarh's Koriya district.India began discussions with the Shah of Iran in the 1970s to bring the Asiatic cheetah to India in exchange for Asiatic lions. However, considering the small population of Asiatic cheetahs in Iran and the genetic similarity between the Iranian and African cheetahs, it was later decided to use the African species for reintroduction.Since September 2022, India has translocated 20 African cheetahs — eight from Namibia and 12 from South Africa — as part of its globally watched reintroduction programme.It is now set to receive eight more cheetahs from Botswana in two phases, with the first four expected by May this year.

Once found across central and southwest Asia, the Asiatic cheetah now survives only in Iran. Experts estimate fewer than 30 remain in the wild. In January 2022, an Iranian Minister told state media that the population had dropped to just 12 from around 100 in 2010.According to researchers at the Tehran-based conservation NGO Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS), up to 400 Asiatic cheetahs roamed a large area of eastern and central Iran in the mid-1970s.Despite receiving legal protection in the 1960s, the cheetahs in Iran have continued to face threats owing to a decline in their primary prey species, habitat loss and fragmentation, human-wildlife conflict, especially after the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war.Researchers say most of the remaining cheetah habitats in Iran are also rich in mineral resources while international sanctions on Iran have caused economic hardships, pushing some people towards illegal and unregulated hunting of prey animals.

# Zelenskiy weighs next step as Putin's no-show throws Ukraine talks into confusion

ISTANBUL, GNS News Agency, May 19 , Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a second-tier team of aides and deputy ministers to hold peace talks with Ukraine in Turkey on Thursday, spurning Kyiv's challenge to go there in person to meet President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.Putin's no-show plunged prospects for the talks - which would be the first since the early weeks of the war - into confusion. Russia said they would take place in Istanbul in the second half of the day, but Turkey said no meeting was scheduled yet.The Reuters Tariff Watch newsletter is your daily guide to the latest global trade and tariff news. Sign up here.Zelenskiy, arriving in the Turkish capital Ankara, described the Russian line-up - excluding Putin, his foreign minister and his top foreign policy adviser - as "decorative". He said Ukraine would decide its next move on talks with Russia after he had met Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan."We need to understand what kind of level the Russian delegation is, and what mandate they have and whether they can make any decisions," he said.

Asked what his message to Putin would be, Zelenskiy told reporters at the airport: "I'm here. I think this is a clear message."Russia said its team was in Istanbul and ready for serious work, and accused Ukraine of "trying to put on a show" around the negotiations.Both sides have been wrestling for months over the logistics of ceasefires and peace talks while trying to show U.S. President Donald Trump they are serious about trying to end what he calls "this stupid war".Hundreds of thousands have been killed and wounded on both sides in the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two. Washington has threatened repeatedly to abandon its mediation efforts unless there is clear progress.Russia said on Thursday its forces had captured two more settlements in Ukraine's Donetsk region. A spokeswoman for Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pointedly reminded reporters of his comment last year that Ukraine was "getting smaller" in the absence of an agreement to stop fighting.PRESSURE FROM TRUMPThere was confusion in Istanbul, where reporters were gathered near the Dolmabahce palace that the Russians had specified as the talks venue.Zelenskiy had goaded Putin earlier this week by questioning if he was brave enough to show up. The Kremlin says Putin - who is also under threat of even tighter European sanctions to "suffocate" Russia's economy - does not respond to ultimatums.

The warring sides last held face-to-face talks - also in Istanbul - in March 2022, only weeks after Putin sent his army into Ukraine.After leaning heavily on Ukraine and clashing with Zelenskiy at an Oval Office meeting in February, Trump has shown increasing impatience with Putin in recent weeks and threatened additional sanctions to hit Russian trade.The U.S. president, who is on a three-nation tour of the Middle East, said on Thursday he would go to the talks in Turkey on Friday if it was "appropriate"."I just hope Russia and Ukraine are able to do something. It has to stop," he said.U.S. Secretary of



State Marco Rubio, speaking at a NATO meeting in Turkey, said there was no military solution to the conflict, and Trump was open to "virtually any mechanism" that would lead to peace.If the talks do go ahead, they will have to address a chasm between the two sides over a host of issues.Zelenskiy backs an immediate 30-day ceasefire, but Putin has said he first wants to start talks at which the details of such a truce could be discussed.With Russian forces in control of close to a fifth of Ukraine, Putin has held fast to his longstanding demands for Kyiv to cede territory, abandon its NATO membership ambitions and become a neutral country.Ukraine rejects these terms as tantamount to capitulation, and is seeking guarantees of its future security from world powers, especially the United States.The Russian delegation is headed by presidential adviser Vladimir Medinsky and includes a deputy defence minister, a deputy foreign minister and the head of military intelligence.The Kremlin said Putin had held a late-night meeting with ministers, military commanders and spy chiefs to discuss the upcoming talks.A source involved on the Ukrainian side in the March 2022 talks in Istanbul said that Medinsky - who also led the Russian team then - did not have a strong mandate to make decisions."The people who will actually be sitting at the table are not necessarily the key players," the source said.French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said Zelenskiy had shown his good faith by coming to Turkey but there was an "empty chair" where Putin should be sitting."Putin is stalling and clearly has no desire to enter these peace negotiations, even when President Trump expressed hiavailability and his desire to facilitate these negotiations," he said.Estonia, an EU and NATO member, said Putin was delivering a "slap in the face" by sending a low-level team.Highlighting the level of tension between Russia and the U.S.-led alliance, Estonia said a Russian fighter jet had "violated NATO territory" as the Estonian navy tried to detain a Russia-bound oil tanker under British sanctions.Additional reporting by Can Sezer in Istanbul; Humeyra Pamuk, Tuvan Gumrukcu and John Irish in Antalya, Turkey; Huseyin Hayatsever in Ankara; Steve Holland in Washington; Christian Lowe, Olena Harmash and Yuliia Dysa in Kyiv; Dmitry Antonov in Moscow; Lidia Kelly in Melbourne; Writing by Mark Trevelyan; Editing by Ros Russell

# Trump says Qatar will invest \$10 billion in US airbase

GNS News Agency, May 19

Item 1 of 3 U.S. President Donald Trump salutes next to Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani as the U.S. anthem is played on the day of a state dinner, at Lusail Palace in Lusail, Qatar, May 14, 2025. REUTERS/Brian SnyderDOHA, May 15 (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday that Qatar will invest \$10 billion in coming years in the Al Udeid Air Base south-west of the country's capital Doha, the largest U.S. military facility in the Middle East.In a speech to U.S. troops at the base during his tour of the Gulf, Trump also said Qatari defence purchases signed on Wednesday are worth \$42 billion.The Reuters Tariff Watch newsletter is your daily guide to the latest global trade and tariff news. Sign up here.Trump will later head to the United Arab Emirates, where leaders are seeking U.S. help to make the wealthy Gulf nation a global leader in artificial intelligence.The U.S. has a preliminary agreement with the UAE to allow it to import 500,000 of Nvidia'smost advanced AI chips a year, starting this year, Reuters reported on Wednesday.The deal would boost the UAE's construction of data centers vital to developing artificial intelligence models. But the agreement has provoked national security concerns among sectors of the U.S. government, and the terms could change, sources said.A string of business agreements has been inked during Trump's four-day swing through the Gulf region, including a deal for Qatar Airways to purchase up to 210 Boeing

widebody jets, a \$600 billion commitment from Saudi Arabia to invest in the U.S. and \$142 billion in U.S. arms sales to the kingdom.The trip has also brought a flurry of diplomacy. Trump made a surprise announcement on Tuesday that the U.S. will remove longstanding sanctions on Syria and subsequently met with Syrian interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa.He urged Sharaa to establish ties with Syria's longtime foe Israel.In Abu Dhabi Trump will meet UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and other leaders.Former President Joe Biden's administration had imposed strict oversight of exports of U.S. AI chips to the Middle East and other regions. Among the Biden administration's fears were that the prized semiconductors would be diverted to China and buttress Beijing's military strength.Trump has made improving ties with some Gulf countries a key goal of his administration. If all the proposed chip deals in Gulf states, and the UAE in particular, come together, the region would become a third power center in global AI competition after the United States and China.Trump had dangled the possibility of making a side trip to Turkey to join Russia-Ukraine talks before returning to Washington, but a U.S. official said on Wednesday that the president would not make that stop.By Gram Slattery and Andrew Mills in Doha and Federico Maccioni, Nayera Abdallah and Tala Ramadan in Dubai; Additional reporting by Yousef Saba, Karen Freifeld and Hadeel Al Sayegh; Editing by Colleen Jenkins and Cynthia OstermanGram Slattery is a White House correspondent in Washington, focusing on national security, intelligence and foreign affairs.

# Israeli military strikes kill scores in Gaza, medics say



CAIRO,GNS News Agency, May 20. Israeli military strikes killed at least 60 people in the Gaza Strip on Thursday, Palestinian medics said, as the United States and Arab mediators pushed for a ceasefire deal and U.S. President Donald Trump visited the Middle East.Most of the victims, including women and children, were killed in Khan Younis in southern Gaza in airstrikes that hit homes and tents, they said.The Reuters Tariff Watch newsletter is your daily guide to the latest global trade and tariff news. Sign up here.The dead included local journalist Hassan Samour, who worked for the Hamas-run Aqsa radio station and was killed along with 11 family members when their home was struck, the medics said.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military, which has intensified its offensive in Gaza as it tries to eradicate Hamas in retaliation for the deadly attacks the Palestinian militant group carried out on Israel in 2023.Hamas said in a statement that Israel was making a "desperate attempt to negotiate under cover of fire" as indirect ceasefire talks take place between Israel and Hamas, involving Trump envoys and Qatar and Egyptian mediators in Doha.Israel carried out the latest strikes on the day Palestinians commemorate the "Nakba", or catastrophe, when hundreds of thousands of people fled or were forced to flee their hometowns and villages during the 1948 Middle East war that gave birth to the state of Israel.

With most of the 2.3 million people in Gaza internally displaced, some residents of the tiny enclave say suffering

is greater now than at the time of the Nakba."What we are experiencing now is even worse than the Nakba of 1948," said Ahmed Hamad, a Palestinian in Gaza City who has been displaced multiple times."The truth is, we live in a constant state of violence and displacement. Wherever we go, we face attacks. Death surrounds us everywhere."Palestinian health officials say the Israeli attacks have escalated since Trump started a visit on Tuesday to the Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates that many Palestinians had hoped he would use to push for a truce.

The latest strikes follow attacks on Gaza on Wednesday that killed at least 80 people, local health officials said.Little has come of new indirect ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas led by Trump's envoys and Qatar and Egyptian mediators in Doha.Hamas says it is ready to free all the remaining hostages it is holding in Gaza in return for an end to the war, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu prefers interim truces, saying the war can only end once Hamas is eradicated."At a time when mediators are exerting intensive efforts to put the negotiation back on the right track, the Zionist occupation (Israel) responds to those efforts by military pressure on innocent civilians," the group said in a statement."Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants an open-ended war and he doesn't care about the fate of his hostages," it said.Israel invaded Gaza in retaliation for the Hamas-led attack on southern Israeli communities on October 7, 2023, in which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 were taken as hostages to Gaza, according to Israeli tallies.Israel's military campaign has killed more than 52,900 Palestinians, according to local health officials. It has left Gaza on the brink of famine, aid groups and international agencies say.A U.S.-backed humanitarian organisation will start work in Gaza by the end of May under an aid distribution plan, but has asked Israel to let the United Nations and others resume deliveries to Palestinians now until it is set up.No humanitarian assistance has been delivered to Gaza since March 2, and a global hunger monitor has warned that half a million people face starvation in Gaza.A senior correspondent with nearly 25 years' experience covering the Palestinian-Israeli conflict including several wars and the signing of the first historic peace accord between the two sides.

# Trump says US close to a nuclear deal with Iran

GNS News Agency, May 19

DUBAI, May 15 (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday that the United States was getting very close to securing a nuclear deal with Iran, and Tehran had "sort of" agreed to the terms."We're in very serious negotiations with Iran for long-term peace," Trump said on a tour of the Gulf, according to a shared pool report by AFP.

The Reuters Tariff Watch newsletter is your daily guide to the latest global trade and tariff news. Sign up here."We're getting close to maybe doing a deal without having to do this... there (are) two steps to doing this, there is a very, very nice step and there is the violent step, but I don't want to do it the second way," he said.An Iranian source familiar with the negotiations said there were still gaps to bridge in the talks with the United States.

