

Special Trains between Kacheguda–Bilaspur-Kacheguda

Hyderabad, June 23 (NSS): In order to clear extra rush, South Central Railway will run weekly special trains between Kacheguda – Bilaspur – Kacheguda. Train No. 08263 (Bilaspur-Kacheguda) weekly special train will run on July 23 to July 4 (Mondays) and in return direction Train No. 08264 (Kacheguda – Bilaspur) weekly special train will run on June 24 to July 15 (Tuesdays)En route, these special trains will stop at Bhatapara, Raipur, Durg, Raj Nandagaon, Dongargarh, Gondia, Wadsa, Chanda Fort, Balharshah, Sirpur Kaghaznagar, Mancheriyal, Ramagundam, Kazipet, Charlapalli and Malkajigiri stations in both the directions. These special trains consist of 3AC, Sleeper and General Second Class coaches.

Telangana extends continued support to citizens returning from conflict zones



New Delhi, June 23 Following the directions of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, the Telangana government continues to actively monitor the ongoing crisis in the Middle East and is extending all necessary support to its citizens returning from the affected regions. In a coordinated effort, Telangana Bhavan, New Delhi, facilitated the safe transit of 6 Telangana students (Four from Iran and two from Israel) who arrived at midnight on Saturday. All 6 had pre-booked their onward flights to Hyderabad and were safely seen off

Govt planning to conduct Rythu Bharosa's success meet on grand scale today

Hyderabad, June 23 : After successfully distributing Rs. 9,000 crore to farmers within just nine days through the Rythu Bharosa scheme, the State government is gearing up to conduct a massive meeting with farmers at the Rajiv Gandhi statue located in front of the Secretariat on Tuesday.

Minister for Agriculture Tummala Nageswara Rao, along with Chief Secretary Ramakrishna Rao and several senior officials from various departments, on Monday inspected the venue for the meeting at the Rajiv Gandhi statue.During the visit, the Minister announced that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, and other Ministers would be in attendance for the event."The government is committed to supporting farmers in Telangana, with the primary goal of treating them like Kings. In a remarkable achievement, Rs. 9,000 crore has been deposited into farmers' accounts within just nine days. To celebrate this success, a victory meeting is being organised in front of the Secretariat," Tummala stated. The Minister has instructed officials to ensure that the arrangements for the event are impeccable, emphasising that farmers should not face any difficulties. Participants from all districts who have benefited from the Rythu Bharosa scheme are expected to attend. Officials received guidance on various logistical matters, including electricity, drinking water, tent arrangements, seating capacity, traffic management

HC reserves verdict on local body elections



Hyderabad, June 23 : The Telangana High Court has asked the State government to state whether the Gram Panchayat elections (Local Body Elections) will be held in the coming days or not? It questioned the State government, which had said it would hold the elections in February this year itself, and why the elections were not held?Six petitions filed by former Sarpanchs of Nalgonda district regarding the conduct of the local body elections, the HC heard the petitions today. The term of the office of the Sarpanchs in Telangana ended on February 1, 2024, while the term of office of MPTC members ended on July 5, 2024. The petitions were previously filed in the Telangana High Court alleging that the State government was delaying the conduct of the elections while the elections should be held within six months as per the rules.The arguments have been made on these issues before the HC. The latest hearing came up again and the High Court reserved its verdict on the local bodies' elections after the arguments of the petitioners, the State government and the Election Commission were completed.During the hearing, the State government asked the High Court for a 30-day deadline and the State Election Commission asked for a 60-day deadline to conduct the elections. The government asked for a deadline to complete the reservations and ward division process, but the Election Commission told the High Court that if the State government gets clearance, they need two months time to conduct the elections. However, the petitioner's lawyers brought to the court's attention that the State government, which had said it would hold the elections in February, had not made any efforts in this direction. With this, the High Court questioned the government as to why it did not hold the elections as it had said in the previous hearing regarding the conduct of the elections.

by Telangana Bhavan staff at 5:30 AM on Monday. Officials ensured their comfort and well-being during their stay in Delhi and assisted them until they boarded their flights.Further, officials are expecting 7 more Telangana citizens to arrive in New Delhi on Monday night. These individuals have successfully crossed over from Israel to Amman and Jordan and are scheduled to reach India shortly. Arrangements are being made to receive and support them at the airport and at Telangana Bhavan. Meanwhile, several other Telangana residents stranded in Israel are facing delays due to the temporary closure of Israeli airspace. Despite these disruptions, the Government of Telangana remains fully committed to assisting all affected citizens and is in constant coordination with the Ministry of External Affairs, Indian Embassies, and concerned authorities.The Chief Minister has instructed officials to ensure that every Telangana resident arriving from the region receives timely assistance, proper accommodation, and onward travel support. Citizens are advised to stay in touch with official channels and avoid relying on unverified information. The Telangana government stands firmly with its people during this challenging time and will continue its efforts to ensure their safety and swift return.