Oil prices fell by about \$2 on Thursday on expectations for a U.S.-Iran nuclear deal that could result in sanctions easing.Fresh talks between Iranian and U.S. negotiators to resolve disputes over Tehran's nuclear programme ended in Oman on Sunday with further negotiations planned, officials said, as Tehran publicly insisted on continuing its uranium enrichment.Though Tehran and Washington have both said they prefer diplomacy to resolve the decades-long nuclear dispute, they remain divided on several red lines that negotiators will have to circumvent to reach a new deal and avert future military action.Iran's president reacted to Trump's comments on Tuesday calling Tehran the "most destructive force" in the Middle East."Trump thinks he can sanction and threaten us and then talk of human rights. All the crimes and regional instability is caused by them (the United States)," Masoud Pezeshkian said.

"He wants to create instability inside Iran."However, in an interview with NBC News published on Wednesday, an Iranian official said Iran was willing to agree to a deal with the U.S. in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.Ali Shamkhani, an adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said Iran would commit to never making nuclear weapons and getting rid of its stockpiles of highly enriched uranium, agree to enrich uranium



only to the lower levels needed for civilian use and allow international inspectors to supervise the process, NBC reported.U.S. officials have publicly stated that Iran should halt uranium enrichment, a stance Iranian officials have called a "red line" asserting they will not give up what they view as their right to enrich uranium on Iranian soil.However, they have indicated a willingness to reduce the level of enrichment.Iranian officials have also expressed readiness to reduce the amount of highly enriched uranium in storage—uranium enriched beyond the levels typically needed for civilian purposes, such as nuclear power generation.But they have said it would not accept lower stockpiles than the amount agreed in a deal with world powers in 2015 - the deal Trump quit.The Iranian source said that while Iran is prepared to offer what it considers concessions, "the issue is that America is not willing to lift major sanctions in exchange."Western sanctions have severely impacted the Iranian economy.Regarding the reduction of enriched uranium in storage, the source noted: "Tehran also wants it removed in several stages, which America doesn't agree with either."There is also disagreement over the destination to which the highly enriched uranium would be sent, the source added.

# How Trump's man in Beijing swung from trade globalist to China hawk

GNS News Agency, May 19

BEIJING/WASHINGTON, May 15 (Reuters) - The new U.S. envoy to China, Ambassador David Perdue is a former champion of global trade turned China hawk who will emphasize his close ties to President Donald Trump as he seeks to restore crucial lines of communication between Washington and Beijing.Perdue, a one-time Republican Senator for Georgia, arrived in Beijing Thursday, according to a post on his X account. He replaces career diplomat Nicholas Burns, a pick of former President Joe Biden, who left in January.The Reuters Tariff Watch newsletter is your daily guide to the latest global trade and tariff news. Sign up here.Perdue's arrival will be closely watched after both sides reached an unexpected truce in Geneva last weekend, pausing a trade war between the world's two biggest economies that had stoked fears of a global recession.

"It is an honor to represent President Trump," Perdue wrote on his official X account Thursday, accompanied by a selfie taken outside the embassy building."I am ready to get to work here and make America safer, stronger and more prosperous."Analysts say Perdue, who was a prominent Senate ally for Trump in his first term, will use his ties to Trump as he seeks to gain credibility with Chinese interlocutors to help push through a trade deal."I would describe David Perdue as having one of the closest relationships with the President of any of our ambassadors," Republican Senator Steve Daines told Reuters in an interview."President Trump has picked the right man, at the right time, for this most important responsibility."Perdue is also tasked with helping to convince Beijing to stop the flow to the U.S. of ingredients used to manufacture the deadly opioid fentanyl, the reason behind 20% of Washington's remaining tariffs on China.Daines said he and Perdue have discussed the issue "at length," including a proposal offered by Chinese Premier Li Qiang in March during Daines' visit to Beijing.Daines suggested both sides could structure a tariff

reduction deal around whether Beijing commits to effectively stopping the precursor flow within a set timeframe, though it remains up to the two countries' negotiators to hammer out such steps.China's foreign ministry said Wednesday it is "willing to facilitate" Perdue's arrival in Beijing to take up his duties. Reuters has contacted the U.S. Embassy in Beijing for comment.Perdue, 75, was once a global trade evangelist, who leveraged outsourcing manufacturing to Asia during his 40-year international business career.He later became a China security hawk in the Senate, and backed, if initially reluctantly, Trump's first term tariffs on the country.Perdue and Daines co-led congressional delegations to China in 2018 and 2019, meeting then-Premier Li Keqiang and Liu He, President Xi Jinping's former economic tsar and lead Chinese negotiator for the U.S.-China Phase One trade deal to reduce tariffs during Trump's first term.Chinese officials expect Perdue to be more "pragmatic" and economics-minded than his predecessor, who was more focused on "ideological issues" such as human rights, said Wu Xinbo, director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University."Given his business background, he can ... work to resolve specific issues in areas such as trade, economic and people-to-people exchanges," said Wu.They are also hoping he can act as a direct communications channel between China and the U.S., he added.Perdue was raised in Warner Robins, Georgia by two teachers from a farming community.He studied at Georgia Institute of Technology before joining consultancy Kurt Salmon Associates, where he helped American clothing manufacturers source products from Asian factories.He helped consumer goods company Sara Lee establish its Asia operations while living in Hong Kong 1992-1994. The firm cut thousands of jobs in 1994, including at plants in Virginia and Georgia. The pattern repeated during his subsequent stints at Haggard Clothing, Reebok and Dollar General.







# Physicists propose tabletop experiment to test gravity’s quantumness



General relativity and quantum mechanics are two highly successful theories. The former explains gravity and the latter teams up with special relativity to describe the other three forces of nature: electromagnetic, strong nuclear, and weak nuclear forces. However, scientists don't know how gravity fits into quantum mechanics. In fact, they have been proposing experiments that can test the quantumness of gravity. On October 29, 2024, one such proposal appeared in the journal *Physical Review Letters*. With concepts like superposition, illustrated by the Schrödinger's cat thought experiment, and entanglement, quantum mechanics defies classical intuition. Quantum mechanics also allows seemingly absurd phenomena, e.g. the measurement of a quantum system (like a particle) can cause the system to instantaneously 'collapse' into one possible state that described the system before the measurement. In fact, if a system undergoes measurement-induced collapse, it's said to live by the rules of quantum mechanics. Classical systems like planets orbiting stars, cricket balls flying in the air, and cars on the road don't do this.

Ruling out alternatives Multiple experiments have found that both quantum mechanics and general relativity are legitimate theories of nature — yet they remain incompatible with each other. This has encouraged physicists to try and come up with a larger theory that can accommodate both. One strong contender is string theory, another is loop quantum gravity. Both of them predict deviations from quantum mechanics and general relativity either at the beginning of the universe or inside black holes, meaning they're nearly impossible to test. "So far, experimental tests are extremely difficult — the situation looks very bleak — it is not clear if it can be done at all," Dipankar Home of Bose Institute, Kolkata, and one of the authors of the new paper, said. To check whether gravity is quantum mechanical, scientists need precise tests that rule out alternative possibilities. Unlike the classical Newtonian mechanics, where measuring a system doesn't alter it, quantum mechanics dictates that observing a system forces it into a definite state. This isn't a matter of how carefully a physicist is making the measurement. The measurement will always collapse the state. So measuring the state versus not measuring it creates a way to test whether the system is behaving according to the laws of Newtonian mechanics or quantum mechanics. As a first step, physicists said they needed an experiment where gravity helps an inherently quantum mechanical process happen. If gravity causes the state to collapse, it will be a sign that gravity behaves quantum mechanically. The new study suggested the following design: a test mass is in a superposition of two possible paths it can take. A probe mass will interact with it gravitationally to force it to choose one of the paths. Here, both masses are in a superposition of which paths they take. These two paths come close, resulting in different distances between the two pairs of paths. That is, for each path of the test mass, there are two possible paths the probe mass can take. "Such simple, yet novel proposals ... are very inter-

esting to the community," said Sreenath K. Manikandan, a theoretical physicist at the Nordic Institute for Theoretical Physics, Sweden, who wasn't involved in the study. Testing weak gravity The idea is also interesting because it proposes to test weak gravity. Say you're performing an experiment where you're looking for light. If the light is bright, you can find it just by looking at it. But if it is very dim, you need sophisticated light-detecting cameras. Similarly, ideas to look for quantum gravity have so far involved strong gravity, like that near black holes, whereas the new test proposes looking for weak gravity, like the force near a small object.

"Our contention is that fundamental quantum gravity features can persist in this limit," Home said. Igor Pikovski, a quantum gravity researcher at the Stevens Institute of Technology and Stockholm University, commended this: "The important lesson is that quantum gravity signatures might show themselves even ... in tabletop set-ups and not just in science-fiction scenarios." But independent experts said the experiment is still challenging because the masses need to behave quantum mechanically. Quantum properties usually show up in a measurable way in systems that exist at a smaller than microscopic scale, like inside atoms, whereas gravity is easier to measure around larger objects, like a building. This is why Vivishek Sudhir of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said, "Preparing a spatial quantum superposition of an object massive enough such that its gravitational force is also measurable is an enormous experimental challenge." Creating a superposition Bose et al. have proposed the use of masses weighing about one-trillionth of a gram while maintaining a separation of around one-tenth of a millimetre. Nanocrystals meet these criteria. Yet the team still estimates a decade for their experiment to be conducted. Thus far, "the largest objects that have been placed in two places at once are macromolecules. We will have to place a nanocrystal, which is a billion times larger, in two places at once," Sougato Bose, one of the coauthors of the study, said. "Creating this superposition is by far the main challenge," Debarshi Das, another coauthor, added. To do so, the authors have proposed using a quantum property of the nanocrystals called spin. Simply speaking, the spin affects the nanocrystals' motion (and can be manipulated by an external magnetic field). The spin of each nanocrystal exists in a superposition of two states until it is measured. Since the state affects the nanocrystal's path, it also exists in a superposition of two paths until a measurement.

"Once prepared in such a state, the gravitational field produced by this configuration will need to be measured very rapidly," according to Sudhir. "This is because any spatial quantum superposition will be extremely fragile and will die quickly, [so] measurements have to be made before this happens." Bose also said the nanocrystals can collide with gas atoms and other objects and forces in their environment, which could destroy the superposition. "This could include things like the gravitational forces from seismic activity in the earth or perhaps even those due to clouds moving in the sky," Sudhir said. For these reasons, the experimental set-up will have to happen in a near-perfect vacuum and the masses' properties will have to be measured with extreme efficiency. Despite all these challenges, physicists are hopeful. The proposed test has a much shorter timeline than the centuries required for humankind to develop the technologies to test quantum gravity near black holes. Pikovski agreed the future is bright: "Just a few years ago, it was considered impossible to experimentally test quantum gravity even in principle." The experts also said that the test may reveal gravity isn't a classical force, and that overall they will have to keep an open mind: it may not necessarily mean gravity is quantum but that it could be a non-classical and non-quantum entity, something different altogether.

# A ‘summer checklist’ for Perumbakkam wetland



Perumbakkam wetland is beginning to develop a "tan". The bulrushes are beginning to shrink resembling ageing human skin drained of fat. These are nature's aide-memoire on what next to expect. It is a "gentle reminder" — using a phrase that makes nudges to action palatable in polite society — that the Perumbakkam wetland is an easy target for fires during summer. And it is time to start efforts to scuttle that possibility, checking factors that can be controlled. Summer heat can cause fires on dry vegetation, but there could be something else at work. Before proceeding further, here is what is at stake. At risk of repeating the evident, Perumbakkam wetland is not the sole preserve of waterbirds. Certain parts of it host ground-nesting birds, and these are the parts susceptible to fires, due to a cocktail of factors — brown vegetation during summer, the summer heat and burning cigarette stubs. These parts — particularly a kuccha road that marks the western border of the

wetland — are hoofed by humans, and unknown to themselves, some of them carry in their hands an agency to start a fire.

The Perumbakkam wetland is swamped by intense developmental activity on three sides. On its northern side, lined by the Sholinganallur-to-Perumbakkam road, Metro Rail pillars are rearing up their head. In addition to Metro Rail work, there is activity pertaining to the Water Resources Department. On its southern side is a neighbourhood that is "mobilising" residents at a rapid pace. Housing projects abound on this side and frequently, a project becomes a collection of homes. There is constant work and work presupposes the presence of workers. On both sides — the northern and the southern — there is a noticeable presence of workers. Some of them live in temporary shacks arranged for them next to their work sites. Perumbakkam wetland is known for movement of people down a kuccha road on its western side, a good number of them belong to this workforce. Besides, on the other side of the kuccha road that is housing construction activity, leading to movement on the road. A careless cigarette butt thrown on the brown, dry vegetation before it has burnt out, can cause considerable mischief. From where the fire often started in recent years — particularly in the 2022 and 2024 fires — there is reason to believe it was the trigger and the intense summer heat did the rest.

# Cell and Gene therapy facility launched by Bharat Biotech

Hyderabad: Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL), on Thursday announced the launch of country's only vertically integrated, purpose-designed Cell and Gene Therapy (CGT) Infrastructure and Viral Vector Production Facility at Genome Valley.

Spread over 50,000 sft, the CGT facility will explore gene and cell therapies to tackle targetted gene expression, immune system modulation, and long-term cell survival. The work will span from boosting immune responses against cancer to ensuring that therapeutic proteins are safely accepted in patients with genetic diseases like haemophilia, a press release said.

Dr Krishna Ella, executive chairman, Bharat Biotech, said, "Gene and cell therapies represent some of the most intricate, scientifically advanced treatments available today." Dr Raches Ella, chief development officer, Bharat Biotech, spearheading the CGT initiative, said: "Oncology and rare diseases' treatment therapies are our key focus area and this facility will support a wide array of advanced therapies, including CD19 CAR T Cell Therapy for Blood



The work of the CGT facility will span across multiple things - from boosting immune responses against cancer to ensuring that therapeutic proteins are safely accepted in patients with genetic diseases like haemophilia

cancers and Gene Therapy." Prof Krishanu Saha, University of Wisconsin, Madison, said that his lab has initiated a pioneering collaboration with Bharat Biotech to develop next-generation CAR (chimeric antigen receptor) cell therapies using AI.

# ‘We have lived with macaques for very long periods of time and have co-evolved with them’



When primatologist Anindya Sinha first came to Bengaluru in the early 1990s, he couldn't help but notice the number of bonnet macaques in the city. "They were not just in Cubbon Park or Lal Bagh, but also on the city walls and the terraces of houses," he says at a recent talk at Science Gallery, Bengaluru. "But, of course, we knew that times were changing and their existence was doomed," he says. According to Sinha, a professor at the National Institute of Advanced Sciences (NIAS) in Bengaluru, as the city transitioned from the Garden City of yore to the Silicon Valley of India that it is today and lost its gardens as well as the relatively relaxed pace of life that had once defined it, many other non-human inhabitants of the city began to leave. One such "legitimate citizen of the city" was the bonnet macaque, a species of monkey native to peninsular India.

"What subsequently developed was not only negativity about the macaque, but also these other ideas and conceptions that came in, about aesthetics, for example," he says in this talk titled *Changing Ecologies, Transforming Lives: Complex Coexistence of Human and Non-Human Primates in Our Cities*. "If Bengaluru was to be a beautiful city, it shouldn't have monkeys just as it shouldn't have dogs. I find that personally very difficult to accept because what it is clearly saying is that we are speciesists," says Sinha, whose lecture offered insights into the profound relationship Indians have shared with nonhuman species, including macaques, why this co-existence is under threat and how these macaques have learnt how to survive in human-altered landscapes, often resorting to pilfering, begging or forging new friendships to adapt to an urbanised world. "We fight being racists, we fight being sexist. But I don't think we have any qualms about announcing loudly that only we will stay in the city, not the macaques or dogs."

The kinship that Indians have traditionally had with non-human species has been an integral aspect of our culture, he says, adding that this aspect of our attitude towards other forms of life still exists in many parts of the country. "I will stick out my neck and say that the closeness that humans feel towards non-humans in India far out-surpasses any other community anywhere in the world," he says, attributing this to two specific reasons. "The first is that our philosophy looks at all other species in a continuum with ourselves. This is in marked contrast with the West, where either because of Judeo-Christian faith or generations of philosophers, the human and the non-human were very starkly separated," he says. The second reason, in his opinion, is religion, with "many of our deities, many of the vehicles of our gods and goddesses being non-human. That gave them pride of place in our communities and belief systems," he says. To make his case, he uses the example of the fishing folk of Charotar in Gujarat, who have lived in relative harmony alongside the mugger or marsh crocodile for centuries. "This is a remarkable friendship. There have been very few attacks, about four or five in the last 40 years, with almost no deaths," says Sinha, showing the audience a photograph taken at Charotar depicting one such friendship — between Ramubhai, a fisherman and Raju, a marsh crocodile. "The relationship is so close that Ramubhai can call out to Raju, and Raju responds to him," he says. This attitude, unfortunately, is fast disappearing, says Sinha. "I do not understand why this spirit, this philosophy of being with other beings, does not pervade our modern thinking of other beings," he says. "Maybe we have lost much of the idyllic kind of world that we imagine where we could co-exist without stress, strain and conflict."

The macaques who love humans Macaques are a genus of old-world primates consisting of around 24 species spread across the world, 12 of which are found in India, including the Assam macaque, the Rhesus macaque, the southern pig-tailed macaque, the white-cheeked macaque and the lion-tailed macaque. "They have the largest range of non-human primates, to the extent that there is one species that lives in Northern Africa, but all the other species extend from Afghanistan in the west to Japan in the east," says Sinha. In his opinion, what is most remarkable about them is that they are flexible in their social and individual ecologies and behaviour. "As a result, they have been extremely successful evolutionarily." Of these, there are two species — the North Indian Rhesus macaque and the South Indian bonnet macaque — that are especially interesting because they have a "remarkable ability to adapt to almost any kind of ecology, both natural and human-made." Additionally, both these species as well as the Nicobar long-tailed macaque, tend to move towards human habitation, says Sinha. "In some sense, crudely speaking, if you give these macaques a choice between living in a forest and living with people, they prefer to live with people," he says. According to him, the ability of macaques to adapt to urban dwellings is not new — they have been doing so for centuries. Sinha brings up a poem featuring a monkey on a jackfruit tree who "mistakes for fruit... the eye... on the thronged drumheads," and explains, "This was originally a poem in Tamil by a poet called Mutamociyar," he says, pointing out that the poet wrote this poem about 2000 years ago. This indicates that "we have lived with macaques for very long periods of time and have co-evolved with them." And yet, the relationship between human beings and macaques is also often fraught with tension, with many early biologists even referring to these macaque species as "weed macaques" since they "are very prolific, they multiply in large numbers and are even called pests, just as weeds are." Sinha, however, does not see the macaques this way. "In our research group, we decided very consciously to do away with that term because of the kind of value system this term had," he says. "We call them anthropophilic macaques since they love people, or the prolific macaques since they multiply at very high rates," he says. "Once a macaque has tasted

human food, her life has changed forever," says Sinha. One offshoot of this close relationship with human beings is that these interactions irretrievably change the macaques. "Once a macaque has tasted human food, her life has changed forever," says Sinha, expanding on some of the behaviours that have resulted from this. In Bandipur National Park, for instance, where tourists have been interacting with these animals by throwing food to them, juvenile bonnet macaques have developed new modalities of communicating with people who carry foods in their hand, he says, showing a photograph of a young monkey with its arm stretched out, almost in a begging gesture. "It consists of four behaviours," he explains. "These juvenile monkeys end up tracking people who have food in their hands and orient themselves so that they are making eye contact with these people." "While they are doing this, they give a coo-coo call, and finally, when eye contact is made with a human, the macaque puts out its hand," he says. "This is remarkable because they don't do it with other macaques; they do it only with people. The interesting reason for that is there is no food-sharing amongst these macaques, but people are willing to share food with them. "It is a very human appeal," says Sinha, adding that this entire set of behaviours is completely new and "never before seen in any wild monkeys." "When people provide food to these females, that bond is tested because the competition for the food becomes so high," says Sinha. "When people provide food to these females, that bond is tested because the competition for the food becomes so high," says Sinha. [Photo Credit: RAJEEV BHATT] Human presence in Bandipur is also gravely impacting the integrity of macaque social groups. Like most primates as well as mammals like elephants, lions and hyenas, macaques are female-bonded, forming very close relationships with others in their group, which typically consists of a few adult males, many females and all their offspring. "When people provide food to these females, that bond is tested because the competition for the food becomes so high," says Sinha, whose team is now seeing group fission with females often leaving these large multi-male, multi-female groups to bring down social tensions. "You end up with small groups of females with a single male. In the last three decades, many of the groups in Bandipur and Mudumalai, especially those around the highway, have developed a new form of social organisation — a single adult male and these small groups of females — and they don't do very well," he says. Doomed city dwellers

In his talk, Sinha also discusses how changing ecological circumstances are causing many of these animals to move from forests to highways to villages and cities. "Their forests are being removed, they have no way to go back, and so they adapt to different kinds of human habitations," says Sinha. Macaques, he adds, have a high degree of what he calls phenotypic flexibility, the "ability to quickly adapt to changing conditions, so you are not left in a difficult situation," he says. This phenotypic flexibility makes it easier for them, as compared to many other animals, to adapt to urban ecosystems. For instance, "they may not have their trees, canopies and branches, but they use this mass of electric cables and wires to move across the city," he says, sharing a video of a macaque stealing a woman's glasses and refusing to return it unless given food bought from a nearby vendor. "Clearly, this is a barter system, which they have learnt to negotiate," he says. "And don't forget that shopkeepers also benefit." While macaques may have learnt to adapt to urban spaces, the people who inhabit these same spaces aren't always happy to have them there. "Across virtually every city, we have gotten into negative relationships with macaques," he says. The problem, in his opinion, is very complex, affecting both humans and animals. "Where you stand on it will depend on where your empathies lie and how you think the problem can be solved," he says. However, it is important to remember that macaques, world-over, are struggling to survive, with research showing that many of them are disappearing from across their traditional distribution ranges, "primarily due to anthropogenic factors and their own maladaptive responses to such influences. Their lives are not becoming easier, and in fact, they are doomed," says Sinha, who believes that more detailed ecological behavioural studies of wild, urban and semi-urban macaques are essential. "

# Farmers in Telangana face rising threat of counterfeit seeds

Hyderabad: As Telangana gears up for the Kharif 2025 season, meeting the seed requirements for its vast agricultural expanse remains a pressing challenge.

The State's gross cropped area expanded from 129.04 lakh acres in 2014-15 to 232.58 lakh acres last year. It resulted in a growing demand for high-quality seeds. Kharif (Vanakalam) operations are to commence in June, barely 75 days away. Kharif will be occupying more than half the gross cropped area in the State. The surge in demand for paddy, cotton and maize seeds has placed significant pressure on the distribution system. Despite government efforts to ensure adequate supplies, farmers in districts like Karimnagar, Peddapalli and Jagtial have experienced shortage of certain brands of paddy and cotton seeds, even during the recent Rabi (Yasangi) season.

In some cases, traders have added to the problem by creating artificial scarcity to inflate prices, leaving farmers waiting in long queues at distribution centres.



# What is war anxiety? And how to deal with it



In 2020, during the pandemic, Arthi J, a 39-year-old HR professional from Chennai experienced a cocktail of strange emotions. An extrovert who loves going out, she found it stifling to be locked indoors. "I was scared; I felt like crying everyday. Finally, I met a psychiatrist who prescribed a short dose of anti-depressants. Eventually, things got better," she says. But last week, when a war-like situation broke out between India and Pakistan, she could feel those emotions coming back. She kept waking up repeatedly at night, and was angry, sad, and even fought with her family for no reason because of the anxiety. "What if we got locked in again because of the war? This thought brought back dark memories. What is the future going to be? What about all our plans? I even had thoughts of our cities being bombed and what if we had to leave the homes we have known," she says.

"Those four days were full of horror," says Shamima Mir, a resident of Srinagar. "People had heart attacks, there were blackouts, there was too much stress. Over the last two years, the economy had picked up, there was employment. Our anxiety had gone, we could move and breathe freely. But all that has changed now," she says. Shamima says many residents of Jammu and Kashmir do not know what is happening. Situations like these disrupt education, work, tourism, normalcy. And this uncertainty results in depression, mental stress and anxiety, she says. Activists hold placards and shout slogans demanding peace and justice for victims of the Pahalgam attack. File

Not just the conflict zones, people all over the country have been impacted by the situation that the country experienced last week. The suddenness of the situation, the fear of the unknown and uncertainty is what has triggered many over the last week, says Dr Nikita Shah, a psychiatrist from Mumbai. "There has been a mass shift since last Thursday. Sixty per cent of my clients — mostly in the 20-30 age category — have spoken about this. It is a shift from the regular issues they have. They talk about how their family members have been affected by this and that in turn has affected them," she says.