and vehicle parking. Principal Secretary (Agriculture) Raghunandan Rao, Hyderabad Commissioner of Police CV Anand, Additional DG Law and Orders MM Bhagwat, Transport Commissioner Surender Mohan, GHMC Commissioner RV Karnan, I&PR Commissioner CH Priyanka, Horticulture Commissioner Yasmin Bhasha, SPDCL MD Mushraf Ali, officials of Agriculture and other departments were also present

Iran’s underground nuclear enrichment site at Fordow was attacked again as Israeli strikes continue

GNS News Agency, June 23
Israel hit Iranian government targets in Tehran on Monday (June 23, 2025) in a series of strikes that followed a salvo of missiles and drones fired by Iran at Israel in the wake of the Trump administration’s massive strikes on Iranian nuclear sites the day before.The Israeli military also confirmed it struck roads around Iran’s Fordo enrichment facility to obstruct access to the site. The underground site was one of those hit in Sunday’s (June 22, 2025) attack by the United States on three nuclear facilities. The Israeli military did not elaborate.In Tehran attacks, Israel’s Defence Ministry said it hit targets that included the notorious Evin Prison in the Iranian capital and the security headquarters of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guards.“The Iranian dictator will be punished with full force for attacking the Israeli home front,” the Ministry said.The strikes also hit Tehran’s Palestine Square and other “military command centres belonging to the Iranian regime,” it said.

According to an Israeli official familiar with the government’s strategy, Israel is targeting these sites to put pressure on the Iranian administration but is not actively seeking to topple it. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal government deliberations.The Israeli move came just hours after President Donald Trump wrote on his Truth Social website: “If the current Iranian Regime is unable to MAKE IRAN GREAT AGAIN, why wouldn’t there be a Regime change???”

In Vienna, the head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog said he expected there to be heavy damage at the Fordo facility already following the Sunday’s (June 22, 2025) U.S. airstrike there with sophisticated bunker-buster bombs.“Given the explosive payload utilized ... very significant damage ... is expected to have occurred,” said Rafael Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency.With the strikes on Sunday (June 22, 2025) on Iranian nuclear sites, the United States inserted itself into Israel’s war, prompting fears of a wider regional conflict. Iran said the U.S. had crossed “a very big red line” with its risky gambit to strike the three sites with missiles and 30,000-pound bunker-buster bombs.Several Iranian officials, including Atomic Energy Organization of Iran spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi, have claimed Iran removed nuclear material from targeted sites ahead of time.Mr. Grossi told the IAEA board of governors on Monday (June 23, 2025) that Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi had informed him on June 13 that Iran would “adopt special mea-

ICAR-NAARM bagged first prize in organic expo-2025

Hyderabad, June 23 (NSS): ICAR-NAARM bagged first prize in the International Agriculture, Horticulture and Organic Expo 2025 organized at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi from June 21 to 23, 2025. Harsh Malhotra, Minister of State for Corporate Affairs and Road Transport and Highways presented the award during the ceremony at New Delhi. ICAR-NAARM was honoured with the award for its sustained excellence in Training, Learning and Capacity Building.NAARM exhibition stall attracted many visitors, and they keenly learned about NAARM and its activities and achievements. Dr R Venkattakumar, Principal Scientist and Head, Extension Systems Management (XSM) division, Dr S Siva Kumar, Principal Scientist, Research Systems Management Division.

PM Modi to open centenary celebration of Sree Narayana Guru, Mahatma Gandhi talks

GNS News Agency, June 23
New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Tuesday inaugurate the centenary celebration of the historic conversation between two of India's greatest spiritual and moral leaders Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi on poverty alleviation and social justice, among others.In an event at Vigyan Bhawan, PM Modi is also likely to share his thoughts on issues ranging from upliftment of the downtrodden to unity.