She observed that people with more empathy felt guilty about the dissonance because while the border towns faced blackouts and shelling, the others were attending dinners and sticking to plans that had been made before. The constant bombardment of information, opinions and even misinformation made the chaos worse. People were getting hooked to the 24-hour news cycle. While one of her patients absolutely needed to know everything that was going on to assuage her anxiety, some others dissociated completely. "One of them was finding it difficult to wake up in the morning. She said 'we work hard to live a happy life and then one event turns everything upside down. What is the point of anything?' I noticed a feeling of helplessness and pessimism in some of them," says Dr Nikita. It has even triggered anxiety in children. Nine-year-old Sasha Mony from Chennai is anxious. She heard about the recent strife between India-Pakistan and it scared her. So much so she wrote down a prayer on a piece of paper and kept reading it. "She was having trouble sleeping and was worried. She is a little more jumpy," says her mother Chrishelle Mony. Few days ago, when Sasha heard a siren from one of the factories in Ambattur, she asked her mother if it was war related. "I ask her to write down or draw out her feelings, or

draw a scene that makes her feel calm," says Chrishelle.

Activities like drawing, yoga, grounding and breathwork, meditation, writing, journaling, discussion and debates with elders are beneficial. Activities like drawing, yoga, grounding and breathwork, meditation, writing, journaling, discussion and debates with elders are beneficial. An otherwise cheerful seven-year-old (name withheld), also from Chennai, has been having similar concerns. Being exposed to news about the war and sirens, has led him to overthink. Even the sound of firecrackers from weddings triggers fear. He reacts to this by switching off lights and has been having troubling dreams at night. "Children are anxious because there is so much information out there, be it social media or news channels," says Nandini Raman, consultant counsellor, adding, "They have access to sensationalised news, they are privy to direct or indirect adult conversation, media, political ideologies... all of this can overwhelm children and increase their anxiety because they lack the cognitive ability to fully process and contextualise the information that they are consuming."

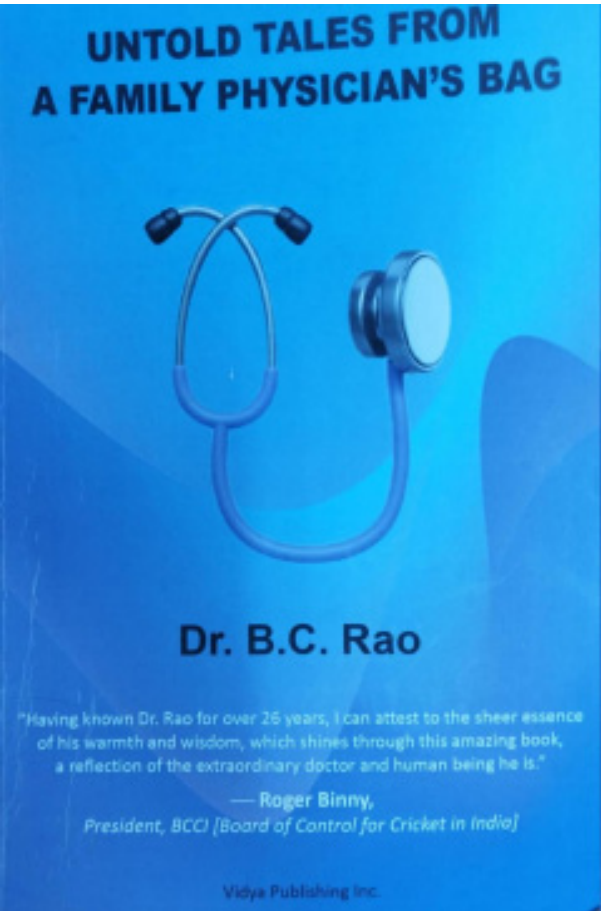
Nandini adds that there is also the constant fear of safety of loved ones, and people and property resource being lost on both sides. There is a sense of insecurity that can trigger a lot of stirring reactions and create unrest, restlessness, nervousness and panic attacks. In a situation like this, coping mechanisms and calming activities help. Activities like yoga, grounding and breathwork, meditation, drawing, writing, journaling, discussion and debates with elders are beneficial, she says. As parents it is important to identify change in behaviour or understand the emotional distress the child is experiencing. She suggests checking children for these signs and symptoms: inability to sleep or sleep adequately, waking up with nightmares, if the child is not eating, and if overall functionality is being impacted, "then certainly you need to seek professional help". Children today are more deeply thinking and emotional, believes Nandini. They are also very sensitive and perceptive to emotional states of adults around them. If parents and caregivers are anxious, they also pick up on the feelings. "Age appropriate communication is key. We need to limit exposure of disturbing content that is available out there. Maintain calm and provide reassurance. We should encourage open communication that creates a safe space for children to express their feelings, clarify, ask questions, validate their feelings and emotions," she explains. Sheela Ilangovan, 39, a bank manager from Tiruchirappalli, was anxious about Indian soldiers. "My father and uncles are ex-servicemen, so I know what the ground reality is like. There is nothing called victory because there is loss of lives on both sides. I was worried what if Pakistan starts attacking civilians. I was scared soldiers would lose lives. I kept wondering what this situation would end up like?," she says. Border Security Force (BSF) personnel carry the body of BSF Constable Deepak Chingakhram, who died during cross-border firing in Jammu, during a wreath laying ceremony at Imphal airport, Manipur, May 13, 2025. Border Security Force (BSF) personnel carry the body of BSF Constable Deepak Chingakhram, who died during cross-border firing in Jammu, during a wreath laying ceremony at Imphal airport, Manipur, While Dr Nikita has a lot of ways to deal with anxiety and depression in her patients, she also suggests learning somatic methods and doing a body scan. Creating offline communities will help in the long run. "Covid made people insular. It's time to get away from the online world," she says. We are being fed information everyday and this can overstimulate. Her advise is to earmark time away from social media and just sit in silence. A number of her patients constantly need a show or podcast running in the background. Being able to sit in silence for five minutes will go a long way in developing mindfulness and reducing overstimulation-based anxiety. Exercising, she adds, is excellent. Even if it is not strength training, something as simple as going for a walk makes a difference. "It's summer in India, but everything is blooming," she smiles. And just observing these things and looking at what you do while on a walk can be an exercise in mindfulness.

# An engaging medical memoir that sparks important questions

In 'Untold Tales from a Family Physician's Bag', B.C. Rao chronicles decades of clinical experiences with a mix of medical insight, personal anecdotes, and social observations. The book is part memoir, part casebook -- and while it attempts to unpack the human complexities behind diagnosis and treatment, it also opens up difficult, necessary conversations about the limitations of the system itself -- the broader social, ethical, and systemic issues -- sometimes insightfully, sometimes awkwardly. Dr. Rao writes with the confidence of someone who has seen much and thought deeply about it. His tone is often frank, occasionally humorous, and, at times, wryly critical -- especially of patients who "google too much," hop between doctors, or fail to disclose symptoms fully.

The medical system -- diagnosis, privilege and pressureSome of the most layered reflections come in the chapters dealing with patriarchy and sexual health. In one, a patient embarrassed to speak of sexual issues is eventually found to have tuberculosis of the prostate --something that mirrors the importance of full disclosure, but also how cultural taboos keep patients silent. These stories open up space for medical education and awareness. There are genuinely useful takeaways-- like the evolving understanding of ulcers (from stress to H. pylori, and the Nobel-winning discovery by Barry Marshall and Robin Warren) and the complexity of diagnosing conditions like ischemic heart disease or transverse myelitis. However, the humour in some chapters -- particularly when dealing with "difficult" or multi-symptom patients can feel like it stems from a place of privilege. What might be exhausting for the doctor is, for the patient, often the lived chaos of chronic illness. There's room here for a deeper reckoning: How can the medical community better hold space for suffering that doesn't fit a neat diagnostic box?

Dr. Rao ambitiously tries to place medicine within broader societal contexts -- touching on patriarchy, caste, stigma, and sexual health. These are essential and relevant themes. But in doing so, the book sometimes risks overstretching its metaphors or tying social evils too directly to disease, as if culture and biology were interchangeable. Diseases don't have moral compasses. They aren't carriers of cultural baggage, even if social structures influence how we perceive or treat them. Some of the framing -- especially when discussing "honour," or drawing analogies between caste and illness -- may unintentionally blur that line. That said, Dr. Rao's willingness to address taboo topics on sexual health and embarrassment around symptoms is noteworthy. These are areas many clinicians still sidestep, and his candor does add value.



What binds the stories together is a quiet undercurrent of systemic critique -- of how questions of affordability pushes patients to drift between practitioners, how pharmaceutical pressures warp clinical judgment, and how even the best of intentions can get lost in hierarchy. The book raises important questions about ethics, education, and the future of healthcare, especially post the worst phases of COVID where telemedicine has become a new normal. But there's also a sense of unresolved tension: for all its wisdom, the book occasionally mirrors the weak spots it seeks to illuminate -- chief among them being the patient's voice. While we hear a great deal about what patients do "wrong," we hear less about how medical systems and mindsets can evolve to meet them where they are, and even less from patients themselves, whose voice is entirely missing.

# Indian homecoming for Polish grandchildren



It didn't come as a surprise earlier this year in March when Kieran Kyle Culkin walked away with the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in A Real Pain. In the comedy-drama, Culkin sets off on a journey through Poland with his mismatched cousin (played by Jesse Adam Eisenberg) to honour their Jewish grandmother, a Holocaust survivor. Coincidentally, a few weeks before the Oscars, a group of young Polish men and women were retracing their grandparents' journey in India. Their ancestors were among the Polish children orphaned during the course of World War II, who found refuge in this country. Twenty Polish youth, some of them grandchildren of the Polish survivors, visited Balachadi (Jamnagar) and Valivade (Kolhapur) in February under the Jamsaheb Memorial Youth Exchange Programme. The visit was organised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, after PM Narendra Modi's visit to Poland last year.

"Our grandfather was always talking about India. He called it his second home," says Arkadiusz Michalowski (Arek), 28, a resident of Warsaw, whose (late) grandfather Wieslaw Stypula, was one of about 1,000 Polish children orphaned during World War II who were sheltered by the Maharaja of Nawanagar (presently Jamnagar), Jam Saheb Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji Jadeja, in the erstwhile state of Gujarat. The year was 1942, when Poland was occupied by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and the exiled Polish Government in London was anxious about the future of their younger generations. The Maharaja, whose musical skills were appreciated by the great Polish pianist and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski, created a home within his estate for the orphaned children. "It was my grandfather's dream to show us where he spent his childhood, introduce us to the people who remember the camp, and show us the memorial in Balachadi that he was instrumental in designing," says Arek, who was visiting India with his 25-year-old sister Kasia Michalowska.

The memorial depicts a woman with a babe in her arms, caressing the head of a child reaching up to her. "The woman symbolises Mother India, an Indian child is in her arms and she is hugging a Polish child with her other arm. It is symbolic of how the Good Maharaja in India protected all the Polish children," says Arek. "I cried when I read the poem carved on the memorial. It was written by my grandfather in the Balachadi camp when he was a teenager. It is part of him, his story, and my past," say Arek, remembering his grandfather who passed away last year. After World War II, the efforts of the International Red Cross helped these Polish children reunite with their surviving families across the world, including Poland, the U.K., Canada, and Australia. Books and documentaries have captured their experiences. Poles in India 1942-1948: Second World War Story is a collective work of these Polish survivors, based on archival documents and personal reminiscences. Many survivors have travelled to India on various occasions to take a trip down memory lane. Two documentary films, A Little Poland in India and Jindobrey India, made between 2012 and 2015, have explored this journey through intimate

conversations with the survivors. For the Polish youth, it was a moving experience to visit the places that meant so much to their grandparents. "Our grandfather was dedicated to sharing the story of his life in India. He had photos from his childhood and material he collected for his books, which focussed mostly on his memories of India, and the Good Maharaja. He didn't want to share horror stories from the war. He wanted to convey that, even during the darkest times, there were still good people in the world. His books dwelt on how wonderful India appeared to the Polish children, who knew only the dark and brutal world war," says Kasia, her voice choked with emotion, standing amidst the students of the Sainik school in Balachadi.

Their grandfather would often tell them stories about India. "The Polish children hated spinach and tried to throw it away. They played musical instruments as a band and started a Polish Scouting Team. They learned the Nawanagar Anthem, but every morning they raised the Polish flag in the centre of the camp," continues Arek. Christmas celebrations were different in Balachadi. Jam Saheb, whom the children lovingly called "Bapu", would send bags full of gifts saddled on camels, and watch their traditional performances. "They tried to recreate the 'Jaselka' (Nativity Play) using things they had in the camp. In Polish tradition, Santa Claus comes in a cart drawn by flying reindeers but in Balachadi they saw camels, which they found exotic. They missed the Christmas snow as December was still quite warm in Balachadi," Kasia recalls. While shopping for family and friends, picking up colourful Indian handicrafts and postcards. "Granddad would pick these up for us whenever he visited India," she adds, donning a hand embroidered jacket, while Arek chooses traditional Indian jewellery for his fiancée. Barbara Gutowska, 22, the granddaughter of (late) Roman Gutowski, another Polish child who lived in the Maharaja's camp, says visiting India has been a surreal experience. "I am standing in the place I have known only from my childhood bedtime stories. The place that my grandfather considered his home. The place where he grew up, played, began primary school, made friends and experienced various exotic adventures. I have found peace," she adds. A student at the University of Warsaw, Gutowska is keen on learning Indian classical dance.

Bartosz Jezierski, 17, a high school student, stands at the memorial museum of one of the largest Polish survivors' camps in Valivade, 10 km from Kolhapur. "My grandfather, Andrzej Jezierski, was one of the children who were lucky enough to find refuge here," he says. These young people are struck by the similarity between two entirely different places and cultures. "This trip showed me that we are not as different as we might think," says Kasia, a student at the University of Warsaw. Her brother echoes her sentiments. "I am, and always will be, very grateful for the huge act of kindness and selflessness shown by the Good Maharaja. If not for him, I would not be here in this world. It is the debt of a lifetime, which I hope we will be able to repay one day by helping others in need," says Arek, with humility.

# Pakistan 'wrote' to India on Indus Water Treaty: Willing to restart talks on IWT

A letter from Pakistan's Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, Syed Ali Murtaza, received "a week ago," - sources said, to India's Water Secretary, Debashree Mukherjee, asked for India to nominate representatives who could engage in talks with Pakistan's Indus Commissioner. The Hindu couldn't independently confirm the contents of this letter as well as whether it was sent following the May 8 Operation Sindoor-strike. It was amidst all the happenings," a source said but declined to share a finite date. India's Ministry of External Affairs declined comment. The Hindu has written to Mr Murtaza but hasn't received a comment.

Per the IWT, both India and Pakistan have Indus Commissioners who lead delegations for talks regarding water-sharing aspects governing the Treaty which has been in force since 1960. India had however said, last September, that no more meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) would be held till the governments of India and Pakistan meet and discuss the renegotiation of the IWT. The last meeting reportedly hap-



pened in Delhi in May 2022. Since January 2023, India has written four times to Pakistan to initiate talks on revising the treaty but, according to sources, not received a "satisfactory response."

"India's position is that re-negotiation of the treaty could be done only government-government and not by Indus Commission representatives. Pakistan offered to meet at a neutral venue but we proposed that we meet in Islamabad. Following this there was a silence for 4-5 months and now they have sent us this letter," a person, familiar with

the contents of Mr. Murtaza's latest letter, told

The letter, sources said, has Pakistan's objecting to India's action of keeping the IWT in abeyance and violative of the terms of the treaty. However it says Pakisan is willing to meet and would like to begin the process for arranging the necessary logistics. The letter makes no mention of India's surprise-water releases from the Baglihar and Salal dams on the May 5. "It was polite letter," the person added. India hasn't taken a call on the response to the letter. Following the Pahalgam attacks, India de-

cided to stall the treaty as well as declared its intent to "not give a drop of water" to Pakistan. Under the terms of the IWT, India cannot create significant hydropower storage on the western rivers — Indus, Jhelum, Chenab — and must maintain water levels at prescribed levels, to ensure that no untoward flooding or disruption of Pakistan's agriculture happens. Its prominent hydropower projects on these rivers, such as the Kishenganga and Baglihar projects, are run-of-the-river, meaning they divert the river's flow to generate electricity.



# Donald Trump tells Apple he ‘does not want’ iPhone maker to manufacture in India; claims New Delhi offered to ‘drop all tariffs’



GNS News Agency, May 20

Trump on Apple Company Expansion in India: US President Donald Trump said he has told Apple CEO Tim Cook that he does not want the company to expand its manufacturing operations in India, unless it is to cater specifically to its domestic market. He also claimed that India has “offered to drop all tariffs” on the United States. “I had a little problem with Tim Cook yesterday. I said, ‘Tim you’re my friend, I’ve treated you very good, you’re coming here (in the US) with a \$500 billion announcement, and now I hear you’re building all over India. I don’t want you building in India. You can build in India if you want to take care of India, because India is one of the highest tariff nations in the world’” Trump said after a meeting with business leaders between the US and Qatar.

Trump’s comments come at a time when Cook has confirmed that owing to China-related trade uncertainties, the company will produce a majority of iPhones sold in the US in India in the June quarter. Apple wants to move a quarter of all iPhone production to India in the next few years, in a gradual move away from China, which has so far been the key epicentre of the company’s manufacturing prowess. However, since Cook made this comment earlier this month during a call with investors after announcing the company’s financial results, there has been a significant development – after initial escalation between the US and China over tariff rates, the two have reached a trade deal. This comes as trade tensions between the US and China had started benefiting India, with US buyers turning to Indian suppliers following the imposition of 145 per cent tariffs by the US on Chinese goods. It was widely anticipated that because of significantly higher tariff rates on China, companies like Apple would fast-track their diversifi-

cation to India, where Apple has developed a sizable assembly base. Any potential thaw in US-China relationships could pose a challenge to the expected migration of supply chains to India. However, the Indian government is currently not as worried about the truce between US and China, as it believes that Apple’s migration to India was not induced by any tariff-related pressure, but well before that in 2020 due to New Delhi’s growing ambition to become a global manufacturing hub for electronics.

Although, it remains unclear how supply chains of companies like Apple would react if the trade deal between the US and China gives a significant relief on the tariff front to Beijing. China’s technological prowess and skilled human resource in the electronics sector is generally considered to be significantly better than India’s. What is clear, however, is that the improving trade relationship between US and China is not good news for mandarins in New Delhi. Apple doubled down on production in India in 2020, after the Indian government announced its production linked incentive (PLI) scheme for smartphone manufacturing, under which it was to subsidise manufacturers depending on the amount of their incremental sales. While the company started by making some of its older iPhones in India, today it produces all models, including the higher-end Pro range for global consumption. Apple, through its contract manufacturers, has been the biggest beneficiary of the scheme, which has helped it move some production away from China. The company started with three contract manufacturers here – Foxconn, Wistron and Pegatron – and the latter two have now been acquired by the Tata Group. Apple and its manufacturing partners have been the biggest beneficiaries of subsidies under the PLI scheme for smartphones. The Indian Express had earlier reported that, under the scheme, the government has disbursed close to \$1 billion in the three years from 2022-23 to 2024-25, with the three contract manufacturers of Apple receiving cumulatively over 75 per cent of the amount. Apple’s contract manufacturers, Foxconn, Tata Electronics and Pegatron (which was recently acquired by the Tatas), have received a total of almost Rs 6,600 crore over three years in 2023-24, Foxconn, which is Apple’s biggest contract manufacturer globally, received a subsidy disbursement of Rs 2,450 crore, the highest during the year. However, in 2024-25, the data showed no incentive was issued to Foxconn. In 2024-25, Samsung received the highest subsidy of close to Rs 958 crore.

# Amid rising cyber threats, Power Grid told officials over 270 substations lack ‘next-generation’ firewalls



The estimated cost of installing advanced firewalls — equipped with intrusion detection and prevention systems — across 273 substations is estimated at around Rs 119 crore. Power Grid has told the government this expenditure is “difficult to accommodate” under its operations and maintenance (O&M) budget due to “very stringent” regulatory limits, the documents reveal. The matter will be taken up at a meeting of the National Power Committee (NPC) in Shillong on May 16, where members will discuss a mechanism to book or recover the cost of these installations. The meeting will also deliberate on a broader roadmap for implementing firewalls across the national transmission infrastructure, as per the agenda. The NPC is constituted under the Union Ministry of Power, with a focus on ensuring uniformity in grid management practices across India. The absence of next-generation firewalls at substations poses cybersecurity risks to India’s critical infrastructure, especially against the backdrop of simmering tensions with Pakistan and the evolving capabilities of state and non-state actors. Next-generation firewalls integrate intrusion detection and prevention systems to monitor, detect, and block malicious traffic in real time, offering advanced threat protection beyond traditional firewalls.

In an April 2024 meeting, Power Grid told top officials that no firewall is installed in over 270 of its existing substations that were commissioned before the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) issued cybersecurity guidelines in October 2021. Then, in a December 2024 meeting, the NPC’s member-secretary noted that “firewall are not installed at existing substations of Power Grid and some of the other (TSPs) to ensure perimeter security,” according to docu-

ments.

A Power Grid representative further stated that there was “no firewall at Power Grid stations for any type of data communication towards RLDC (Regional Load Dispatch Centre),” and that firewall installations were also necessary to secure the Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) communication network. More recently, in April this year, the company told the CEA that bearing the Rs 119 crore cost for firewall installations under existing O&M norms could negatively impact its financials. “The expenditure of approx. Rs 119 crore for firewalls under O&M expenses for 273 substations is difficult to accommodate. It will further impact the commercial performance measures,” Power Grid said according to documents. In the April 2024 meeting, India’s apex grid operator had noted that attacks on the power sector “have grown and are also frequent”. “The systems without adequate security devices at the periphery are prone to be compromised and a possible lateral movement cannot be ruled out which will have an impact on a larger system,” Grid India had said. Still, while firewalls are widely adopted as an access control method against hackers, they do not guarantee cybersecurity.

“(There are) instances of firewalls being mis-configured and even if the configuration of firewalls are correct, it has vulnerabilities because they are not able to detect insider attacks and connections from the trusted sites. Hence, solutions based solely on firewalls can be inadequate,” the CEA noted in its documents. In September 2024, Union Power Minister Manohar Lal inaugurated the Computer Security Incident Response Team for the power sector (CSIRT-Power), which is tasked with detecting threats, enabling rapid response, and improving sector-wide resilience. It also promotes best practices, conducts training, and facilitates collaboration to strengthen overall cybersecurity preparedness. At the inauguration, the minister said, “The threats we face today are unlike those of the past. Cyberattacks have emerged as a serious and growing concern, capable of causing significant disruptions with far-reaching consequences. The power sector, being at the heart of our national infrastructure, is a prime target for such attacks.” Earlier, in April 2022, then Union Power Minister RK Singh had said, “Two attempts by Chinese hackers were made to target electricity distribution centres near Ladakh but were not successful... We’ve already strengthened our defence system to counter such cyber attacks”.

beyond-visual-range (BVR) air-to-air missile used by Pakistan’s JF-17 and J-10 fighter jets, was neutralised by indigenous defence systems. This interception has raised questions about the real-world effectiveness of China’s missile technology, possibly triggering the decline in investor confidence in Zhuzhou Hongda. Earlier, Chinese defence stocks surged before the ceasefire, fuelled by investor optimism that Beijing would emerge as a key arms supplier to Pakistan if the conflict dragged on. On the other hand, the Indian defence sector has witnessed a sharp rise in its market capitalisation, gaining an impressive Rs 86,211 crore since the Pahalgam terror attack, which claimed 26 lives. The Nifty India Defence Index, which tracks the performance of leading defence stocks, has gained 9.39 per cent since the start of the military action, a remarkable contrast to the 1.98 per cent increase in the benchmark Nifty during the same period. The surge in the sector has also been reflected in the market capitalisation contributions of major players. Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) has added Rs 23,683 crore to the sector’s market value, while Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) and Bharat Dynamics have contributed Rs 21,654 crore and Rs 12,345 crore, respectively.



# Backlash over support to Pakistan: Turkey and Azerbaijan start losing Indian footfall



With Turkey and Azerbaijan facing a backlash in India over their support for Pakistan during the military confrontation following the Pahalgam terror attack, travel booking portals are reporting a notable drop in bookings from Indians for these countries — and a jump in cancellations. Some Indian travel service providers have also stopped offering flight and hotel bookings for the two countries, while a few others are dissuading Indians from travelling there. Turkey and Azerbaijan are popular destinations for Indians with the number of travellers and direct flight connections growing in recent years. Istanbul is also a major aviation hub used by Indian flyers to connect to destinations beyond Turkey as well. Now, given the growing clamour to boycott these countries, the situation is reminiscent of the calls for boycott of Maldives in January 2024 when a diplomatic row erupted following derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi by three Maldivian deputy ministers.

“Indian travellers have expressed strong sentiments over the past one week, with bookings for Azerbaijan and Turkey decreasing by 60 per cent, while cancellations have surged by 250 per cent during the same period. In solidarity with our nation and out of deep respect for our armed forces, we strongly support this sentiment and advise all against all non-essential travel to Azerbaijan and Turkey. We have already discontinued all promotions and offers on our platform to discourage tourism to these two destinations,” a spokesperson for online travel booking service provider MakeMyTrip said on Wednesday, without elaborating further on the data. Another online travel agency, EaseMyTrip, said it is seeing high cancellation rates of bookings for Azerbaijan and Turkey. EaseMyTrip has already seen 22 per cent of bookings for Turkey cancelled over the past week, and 30 per cent for Azerbaijan.