The historic conversation between Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi took place at Sivagiri Mutt on March 12, 1925 during the latter's visit and centred around Vaikom Satyagraha, religious conversions, non-violence, abolition of untouchability, attainment of salvation and poverty.Organised by Sree Narayana Dharma Sanghom Trust, the celebration will bring together spiritual leaders and other members to reflect upon and commemorate the visionary dialogue that continues to shape India's social and moral fabric.“It stands as a powerful tribute to the shared vision of social justice, unity, and spiritual harmony championed by both Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi,” said an official statement.PM Modi has paid special attention to poverty alleviation during his decade-long stint. In one of the key achievements of the past decade, India lifted 171 million people out of extreme poverty.

The World Bank acknowledged India's decisive fight against poverty in its Spring 2025 Poverty and Equity



Brief.According to the report, the proportion of people living on less than \$2.5 a day, which is the international benchmark for extreme poverty, fell sharply from 16.2 per cent in 2011-12 to just 2.3 per cent in 2022-23.Officials said that this achievement is a testament to the government's commitment to inclusive development, focusing on both rural and urban areas.Through targeted welfare schemes, economic reforms, and increased access to essential services, India has made substantial strides in reducing poverty levels.The World Bank's Spring 2025 Poverty and Equity Brief highlights how these efforts have significantly impacted the lives of millions, narrowing the poverty gap across the country.

Harish Rao criticises CM Revanth Reddy

Hyderabad, June 23 Senior BRS party leader and former minister Harish Rao has taken to social media to criticize the Congress government. He said the situation in Congress government had turned upside down. Harish Rao alleged that the government had stopped the entire sheep distribution scheme started by the BRS government. He also criticized that all schemes had been stopped during the Congress rule and added that CM Revanth Reddy had left the implementation of the promises made in the Congress party's manifesto to the wind.He said if the Chief Minister's words cross the forts, his actions do not cross the threshold. He said the Congress party was the brand ambassador in making people believe and deceive them. He said the Abhaya Hastam manifesto promised to distribute the sheep within 100 days of coming to power. He criticised severely that even the DD money paid cannot be returned. He said the Yadava and Kuruma community people, who were tired of hearing CM Revanth Reddy's words, brought sheep to Gandhi Bhavan and protested.He said the State government should open its eyes before recognizing the fraud and added the people of all sections unite and flock to Gandhi Bhavan. Harish Rao said if the guarantees and promises made are not implemented at any time, there would be a rebellion from the people. Harish Rao wrote



a letter to Minister Seethakka demanding release of the funds to the panchayats along with the payment of pending bills to the former sarpanches and panchayat secretaries. He said due to non-release of the funds to the village panchayats, development works had stalled and sanitation had deteriorated. He said the former sarpanches were in deep distress due to the non-receipt of bills for the work done and demanded that the bills be paid immediately.He said the BRS government had appointed 9,350 junior panchayat secretaries in 2019 and asked for their jobs to be regularized.

Kishan Reddy recalls Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee’s services

Hyderabad, June 23 Union Minister Kishan Reddy today participated in the Balidan Diwas program on the death anniversary of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in Krishnanagar of Jubilee Hills constituency. Addressing a gathering, he said under the auspices of BJP, they had been celebrating the Balidan Diwas of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee for the past many years. “In 1951, Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. After independence, the then Prime Minister Nehru mortgaged the future of the country for temporary benefits in the matter of Article 370. He handed over a part of Kashmir to Pakistan. Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who served as a minister in the first Union Cabinet, resigned from the Nehru Cabinet and founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. A movement was started to protect against Article 370.While the entire country had a tricolour flag, Kashmir had a different flag. While the entire country had one Prime Minister, Kashmir had another Prime Minister. While Ambedkar's Constitution was implemented throughout the country, Jammu and Kashmir had special rights through Article 370,” he said. Reddy said that When Shyama Prasad Mukherjee said that the country was damaged by the selfish decisions of the then Prime Minister Nehru, Nehru ignored his words and added that Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was the first person to launch a movement to abolish the Article 370 and make Jammu and Kashmir an integral part of India. “Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee questioned If Jammu and Kashmir was an integral part of India, then how can there be a separate Prime Minister, special rights, and special powers?He entered Jammu and Kashmir by strongly opposing the visa and permit system. He was accompanied by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee urged Vajpayee to sensitize the people of the country and inform them about the inequalities taking place in Kashmir. However, as soon as he entered Jammu and Kashmir, he was arrested on the grounds of not having a permit. Later, he died under suspicious circumstances in Jammu and Kashmir. Allegations that this incident was a murder still persist. With the determination to protect the integrity of the country, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee took the initiative to fully implement that idea and sacrificed himself. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's goal was fulfilled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019. With the abrogation of Article 370, Dalits and women in Jammu and Kashmir were given equal rights like those in other parts of the country.



asures to protect nuclear equipment and materials.”“I indicated that any transfer of nuclear material from a safeguarded facility to another location in Iran must be declared,” Mr. Grossi said, without saying whether Iran had responded.Iran described its Monday (June 23, 2025) attack on Israel as as a new wave of its Operation “True Promise 3,” saying it was targeting the Israeli cities of Haifa and Tel Aviv, according to Iranian state television.Explosions were also heard in Jerusalem. There were no immediate reports of damage.In Iran, witnesses reported Israeli airstrikes hit areas around Iran’s capital, Tehran, around midday. Iranian state television confirmed one Israeli strike hit the gate of Evin Prison.The report shared what appeared to be black-and-white-surveillance footage of the strike. The prison is known for holding dual nationals and Westerners often used by Iran as bargaining chips in negotiations with the West.Evin also has specialised units for political prisoners and those with Western ties, run by the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The facility is the target of both U.S. and European Union sanctions.Earlier Monday (June 23, 2025), Iranian Gen. Abdulrahim Mousavi, the chief of joint staff of armed forces, warned Washington its strikes had given Iranian forces a “free hand “ to “act against U.S. interests and its army.”Tens of thousands of American troops are based in the Middle East, many in locations within range of short-range Iranian missiles.The U.S. described its Sunday (June 22, 2025) attack on the Fordo and Natanz enrichment facilities, as well as the Isfahan nuclear sit, as a one-off to take out Iran’s nuclear program, but Mr. Trump has warned of additional strikes if Tehran retaliates.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Yoga promotion shouldn't be seen as boosting Hindutva agenda

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing the 11th International Yoga Day celebrations in Visakhapatnam on Saturday, said—perhaps too optimistically—that yoga has the potential to ensure peace in a “conflict-ridden” world. Describing yoga as the “pause button” humanity desperately needs, he urged the world to embrace “Yoga for Humanity 2.0”—a vision where inner peace becomes the foundation for global peace. The theme for this year’s International Yoga Day—Yoga for One Earth, One Health—was especially apt in a world recovering from the shocks of a global pandemic, grappling with environmental degradation, and suffering from geopolitical instability. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, also present at the event, highlighted the scale and success of Yoga Day. He credited Modi with making yoga a truly global movement, noting that the practice is now being celebrated in over 175 countries, across 12 lakh locations, with participation from more than 10 crore people. This scale reflects how yoga has transformed from a personal wellness routine to a symbol of collective global consciousness. Indeed, Modi’s role in promoting yoga on the world stage has been commendable.

From securing June 21 as the UN-recognized International Day of Yoga in 2014 to encouraging mass participation across countries and cultures, he has helped reposition yoga as a universal tool for well-being. What was once primarily associated with Indian spirituality is now embraced by millions globally as a secular, health-enhancing practice. The fact that yoga has found resonance in countries as diverse as the United States, France, Indonesia and Kenya speaks volumes about its adaptability and timeless appeal.

SBI Life Extends Compassion: 10.50 Lakh Insurance Claim Handed Over to Family of Late Choppuri Odela.



“PS Ashokain”Indian Chronicle“Manthani June 23”“In a heartfelt gesture reflecting the value of financial foresight, SBI Life Insurance disbursed a total sum of ₹10.50 lakhs to the family of the late Choppuri Odela, a resident of Gopalpur village, who tragically passed away due to illness.”“Mr. Odela had secured his family’s future by investing in two SBI Life policies — Smart Scholar (₹50,000) and Platinum Plus (₹50,000). Despite the modest premiums, these policies ensured a significant insurance benefit to his family during a time of profound grief.”“The claim amount was formally handed over to his wife in an official program organized at the local SBI branch. The cheque was presented with due respect and solemnity by Branch Manager Mr. Murali and Unit Manager Mr. Ramesh.”“The occasion was graced by the presence of dedicated Life Insurance Advisors who supported the family throughout the process, including Venu Kadiyala, Mothuri Nagaraju, Kontham Ramesh, Koduri Venkatesh, Medagoni Venkatesh, Mekala Ramchander, Gobburu Vamshi, Ashok, Rajamallayya, Shravan, and Ravi.”“This act of timely support underscores the vital role of life insurance in protecting families against life’s uncertainties, and stands as a testament to the reliability and responsiveness of SBI Life Insurance.