“In view of the terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22... and war-like situations between India and Pakistan, it is disheartening to note that Turkey and Azerbaijan have extended their support to Pakistan. EaseMyTrip strongly advise limiting travel to these countries unless absolutely essential. Please stay updated on current developments and exercise caution while making travel plans,” EaseMyTrip had said in a travel advisory Friday. “...Indian tourists have high spending power, making them key contributors to foreign economies. By consciously redirecting tourism flow, we reduce economic support to countries taking anti-India positions. India’s own tourism industry can benefit by retaining this spend within the country or redirecting it to nations aligned with Indian interests,” EaseMyTrip’s Founder and Chairman Nishant Pitti said in a social media post

Wednesday. Meanwhile, travel booking service providers, such as Ixigo and Cox & Kings, have suspended new bookings for Turkey and Azerbaijan. “This decision is driven by our commitment to uphold principles that matter deeply to us and the people of our country. We also advise Indian travellers to exercise discretion and avoid any non-essential travel to these destinations until there is greater clarity and alignment in the broader geopolitical environment,” Cox & Kings director Karan Agarwal had said Friday. In a post on X Friday, Ixigo announced: “In solidarity with our nation, ixigo is suspending flight and hotel bookings for Turkey, Azerbaijan, and China. Because when it comes to Bharat, we don’t think twice. Jai Hind.” Travomint has suspended all ticket sales for airlines of the two countries — Turkish Airlines, Pegasus Airlines, Corendon Airlines and Azerbaijan Airlines, as of last Saturday. “This decision is final and will remain unchanged regardless of any future developments. Going forward, Travomint will not engage in any partnerships with entities from these countries,” said a statement from the portal.

Ravi Gosain, who heads Indian Association of Tour Operators, said 15-20 per cent of bookings taken by member operators for the two countries have been cancelled. Delhi-based Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has advocated a travel boycott of Turkey and Azerbaijan, adding that it will coordinate with travel and tour operators, and other stakeholders on the issue.

According to data from Turkey’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 3.31 lakh Indian nationals visited Turkey in 2024, higher by almost 21 per cent over 2023 when 2.74 lakh Indians visited Turkey. In 2022, the number of Indian nationals who visited Turkey stood at 2.32 lakh. In fact, India was among the top 20 source markets for Turkey, as per officials in the Turkish Embassy in New Delhi — and data from the first three months of 2025 showed it would have crossed that mark in this year.

Embassy officials had said they were enhancing marketing efforts, promotional activities, and collaborations for continued momentum in tourism growth, even betting on wedding tourism and the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) sector. As for Azerbaijan, the number of Indians visiting the country more than doubled to 2.44 lakh in 2024 from 1.17 lakh in 2023, according to data from Azerbaijan Tourism Board, which describes India as a “key target market”. Data shows Indians are among the top five nationalities visiting Azerbaijan. In 2022, Azerbaijan had 60,731 Indian visitors, a sharp spike from 4,853 in 2014. Data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation shows 5.05 lakh passengers flew on direct flights from India to Turkey in 2024, up almost 15 per cent over 2023. The number of passengers who flew direct from India to Azerbaijan shot up to 80,567 in 2024 from 28,899 in 2023 as additional flights began operations. The data includes flyers of other nationalities as well. According to online visa processing firm Atlys, for summer 2025, they had registered a rise of first-time international travellers from India gravitating towards destinations like Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Azerbaijan, which had begun streamlined visa procedures. MakeMyTrip had slotted Turkey and Azerbaijan among the top 20 international destinations searched for the upcoming holiday season.

# New monthly labour survey to have additional details on rent income, remittances, land possession

As the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) sets out to release Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) on a monthly basis starting May along with quarterly reports for both rural and urban areas, the revamped survey will have additional details about education; land possessed and land leased out; and households’ usual monthly income from rent, pension, interest and remittances. The revamped PLFS will also see the reporting period being tweaked to a calendar year basis, beginning January 2025 instead of July-June earlier, the Ministry said

“As a part of this continuous endeavour aimed at enhancing the surveys of NSS, the sampling design of PLFS has been revamped from January 2025 to address the requirement of high frequency labour market indicators with enhanced coverage from PLFS,” the Ministry said.

The first monthly bulletin of PLFS for April is scheduled to be released in May, while the first quarterly bulletin of PLFS covering both rural and urban areas for April-June is slated to be released in August. Four additional details regarding usual monthly income of the household from renting of land or building, from interest on savings and investment, from pension received and from remittances received have been incorporated in the revamped PLFS. Additionally, two additional questions on land possessed and land leased out as on the date of the survey by the surveyed household, one item of information on the nature of the certifying body from which vocational/technical training received, and five additional education-related items of information have been incorporated. The additional education-related details in the new survey include queries on the years of education completed, number of months attended in the last year of education, and secondary education. The Ministry said the annual PLFS results will be brought out based on the calendar year from 2025 onwards, that is, survey period of January–December of a specific year. “This change in disseminating the PLFS annual results and unit level data will facilitate comprehensive analysis of labour market performance through review of key employment, unemployment indicators and also assist in timely updation of India’s labour market statistics in the databases maintained by the international agencies,” it said.

The revamped PLFS will have a total sample size of 22,692 first stage units (FSUs) (12,504 FSUs in the rural areas and 10,188 in the urban areas) in each year of the two-year panel compared with 12,800 FSUs surveyed in PLFS upto December 2024. Each selected household will be visited four times in four consecutive months — one with first visit schedule and other three with the revisit schedule in the following three months, the Ministry said. A total of 12 households will be surveyed from each of the selected FSUs which implies an overall sample size of around 2,72,304 households (22,692 x 12). “This marks a 2.65 time increase in sample households to be covered in PLFS as compared to the number of sample households covered upto December 2024 (which was around 1,02,400),” it said. The PLFS will cover key employment and unemployment indicators (labour force participation rate, worker population ratio, unemployment rate) on a monthly basis for rural and urban areas at all-India level in the current weekly status (CWS) and thereby produce quarterly estimates in both usual status (ps+ss) and CWS in both rural and urban areas annually. Usual status (ps+ss) and current weekly status (CWS) measure activity status of persons surveyed based on reference periods of last 365 days and last seven days preceding the date of survey, respectively. The Ministry said



users of PLFS results need to consider the changes implemented in PLFS from January 2025 while comparing results with estimates released up to December 2024. The Ministry was earlier considering releasing a back series, at least for the previous 12 months, to make the new monthly series of the PLFS comparable with the earlier one. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under MoSPI had launched PLFS in April 2017. Quarterly bulletins provided details of labour force indicators such as LFPR, WPR, unemployment rate. At present, the MoSPI releases rural PLFS data on an annual basis and urban PLFS data on a quarterly basis along with an annual report which combines data for both urban and rural on an annual basis. Other employment surveys such as the survey by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) comes out on a weekly and monthly basis.

# India must build a truly circular economy

By 2030, India is poised to become the world’s third-largest economy. Yet, amid this remarkable ascent lies a growing mountain — of garbage. India generates 1,60,038 tonnes of waste per day (TPD), but only half of this is treated. A staggering 29,427 TPD is dumped in landfills, while nearly 51,000 TPD disappears unaccounted for. These numbers speak not just of poor waste management but also of an economic model that’s still stuck in a linear loop of “take, make, dispose.”

The circular economy (CE) — a model that designs out waste and pollution, keeps products and materials in use and regenerates natural systems — is no longer a theoretical ideal. It is a practical necessity. Yet, while India has signalled bold ambitions to embrace circularity, the path remains strewn with policy bottlenecks, capacity gaps and systemic inertia. India’s policy discourse on circularity has expanded in recent years. From the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) rules to flagship forums like CITIIS 2.0 and the 12th Regional 3R and CE Forum hosted in Jaipur, the government has sent strong signals about its intentions. In 2024 alone, CITIIS projects worth over Rs 1,800 crore were signed, with 18 cities selected for ‘Lighthouse Projects’ to integrate CE into urban planning. However, these efforts remain isolated. The Central Pollution Control Board reports that 31.7% of India’s municipal solid waste remains untraced. Delhi, India’s capital, presents a grotesque symbol of this failure. The Ghazipur landfill alone emits 15.3 Gg (greenhouse gas) of methane annually — 1-3% of India’s total landfills emit methane — posing grave health and environmental risks.





## ‘The flair he had on both sides of the wicket is pretty cool’: Alyssa Healy on Virat Kohli



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One of the most productive shots of Virat Kohli through his career has been his glorious cover drive. However, while it has given him a lot of runs, it was also where he has had his troubles against throughout nicking those deliveries on the fourth and fifth stump line. In the recent tour to Australia, all his dismissals were identical. He flapped his bat around a delivery near his off-stump, which he edged to the keeper, and got himself out.

“To be brave enough and drive those balls on the up is going to get you in trouble every now and then, but you’ve got to counter-attack as well. If you get it right, it puts it back on the bowler. But yeah, when he was unbelievably still at

the crease, his head did not move. He looked so difficult to remove, and the flair he had on both sides of the wicket is pretty cool,” Alyssa Healy said, speaking on the LISTNR Sport podcast. “Funnily enough, Mitch actually liked bowling to him because he was like just hang it outside off-stump and Virat loved to nick it. But that’s why I loved that. Everyone’s saying he had this technical flaw. Yes, because he wants to hit the ball, and that’s what he’s done throughout his career,” Healy added.

After his ton in Perth during the first Test in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, his form dipped. “I was in Australia over the winter and watched him have a tricky tour, but I still fully expected to see him in England this summer. Kohli struggled at first in England but was unbelievable in 2018 as captain, when he worked a method out and just left the ball. He was so patient for a player with so much attacking skill,” Former England cricketer Michael Vaughan wrote in his column for The Telegraph. “All of his tours of England were up against James Anderson and Stuart Broad so I was really looking forward to seeing him take on a new England attack. His battles with Anderson, not least at Edgbaston in 2018, were magnificent, a great spectacle. It was a proper heavyweight contest, with two world beaters going up against each other. It was so enthralling,” he added. However, the 36-year-old has announced his retirement earlier and won’t take part in the marquee India vs England Test series starting in June.

## Neeraj Chopra: ‘Didn’t have very strong relationship with Arshad Nadeem, as athletes, we have to talk’

GNS News Agency, May 20

Claiming that he ‘did not have a very strong relationship’ with the reigning Olympic champion from Pakistan, Arshad Nadeem, Neeraj Chopra said if anyone talks with him ‘respectfully’, he will reciprocate in the same way. The twice Olympic and World Championship medalist was asked about his relationship with Nadeem, which has come under scrutiny after the Pahalgam terror attacks and the subsequent conflict between India and Pakistan. Speaking at a media conference in Doha, ahead of Friday’s Diamond League, Chopra said: “First of all, I really wanted to (make it) clear that I didn’t have a very strong relationship (with Nadeem). As athletes, we have to talk, and I have some good friends in the athletics community and from all around the world. Not just javelin throwers but also other events. But yeah, if someone talks to me respectfully, I also talk to them respectfully.”

Chopra and Nadeem have dominated the javelin world in the last few years. At the Tokyo Olympics, Chopra became the first Indian to win a track-and-field gold medal while Nadeem finished fifth. Last year at the Paris Games, Nadeem shattered the Olympic record to win Pakistan’s first gold medal outside hockey while Chopra clinched the silver medal. The duo is unlikely to go head-to-head anytime soon this year, with Chopra opting for Diamond League and another meet in Poland to kick off his season while Nadeem choosing to take part in the Asian Championships. Last



month, Chopra had issued a strong statement, saying he received hate and abuse over inviting Nadeem for the now-postponed NC Classic, and his family had also been at the receiving end. “There has been so much talk about my decision to invite Arshad Nadeem to compete in the Neeraj Chopra Classic, and most of it has been hate and abuse,” Chopra had said. “They haven’t even left my family out of it. The invitation I extended to Arshad was from one athlete to another — nothing more, nothing less. The aim of the NC Classic was to bring the best athletes to India and for our country to be the home of world-class sporting events. Invites had gone out to all athletes two days before the terrorist attacks at Pahalgam. After all that has taken place over the last 48 hours, Arshad’s presence at the NC Classic was completely out of the question.”