Komatireddy pays tributes to Koppula Krishna Reddy

Hyderabad, June 23 : On Monday, Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy attended the 12th-day ceremony (Dwadasha Dinakarma) honouring the late Koppula Krishna Reddy, the father of Koppula Srikar Reddy, who currently serves as the Consul General of India in San Francisco, California. During the ceremony, the Minister paid floral tributes to the portrait of the deceased and offered prayers for his eternal peace. Komatireddy also expressed his sincere condolences to the grieving family. He was joined by Additional DGP (Law & Order) Mahesh Bhagwat and Director General of Fire Services Nagireddy (IPS), among others, who also came to pay their respects to the late Krishna Reddy.

Minister Komatireddy invited for Golconda Bonalu festival

Hyderabad, June 23 Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has received an invitation to participate in the Golkonda Bonalu festival, set to take place on June 26.

On Monday, members of the Sri Jagadamba Mahankali Temple Committee visited Komatireddy Venkat Reddy at the Minister’s Residence Complex. During this meeting, the Minister commended the committee’s efforts in organising the Golkonda Bonalu festival, which aims to celebrate and uphold the cultural and traditional heritage of Telangana on a grand scale. He offered prayers for peace and prosperity for everyone, invoking the blessings of Goddess Sri Jagadamba Mahankali.

Those who invited the Minister included temple trust Chairman K. Chantibabu, Members Pradeep Kumar, Srikanth, Santosh Goud, Yadagiri and others.

Canon India Deepens Commitment to Cinema Excellence with Renowned Cinematographers Kiran Deohans and Sudhir Koushik as New Cinema EOS Ambassadors



Hyderabad: In a significant move underscoring its commitment to advancing cinematic storytelling in India, Canon India today proudly announced the onboarding of two celebrated visual storytellers, Mr. Kiran Deohans and Mr. Sudhir Koushik as its newest Canon Cinema EOS Ambassadors. The announcement reinforces Canon’s vision of building a robust community of creators and innovators who push the boundaries of visual storytelling across genres and formats. As pioneers in their respective fields, both Mr. Deohans and Mr. Koushik bring decades of experience, distinctive visual styles, and an unrelenting passion for the craft aligning with Canon’s core philosophy of innovation, precision, and cinematic empowerment.

A revered name in mainstream Indian cinema, Mr. Kiran Deohans, ISC, is hailed as a true master of visual storytelling for the big screen. With a celebrated filmography that includes Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak, Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham, Agneepath, Jodhaa Akbar, AKS, Manikarnika, Sarbjit, Ramaiya Vastavaiya, and many more, Mr. Deohans has visually shaped some of Indian cinema’s

most iconic moments. His commercial portfolio spans over 1,500 ad films, and he is a respected member of the Indian Society of Cinematographers (ISC). His work has earned him several accolades including the Filmfare Award, APSA Award, and IAAFA Award making him a force in India’s contemporary cinematic landscape. Equally influential in the domain of television and OTT, Mr. Sudhir Koushik is widely known as the creative powerhouse behind some of India’s most beloved reality and variety shows. His work spans The Great Indian Kapil Show, Kaun Banega Crorepati, MasterChef India, Coke Studio, MTV Unplugged, MTV Hustle, Khatron Ke Khiladi, and The Traitors, among others. With an expansive career that continues to redefine how India experiences unscripted entertainment, Mr. Koushik is a leading voice in crafting high-impact, multi-format visual experiences.

Commenting on the announcement, Mr. Vishesh Magoo, Assistant Director, Imaging Communication Business Centre, Canon India, said, “At Canon, we see cinematography not just as a technical pursuit, but as a cultural force. The stories being told today whether through a feature film, a reality show, or a digital series are shaping how we view the world. Our aim is to support and empower storytellers who are redefining these narratives. Mr. Kiran Deohans and Mr. Sudhir Koushik bring immense experience and creative integrity to the table, and we are thrilled to have them as ambassadors of Canon’s larger vision for visual storytelling in India.”

Speaking on his association with Canon, Mr. Deohans shared, “Cinema is not just about capturing visuals; it’s about shaping culture, evoking emotion, and preserving memory. Canon has always understood that storytelling is as much a craft as it is a responsibility. I’m excited to be part of a brand that empowers creators not just with cutting-edge tools, but with a deep commitment to shaping the future of Indian cinema.”Sharing his excitement about joining the program, Sudhir Koushik, said, “What sets Canon apart is not just its products, but its purpose. The brand truly believes in elevating the art of cinematography not just through innovation, but by creating a platform for collaboration and creativity. As someone who has seen this industry evolve from analog to digital, it’s heartening to partner with a brand that evolves with us, not just for us.”

Indian Bank Disburses 1,050 Crores to SHGs at MegaCredit Outreach Camps Held in Hyderabad andAmaravathi



In a significant initiative to empower Self Help Groups (SHGs), Indian Bank has sanctioned a total of ₹1,050 Crores through Mega SHG Credit Outreach Camps held at Hyderabad for

Telangana and Amaravathi for Andhra Pradesh. These camps witnessed enthusiastic

participation from SHG members and community leaders, reflecting the Bank’s deep-rooted commitment to inclusive development.

The Hyderabad event is presided over by Shri Shiv Bajrang Singh, Executive Director,

Corporate Office, Chennai, and attended by senior executives and field-level functionaries of

Indian Bank. SHG Camp at amaravathi also connected virtually. Key dignitaries participated

are Shri Pranesh Kumar, Field General Manager, Hyderabad; Shri K. Srinivas, Zonal

Manager, Hyderabad; Shri P. S. S. Sudhakar Rao, Zonal Manager, Karimnagar Zone; and

Shri Swarna Prava Sundarray, Zonal Manager, Malkajgiri Zone. They addressed the

gathering and emphasized Indian Bank’s continued commitment to SHG linkage and financial

empowerment in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh States. During the event, zones under Telangana and Andhra Pradesh Sanctioned total of ₹1050

Crores in SHG loans:

Hyderabad Zone: ₹50 Crores

Karimnagar Zone: ₹55 Crores

Malkajgiri Zone: ₹45 Crores

Amaravathi Zone: ₹200 Crores

Rajahmundry Zone: ₹250 Crores

Tirupati Zone: ₹250 Crores

Vijayawada Zone: ₹160 Crores

Visakhapatnam Zone: ₹40 Crores

Shri N. Gowri Sankar Rao, Zonal Manager, Amaravathi, and Shri M. Rajesh, Zonal

Manager, Vijayawada. Shri Awadhesh Kumar Purbey, Zonal Manager, Visakhapatnam, Shri

Selvaraj M, Zonal Manager, Tirupati, Shri K Rajkumar, Zonal Manager, Rajahmundry also

joined the meeting virtually.

Speaking at the event, Shri Shiv Bajrang Singh. Executive Director has praised the SHG

Members for their contribution to the society and also to the business of the bank to the extent

of Rs. 7000 Cr in both the states. He also appreciated for 100% repayment by the SHG

members. He also underlined the transformative impact of SHGs on grassroots entrepreneurship and inclusive economic growth. He reiterated Indian Bank’s continued

dedication to supporting women-led initiatives through affordable credit and capacity-building

measures.

The Field General Managers acknowledged the active participation of over 2,000 SHG members across the

locations and assured that Indian Bank will continue to provide consistent support to help SHGs evolve into sustainable and self-reliant economic units.

IIIT Hyderabad & KIET sign MoU to launch Smart City Living Lab with Integrated Net-Zero Dashboard

Hyderabad, June 23 (NSS): In a significant step toward accelerating urban innovation, the Smart City Research Centre at International Institute of Information Technology Hyderabad (IIITH) and Kakinada Institute of Engineering and Technology (KIET) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) recently at the KIET Campus to support the Kakinada Smart City Mission. The collaboration aims to bring cutting-edge research, real-time urban solutions, and emerging technologies to the forefront by establishing a Smart City Living Lab at the KIET campus and extending the same to Kakinada Smart City. The initiative, launched in the presence of the Kakinada District Collector Shri Sagili Shan Mohan and other dignitaries, marks a new chapter in bridging academia, government, and technology for smarter, more sustainable cities. The lab will serve as a collaborative ecosystem to support the research, development, and deployment of smart city solutions, enabling students, researchers, and city stakeholders to tackle practical urban challenges. Mr. PV Viswam, Founder Chairman of Kakinada Institutes of Engineering and Technology, signed the MoU on behalf of the KIET institutes

Resounding Reception for TPCC General Secretary Duddilla Srinu Babu at Madikonda



“PS Ashokan”Indian Chronicle“Manthani June, 23”“In a momentous show of solidarity and celebration, Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) General Secretary Sri Duddilla Srinu Babu was accorded a grand and heartfelt welcome by Congress leaders, Youth Congress activists, and enthusiastic party workers at Madikonda, Hanamkonda.”“Marking his maiden visit to the Manthani Assembly Constituency (Kataram Sub-Division) following his prestigious appointment as TPCC General Secretary, Sri Srinu Babu was received with thunderous applause and vibrant floral greetings.”“The jubilant gathering included ardent supporters of Wardhannapet Constituency leader Sri Janga Raghava Reddy, along with senior Congress functionaries, grassroots cadres, and members of the Youth Congress. The occasion symbolized a renewed wave of enthusiasm within the party ranks and highlighted the growing public confidence in the leadership of Sri Srinu Babu.”“This warm reception stands as a testament to the admiration he commands across various segments of the party and signals a promising and dynamic phase for the Congress party in the region.