## ‘Ever see Rohit Sharma defend balls on 4th or 5th stump?’ Gibbs explains why he feels Rohit is ‘more technically correct’ than Virat Kohli

GNS News Agency, May 20

Former South Africa cricketer Herschelle Gibbs has said that Rohit Sharma is a ‘more technically correct’ batter than Virat Kohli in the backdrop of both cricketers calling time on their careers from the longest format of the game in the past weeks. The Indian Test team will be sans both stars for the long tour of England which starts next month. While engaging with fans on his X account, Gibbs declared that Sharma is a ‘more technically correct’ batter than Virat Kohli, before explaining why. The conversation started because a handle on X has posted clips of both India batters while trying to make the case that Sharma plays different types of shots even in bad form and in constantly adapting. Responding to that tweet, Gibbs said: “It’s up to the batting coach to give him (Virat Kohli) more options to score no matter who the batter is.. thank me later.” Later, responding to a direct query about who was the more technically proficient batter among the two, Gibbs said: “Rohit was always more technically correct than Virat. But Virat’s desire to dominate, especially in white ball format, is a major difference between the two batters.” As a teenager leading the Indian cricket team to the U19 World Cup title, Virat Kohli had mentioned in a now-viral video for ICC’s social media handles that the South African opener Gibbs was his “favorite cricketer”. Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli have been two of the most prolific cricketers for team India. (BCCI) Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli have been two



of the most prolific cricketers for Team India. (BCCI) When another X account disagreed with Gibb’s assessment, the South African elaborated why he thought that Sharma was more technically sound than Virat Kohli. “You ever see Rohit defend balls on 4th or 5th stump? How many times did Virat get out doing just that? Rohit definitely technically better than Virat,” Gibbs wrote. While Rohit Sharma played 67 Tests for India before retiring, Virat Kohli ended his whites career after playing 123 Tests. While Sharma managed 4301 runs in his Test career, Kohli ended his innings in the longest format of the sport with 9230 runs against his name.

# The physics behind Hardik Pandya’s curved bat that enables his signature no-look sixes

GNS News Agency, May 20

There’s a nonchalance about Hardik Pandya when he hits his trademark no-look sixes; his timing, skill and power make it look easy. Aiding the star in clearing the rope is his bat with a curve in the front – a radical innovation that has been around for a while now but has largely gone unnoticed. The revolutionary ‘bat tweak’ originated in the 1990s when Sachin Tendulkar came up with a query for his bat manufacturer. He had noticed that his bats would develop a nice sweet spot – the wood would get compressed, giving the willow a ‘good dent’ – when used over a period of time. ‘Was it possible to have a readymade sweet spot?’ was Tendulkar’s question. And the answer was ‘yes’ and the bats were no longer flat as a chopping board. They were also convex.

With time, the dent got deeper and broader and the process more scientific. Researchers would bank on the laws of physics, carve the bat keeping in mind the principles of the angle of incidence and reflection. The result is constantly evolving game-changing cricket equipment that is silently and methodically putting cricket on steroids, making six-hitting a frequent event. The ‘bats with arc’ are T20’s unsung heroes, the anonymous crowd-pullers. Hardik’s skills, his training, aided by his bat, make him a front-runner in the arms race among six-hitters. His bat has nearly

200 percent more curve than the competition, claims Meerut-based manufacturer Sanspareils Greenlands (SG). Behind the scenes, in this drive to stay ahead, is a collaboration between researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, mechanical engineers at SG, and Hardik himself. It isn’t unusual for the India star to travel to Meerut and ask questions, and give suggestions, to the engineers poring through bat dimensions. Hardik has a couple of demands: the ball hitting the curve’s sweet spot, and its take-off being at the precise angle that would make it travel the farthest. As an SG engineer points out, it is all physics. For the trajectory of the ball to make a perfect parabola in the air, and thus cover the longest distance, the take-off from the bat needs to be at 45 degrees. With a curved willow, the batsman’s chance of getting the ideal angle increases. “If you look at golf clubs, the pitching wedge has an angle and gives you elevation. What we have done with the help of the curve is give a very good angle. A 45-degree hit with the right force takes it almost 90 metres. That is the science here. The curve helps loft the ball. Hardik figured that out,” Anand said.

The SG engineers scribble diagrams on their notebooks and take help of 3D animation on their laptops to explain the mechanics behind their Arc series bat. Few are old-timers having spent over a decade at the company and

## Srihari LR becomes India’s 86th Grandmaster



GNS News Agency, May 20

A full year after getting its 85 grandmaster, India got its 86th GM after 19-year-old Srihari LR got the coveted title when he played against GM Iniyan Paneerselvam at the Asian Individual Men’s Chess Championship which is going on right now at Al-Ain. Before Srihari, India’s last grand-

master was Shyaamnikhil P, who earned the top title in the sport on 12th May, 2024. Srihari, who unsurprisingly hails from the state of Tamil Nadu, is coached by grandmaster Shyam Sundar at the academy called Chess Thulir. Shyam Sundar has also coached the likes of Pranav V.

“Congratulations L.R. Srihari for becoming the latest GM after securing the final GM norm here in the Asian open, Al Ain. It took nearly a year to get the final norm. Glad it happened now and time to focus on the next bigger goal! 2nd IM to GM from my academy!” Shyam Sundar posted on Instagram.

Coming into the Asian Individual Men’s Chess Championship, Srihari had earned his two grandmaster norms — the first coming at the Qatar Masters in 2023, while the second one came at the Chennai GM Open event in 2024. He had also crossed the 2500 rating threshold in the published ratings last year itself in August 2024. All Srihari needed was to play the game against Iniyan Paneerselvam at Al-Ain for him to secure his third norm that confirms his ascendancy to the GM title. At Al-Ain, Srihari has gone unbeaten in eight games while his ninth game against Iniyan is still going on. Remarkably, eight of his games at the event have come against grandmasters. He has beaten Indian grandmasters Abhijeet Gupta and Pranav V while holding other GMs like AR Saleh Salem (from UAE), China’s Xu Xiangyu, Pranav Anand, Aleksey Grebnev (representing FIDE) and Pranesh M to draws.

## IPL 2025: Kusal Mendis set to replace Jos Buttler in Gujarat Titans squad before Playoffs

GNS News Agency, May 20

Sri Lanka wicket-keeper Kusal Mendis is set to be named as a temporary replacement signing for England wicket-keeper Jos Buttler for the remainder of the IPL 2025 season with the Gujarat Titans. With the rejigged schedule of the IPL clashing with England’s limited-overs series with the West Indies and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) naming Buttler in the squads, he will certainly miss the IPL 2025 Playoffs. While the England-West Indies series begins on May 29 in Edgbaston, the Qualifier 1 match of the Playoffs is also slated to be held on the same day.

According to NewsWire and ESPNcricinfo, Mendis will join his Lankan teammate Dasun Shanaka in the GT dug-out. Mendis is likely to be roped in straight away into the GT XI in Buttler’s absence as their wicket-keeping options remain limited, with the uncapped Anuj Rawat being the only other contender. The Titans are on top of the current standings with 16 points in 11 games and are a win away from securing qualification. Batting at No. 3 this season, Buttler has been in phenomenal form, smashing 500 runs at a 71.43 average. The England veteran is likely to feature in the last three league-stage games before flying out for his interna-



tional commitments. Mendis was recently seen in action in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) where he recorded 143 runs at a 168-plus strike rate for the Quetta Gladiators. Overall, the 30-year-old has amassed over 4700 runs in his T20 career with two centuries and 32 fifties. This will also mark the first time Mendis has been signed for a stint in the IPL. However, with the new replacement rules in effect, the Titans cannot retain the Sri Lankan for the next season.

## With Stephen Curry out injured, Golden State Warriors sent home in five games by Minnesota Timberwolves

GNS News Agency, May 20

Former NBA champions Golden State Warriors were eliminated from the playoffs by the Minnesota Timberwolves one step away from the Western Conference finals. The Warriors were forced to play without star Stephen Curry, who has been out with a hamstring strain since the second quarter in Game 1. The series ended early for the Warriors with a 121-110 defeat in Game 5. The former NBA champs were hoping to stay alive at least their talisman Curry returned to action. While the team’s second star Jimmy Butler had 17 points for the Warriors, players like Brandin Podziemski, who scored a playoff career-high 28 points for the Warriors, and Jonathan Kuminga, who came off the bench for the team and scored 26 points. Curry watched from the sidelines as his 16th season in the league ended unceremoniously.

Before eliminating the Warriors, the Minnesota Timberwolves had also shown the exit door to the Los Angeles Lakers. They have now earned themselves a few days to recoup, and could enjoy as much as five days off if the Nuggets beat the Thunder on Thursday and force a Game 7 in the other West semifinal series. The Minnesota franchise will play the winner of that series between the Denver Nuggets vs Oklahoma City Thunder series. The sixth-seeded Wolves were dragged into the Conference Finals by Anthony Edwards, who scored 22 points and racked up 12 assists on the night. Rudy Gobert added 17 points while Mike Conley, with 16 points and eight assists, and Donte DiVincenzo, with 13 points, also contributed. The Associated Press reported that the Wolves shot a staggering 77%



on 2-pointers (36 for 47). They set franchise postseason records for assists (36) and field goal percentage (62.8%).

According to Sportradar, the Golden State Warriors, who last won an NBA title in 2022, hadn’t lost four straight games in a single postseason since 1972. The Warriors had established a dynasty in the phase between 2015 to 2018, winning three titles in four seasons. They entered the playoffs in red-hot form, after boasting one of the best records in the regular season. They also shot down the second seeded Houston Rockets in the first round. For the Timberwolves, Julius Randle scored 29 points on 13-for-18 shooting in Game 5. The team is headed to the finals of the Western Conference for the second straight year now. Draymond Green, the Warriors’ defensive bedrock, admitted after the game 5 defeat that the Warriors should have gone much further in the season. While admitting that the Curry injury had cost the team heavily, he added: “



off the fears of a batsman getting caught in the circle. “It is not that the ball won’t go along the ground. The chances of getting caught are not that high,” Paras says. Then he delivers the punchline. “Ultimately, they all want to hit sixes. chhakka hi marna hai.” The latest curved bats are machine-made but finished by hand to ensure that the weight is exactly what top players like Hardik want. “Only a machine can get the curve accurate to the degree that Hardik wants. It is that specific,” Anand says. SG’s latest series of curved bats were launched in the market in December. To democratise six-hitting, Hardik insisted the curved blade bats be budget-friendly.



## After Samantha Ruth Prabhu shares cosy photos with Raj Nidimoru, his wife Shhyamali pens a cryptic note: ‘I send blessings and love...’



Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu's recent cosy photo with her *The Family Man* director Raj Nidimoru has sparked dating rumours. Just a few hours after Samantha's post which spoke of new beginnings and had Samantha and Raj posing together, Shhyamali took to her Instagram Stories and posted, "I send blessings and love to everyone who thinks of me, sees me, hears me, hears of me, speaks to me, speaks of me, reads of me, writes of me and meets me today." Samantha and director duo Raj and DK have worked together on multiple occasions in the past, including a season of *The Family Man* and *Citadel: Honey Bunny*. Raj is often a part of Samantha's Instagram posts but the duo has not commented on the rumours. Shhyamali's post came just after Samantha Ruth Prabhu shared a series of photos on her Instagram handle on Wednesday. The actress was seen sharing a success post for her production debut film

Subham. The first photo showed Samantha standing close to Raj while pointing towards Subham poster. Another picture showed the actress as her character in Subham, while she could be seen talking to Raj. A third picture of the duo showed them sitting together on a flight with Samantha resting her head on Raj's shoulders. Sharing these pictures, the actress captioned her post: "Thank you for watching, feeling and celebrating #SUBHAM with us! Our very first step—fuelled by heart, madness and the belief that new, fresh stories matter! We are @tralalamovingpictures And with Subham, the journey has begun. What a start!" Her post attracted the attention of her fans. A fan commented, "8th slide Sam! They are gonna trend your love story!" Another comment read, "It's official! Raj and Sam are in love." Other comments read, "Stay happy Sam, you finally found the right guy who values you", "Samantha with Raj", "In the fourth slide, the way the man look at Sam", "8th slide? If it's true, you lost everything again ma'am", "Samraj is new name for you both", and "Are you in a relationship with Raj", among others. A similar post was shared by Shhyamali on her feed on April 3. She last shared a picture with husband Raj back in 2023 on the occasion of Valentine's Day, where she wrote, "There is a hand I love to hold, a face I love to see, there is a voice I love to hear that means the world to me... At the center of my life, at the heart of all that matters, is you and the love we share. When I count my blessings, I always think of you! Happy Valentine's Day R!" Filmmaker Raj Nidimoru has been married to Shhyamali since 2015. They are also parents to a daughter. Meanwhile, Samantha was previously married to Naga Chaitanya. The couple, however, filed for divorce in 2021 after four years of marriage. Naga Chaitanya is now married to actress Sobhita Dhulipala.

## Ravi Mohan accuses wife Aarti of abuse; calls Keneesha Francis his lifeline: ‘She stood by me when I left my home without basic dignity’



Ravi shared a huge statement on his Instagram on Thursday. It read: "While our country faces a greater collective crisis, it pains me to see personal matters litigated in the court of public opinion. We should know better than this. Watching my private life turned into gossip, twisted without truth or compassion, has been deeply traumatic. My silence was not a weakness — it was survival. But when my integrity is questioned by those who don't know my journey or my scars, I must speak."