Biotech Breakthroughs: UoH Alumni Launch Strategic Partnership

Hyderabad, June 23 : In a powerful display of alumni-led biotech investment fund and translational entrepreneurship, Dr Uday Saxena (MSc-Biochemistry 1978-1980) and Dr Markandeya Gorantla (SRF and PhD Plant Sciences 1999-2004), distinguished alumni of the University of Hyderabad, and co-founders of the Whale Tank Biocatalyst Fund, have signed a term sheet to fund Utopia Therapeutics Pvt. Ltd, an early-stage deep-tech startup. The significant announcement was made at the BIO International Convention 2025 held in Boston on June 19. The Whale Tank Biocatalyst Fund, which counts the Federation of Asian Biotech Associations (FABA) as a knowledge partner and is supported by Prof. Reddanna Pallu and Dr Ratnakar Palakodeti, showcases the impactful contributions of University of Hyderabad alumni Dr Uday Saxena and Dr Markandeya Gorantla, to the global biotech landscape. The signing took place in the presence of Dr Jitendra Kumar, Managing Director of BIRAC, alongside key leaders from ABLE and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

The Whale Tank Biocatalyst Fund is set to commit over USD 1.5 million in cumulative support to Utopia Therapeutics. This crucial funding will propel the development of Utopia’s lead asset, UT009, a first-in-class vaccine designed to combat obesity and Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD). Additionally, the investment will bolster Utopia’s pipeline of UT18-based regenerative health products, supporting infrastructure, manufacturing capabilities, and go-to-market strategies.

Golla, Kuruma communities demand cabinet post in Telangana Govt

Hyderabad, June 23 Leaders of the Shepherds’ Welfare Association held a unique protest on Monday by sending sheep to the Congress Party State Office, Gandhi Bhavan. They voiced their concerns regarding the lack of representation for the Golla and Kuruma communities within the Congress party and the State government. They pointed out that, historically, the Yadava community had positions in the cabinet, but currently, there is no representation for their communities in the existing Congress government.

“A significant disappointment is that the Golla and Kuruma communities have not been given a cabinet position for the first time in the history of Telangana State.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This to inform to the general public at large that, Ghanashyam, Rajesh & Mukesh R/o Adilabad are the owners of House bearing No. 4-3-1/5/1 on Plot No. 25“A” Class, measuring 2840.625 Sq.Ft, situated at Bhukthapur, Adilabad.

That, the original link document No. 1049/1989 has been lost.

If anyone has any claim, right, title or interest of any kind in the said property, they may contact the undersigned within 7 days of the publication of this Notice, with all documents of claim and title.

If any one finds the above document kindly handover to undersigned.

If no objection is received within 7 days, and if any claim and objection arise, it shall be deemed to have been waived.

Dt: 23-06-2025

Bipin Kumar Patel
Advocate,
ADARSH Building,
N.H.No.7, Adilabad
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Manthani Library to Be Transformed into a Modern Learning Hub: Comprehensive Upgradation Plans Underway.



“PS Ashokan”Indian Chronicle“Manthani,june 23”“In a significant step towards empowering students and fostering a culture of knowledge, Medagoni Rajamouli Goud, President of the Manthani Leaders Forum Committee, announced a strategic initiative to modernize and enhance the facilities at the historic Manthani Library. Once a vibrant intellectual haven for scholars, students, and senior citizens alike, the library is set to reclaim its legacy as a center of academic excellence.”“Recalling its glorious past, Mr. Rajamouli Goud highlighted how the library was once a daily

destination for people of all age groups, who immersed themselves in newspapers and a wide array of books. Today, the library continues to serve as a crucial academic space, especially for economically disadvantaged students preparing for competitive examinations. Every morning and evening, these aspirants rely on the library for focused study and access to essential resources.”“In light of this, Mr. Rajamouli Goud emphasized the urgent need for infrastructural development, including the provision of updated study materials, clean restroom facilities, and other basic amenities. He assured that the matter will be brought to the attention of Hon'ble Telangana State Minister, Sri Duddilla Sridhar Babu Garu, seeking his valuable support and cooperation.”“Furthermore, in coordination with Sri Antati Annayya Goud Garu, President of the Peddapalli District Library Authority, comprehensive efforts will be initiated to transform the library into a well-equipped, student-friendly learning hub.”“This planned transformation aims not only to uphold the library's academic spirit but also to serve the evolving needs of today's knowledge-seeking youth—turning Manthani Library into a beacon of learning and opportunity.