Calling himself a survivor of years of physical, mental, emotional and severe financial abuse, Jayam Ravi said, "I was also caged in isolation from ever meeting my own parents through these years, trapped in a reality that became unbearable despite every sincere attempt to heal and save my marriage. I finally found the strength to walk away from a life that had become unlivable. Choosing to walk away was not a decision I made lightly — And so, I write this to you with a heavy heart." In another part of his statement, the Tamil actor shared, "What breaks me most is seeing my children used as tools in a public narrative rooted in financial gain and to sway public sympathy, while I've been deliberately kept away from them since our separation. Apart from a single court-mandated meeting last Christmas, all our communication has been gradual but a well-structured cut off. Bouncers now accompany them almost everywhere to prevent me from ever seeing or approaching

my own children, and you guys question my role as a father?" He added, "There is nothing more heartbreaking for a man who worked tirelessly to support only to feed insecurities purely out of affection, than being reduced to a provider, stripped of my voice, my dignity, my own earnings and finances, shares of my assets, my social media accounts, my career decisions, being trapped in massive financial loans as sureties, my father-son bonding, interacting with my own parents and basic rights with the sole intention to selfishly enrich herself and her parents into luxury while ensuring that not a single penny of my earning was sent to my own parents for more than 5 years — the very people who made me who I am today." In his statement, he also gave an ultimatum to Aarti. He wrote, "Stop our game now. Go ahead with your attention seeking syndrome which made me driver from Prasad to Apollo on a day I was being extremely happy for myself... and more importantly, don't dare involve my kids in it ever again. I will be a better father + any and all relationships they need from me to be. I will only see you in court for any/all amicable proceedings." In the same statement, Ravi Mohan also talked about his relationship with Keneesha saying, "I will not ever allow even a whisper of disrespect toward her character on her profession." He said, "With regards to Keneesha Francis, who was initially a friend that chose to save a drowning man, very quickly became a lifeline of support when I had nothing but tears, blood, and the courage to walk away from a life that nearly broke me. She stood by me on the night I left my own home barefoot, in a night suit — when I was stripped of my wallet, my vehicles, documents, my belongings and even my basic dignity. Acknowledging the sensitivities of the situation — Keneesha didn't hesitate. She didn't flinch. She simply showed up. She is a beautiful companion, and I assure you this — She carries light." Jayam Ravi's long statement also had a paragraph dedicated to his fans, to whom the actor sincerely thanked for standing by him. "I will hold endless gratitude to each one of you."

What sparked the controversy?

In September last year, Jayam Ravi shared a post announcing his separation from his wife Aarti. Back then, the actor didn't give a reason for his separation, requesting privacy. Soon after, his wife claimed she was "blindsided" by the announcement. Recently, after Jayam Ravi was spotted attending a wedding with girlfriend Keneesha in Chennai, Aarti took to her Instagram handle accusing the actor of leaving her in financial distress and not sharing responsibilities of his children. Jayam Ravi and Aarti were married for nearly 16 years and are parents to two sons.



ent companies for their VFX needs, DC has used two firms this time around with whom they have worked before, WETA and Scanline. Both these companies have worked for DC on a previous project, and that was *The Flash* (2023), and more than anything, the movie was criticised for the poor quality of visual effects. Both the movies also share the same cinematographer, Henry Braham, and although the overall framing and shot decisions seem to look good in the trailer, fans will be eager to see whether DC are going to learn from their mistakes or not.

## Aamir Khan and Rajkumar Hirani reunite after 3 Idiots and PK, announce biopic on the ‘father of Indian cinema’ Dadasaheb Phalke



After blockbuster hits *3 Idiots* (2009) and *PK* (2014), actor Aamir Khan and filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani are set to reunite for the third time after 11 years. The duo is collaborating to make a biopic on Dadasaheb Phalke, the father of Indian cinema. Dadasaheb Phalke award is the highest film honour conferred by the government of India, but his story stands untold in Hindi cinema.

The yet-to-be-titled film will be set against the backdrop of India's independence struggle. The shooting of the biopic is scheduled to begin from October 2025. It will cover the producer-director's journey from scratch and how he went on to birth the largest indigenous film industry in the world. According to the Aamir Khan's team's statement, the actor will begin the prep after his upcoming film *Sitaare*

Zameen Par's release on June 20. "He will start preparing for his part soon after the release of *Sitaare Zameen Par*. VFX studios from LA has already created AI designs for the era and period of the film," it read. The statement further added that the script has been under works since four years — "Rajkumar Hirani with Abhijat Joshi and two other writers Hindukush Bharadwaj and Avishkar Bharadwaj have been working on this script for the last 4 years. Dadasaheb Phalke's grandson, Chandrashekhar Srikrishna Pusalkar has been supportive of the project and has provided major anecdotes from Dadasaheb Phalke's life."

Meanwhile, Aamir Khan's *Sitaare Zameen Par*'s trailer was recently released by the makers. The film is the spiritual sequel of his hit film *Taare Zameen Par*. It is a sports comedy drama, directed by R. S. Prasanna. Also starring Genelia Deshmukh in a pivotal role, it is a remake of Spanish movie *Campeones* (2018). During an interaction with one of his fan clubs in China, the actor spoke about the film and his character, and said, "It is the sequel of *Taare Zameen Par*. Thematically, it is going ten steps ahead. It is about people who are differently abled. It is about love, friendship and life. *Taare Zameen Par* made you cry but this film will make you laugh. It's a comedy but the theme is the same. My character, Nikumbh, in *Taare Zameen Par* was a very sensitive person. In this film my character's name is Gulshan but his personality is exactly opposite to Nikumbh. He is very rude, politically incorrect and he insults everybody. He fights with his wife, mother. He is a basketball coach and he beats up his senior coach. He is a person with a lot of internal problems." The man behind India's first silent movie, Raja Harshchandra, Phalke established Phalke Films Company in 1912. Phalke wrote, directed and produced the feature while his wife Saraswati helped with costume designing and food catering. His eldest son Bhalchandra played an important role. Dadasaheb Phalke went on to make a reported 27 short films, and over 90 full-length movies in his career as a filmmaker of nearly two decades. Some of his other well-known works are *Lanka Dahan*, *Shri Krishna Janma* and *Satyavan Savitri* among others.

## Rumoured to be haunted, Rajesh Khanna's ‘cursed’ sea-facing bungalow Aashirwad was purchased for just Rs 3.5 lakh; it was sold for Rs 90 crore

In the 1960s, Carter Road in Bandra, Mumbai, wasn't the hotspot that it is now. It housed mostly Parsis and Anglo-Indians. Among the row of houses at the seafront was a bungalow rumoured to be haunted. According to journalist Ali Peter John, the house was in a dilapidated state, and nobody was willing to buy it, even at dirt cheap prices. The existence of the house was brought to the attention of actor Rajendra Kumar, who was then just starting out in Hindi films. Excited by the opportunity to live in a bungalow with a view of the sea, he was determined to purchase it, even though he didn't have the money to.

According to Seema Sonik Alimchand's book *Jubilee Kumar: The Life and Times of a Superstar*, the house was put on sale for Rs 65,000. But Rajendra Kumar could only spare Rs 10,000. He said, "I immediately signed a cheque for Rs 10,000 and sent it to the broker. Now I had to pay fifty-five thousand more, which I didn't have in my account. So I went to Mr BR Chopra, who, a few days earlier, had offered me two films — *Dhool ka Phool* and *Kanoon*. While I had accepted both, we had yet to come to an agreement over the payment for each film."

Rajendra Kumar told the kindhearted BR Chopra that he would do both films, but would need to be paid in advance. They reached an agreement. He said, according to the book, "The consolidated fee they were offering for both films was not acceptable to me. So CVK Shastri, the Chopras's production controller, and I were still wrangling over it when this beautiful bungalow came into the picture. I told Chopra Saab, 'Shastriji and I have reached an impasse regarding my fee. So could we please finalize the amount?' Chopra Saab asked, 'How much has Shastri offered you?' Rs 1,50,000 for both films,' I told him. 'And I have asked for Rs 2 lakhs, as I am charging other producers more than a lakh per movie.' He said, 'All right, I will pay you Rs 1,75,000 for both.' I agreed immediately, but laid down the condition that he should pay me Rs 50,000 then and there. And the magnanimous B.R. Chopra immediately handed me the money. I paid Rs 55,000 to the owner of the bungalow on Carter Road that I had set my eyes on." But the matter of the haunting remained. According to Alimchand's book, the broker Rajendra Kumar met with dismissed the rumours. "Apparently, this gentleman hasn't paid the rent for months, and now that the landlord has given him an ultimatum he's probably spreading rumours to drive off prospective buyers and tenants. Otherwise, why would he continue to live in a haunted house?" he told the actor. According to Ali Peter John, Rajendra Kumar consulted actor Manoj Kumar, and told him about the rumours. Manoj Kumar advised Rajendra not to pay heed to them, and to perform a puja if necessary. Rajendra renovated the place and gave it the name Dimple, after his newborn daughter. His career took off, and soon, he earned the moniker 'Jubilee Kumar'. He was able to buy another bungalow, which he named Dimple as well. It was around this time that another young actor was taking his first steps in the industry; his name was Rajesh Khanna. He heard that Rajendra Kumar was looking to sell his Carter Road bungalow, and decided to purchase it, hoping that some of the star's good fortune would rub off on him.



According to Peter John, Rajesh bought the bungalow for Rs 3.5 lakh, but because he wasn't allowed to keep the name 'Dimple', he named it 'Aashirwad'. "You must change the name. Dimple is my daughter's name. We had named the Carter Road bungalow after her and we have now named our new home 'Dimple' too. But you have my blessings for your new home. May it bring you immense luck and prosperity," Alimchand's book quoted Rajendra Kumar as saying. Rajesh's fortunes indeed changed. He became the first 'superstar' of Hindi cinema, and hordes of fans would throng the streets outside Aashirwad. According to the book *Dark Star: The Loneliness of Being Rajesh Khanna* by Gautam Chintamani, once Rajesh moved into Aashirwad, "the facade of being a king was complete." "Khanna made tens of producers wait endlessly outside the fabled durbar, granting audience only once they had done time. He would emerge in his famous silk lungi-kurta and take his position at a chair that was conspicuously placed a little higher than the others to differentiate between the king and his subjects. Only a select had access to the inner sanctum, and many a times, those waiting outside would tell the ones who passed by to put in a good word... Inside, copious amounts of whisky would flow endlessly through the night and those present would sing praises of King Kaka... Those who didn't agree with him or presented a somewhat contrarian point of view even for the sake of argument, were often shown the door. The manner in which Khanna supposedly banished people from his court was nothing less than high theatrics; he would weigh the words that didn't meet his approval and proclaim, 'Aapko humara durbar chhodna padega'. Funeral procession of the first superstar of Bollywood Rajesh Khanna at his bungalow Ashirwad in Carter Road, Bandra on Thursday. Express photo by Prashant Nadkar) Funeral procession of the first superstar of Bollywood Rajesh Khanna at his bungalow Ashirwad in Carter Road, Bandra on However, Rajesh's career famously sank after the arrival of Amitabh Bachchan. According to Peter John, "Finally, this one-time haunted house started haunting him and he spent most of his time in his office on Linking Road, going home only to sleep in a tiny bedroom in a corner." Rajesh Khanna died in 2012. Following his death, Aashirwad was sold for Rs 90 crore to Shashi Kiran Shetty, founder and chairman of AllCargo Logistics. A highrise stands on the land today.

## Jacqueline delighted to be an honouree at women in cinema initiative at Cannes

Mumbai: Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez, who is all set to represent India at the Red Sea Film Festival, being hosted at the 78th Cannes Film Festival, says she is delighted to be an honouree at the event. The actress took to Instagram with a series of stunning pictures from her visit to the Cannes Film Festival, where she turned heads in a striking white and silver ensemble.

Her post offered fans a behind-the-scenes glimpse into her glamorous journey from getting her makeup done to giving interviews and sharing radiant moments with fellow honourees. For the caption, Jacqueline wrote: "Cannes Day

1 with @redseafilms Delighted to be an honouree at the women in cinema initiative that champions female storytellers. #redseafilms #womenincinema #redseafilmsfoundation."

The Red Sea Film Festival, in collaboration with Cannes, seeks to promote cultural exchange and creative collaboration. Jacqueline will grace the red carpet alongside filmmakers, storytellers, and global icons. The Red Sea International Film Festival has announced its seven honourees for its annual Women in Cinema Gala, which spotlights contributions of female filmmakers, creators, actors and executives to the entertainment industry.