Solemn Tributes Paid to Dr. Syama Prasad Mukherjee on Balidan Diwas in Sultanabad Rural Mandal.



“PS Ashokan”Indian Chronicle“June, 23”“A dignified and patriotic commemoration was held today in Gattepalli village of Sultanabad Rural Mandal to mark Balidan Diwas, the martyrdom day of the great nationalist and visionary leader, Dr. Syama Prasad Mukherjee. The event was organized under the stewardship of Mandal General Secretary Shri Kolluri Santosh Kumar and witnessed enthusiastic participation from BJP leaders, karyakartas, and community members.”“As part of the observance, Mandal President Shri Kandula Srinivas spearheaded a symbolic tree plantation drive, reflecting the values of sustainability and nation-building that Dr. Mukherjee stood for.”“Addressing the gathering, Shri Kandula Srinivas paid glowing tributes

to Dr. Mukherjee, lauding him as a torchbearer of cultural and economic nationalism. He remarked that Dr. Mukherjee, the founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, dedicated his life to the preservation of Sanatana Dharma and the integrity of the Indian nation. He described him as a man of unwavering conviction who lived by the principle of "Ek desh mein do Vidhan, do Pradhan, do Nishan nahi chalega" — a slogan that continues to inspire millions across the country.”“Dr. Mukherjee's ultimate sacrifice and his commitment to the ideal of a unified India make him a timeless icon of patriotism and ideological clarity,” Srinivas stated. He also emphasized that Dr. Mukherjee's relentless efforts laid the ideological foundation for the modern nationalist movement and continue to resonate strongly among the youth of today.”“Participants paid rich tributes, reaffirming their commitment to uphold his legacy of national unity, cultural pride, and selfless service.”“Prominent attendees at the event included BJP District Secretary Shri Saudari Mahender Yadav, former Mandal President Shri Kommu Tirupathi, Prabhari Shri Kamani Rajendra Prasad, Kolluri Santosh, Malka Bhagyalakshmi, Kommidu Rajender Reddy, Nallavelli Balakrishna, Erla Prashanth, Manupati Balakrishna, Karengula Ajay, Ailaveni Santosh, Erla Harish, Anil, Kodi Sai Kumar, Abhi, Kattagoni Rajesh, and several other local party leaders and karyakartas.”“The event concluded with a collective vow to carry forward the ideals of Dr. Syama Prasad Mukherjee with renewed vigor and national spirit.

Legal action against those who attack RTC staff, warns TGSRTC MD VC Sajjanar

Hyderabad, June 23 TGSRTC MD VC Sajjanar today warned that legal action would be taken against anyone involved in attacks on his staff. He clarified that rowdy sheets would be opened against those responsible with the cooperation of the police department.VC Sajjanar, on Monday, consulted Bandlaguda depot driver Vidya Sagar, who was attacked by assailants and was undergoing treatment at Tarnaka RTC Hospital. He inquired about his health condition and the manner of the attack. The injured driver was assured that TGSRTC would fully support him and not to worry about this matter. He recalled that a pregnant woman died after her bike fell under the route number 300 to cover Mehdiapatnam to LB Nagar. “When the door of a car parked on the side of the road suddenly opened, the bike lost control and fell under the rear tyres of the bus and the accident took place on June 19 at Attapur Pillar No. 198. Although

the driver Vidya Sagar was not at fault in this road accident, some people indiscriminately attacked him and abused him with foul language and beat him severely. RTC constables Bhaskar and Mufkar Ali, who were going home after finishing their duties, took the driver to the local police station. The driver was rushed to the RTC hospital in Tarnaka from there as he was already seriously injured,” he said. Sajjanar said there was no fault of the driver in this accident and added that it was saddening to see the TGSRTC staff performing their duties among the public being attacked.He said based on the complaint of RTC officials, the Cyberabad Commissionerate Attapur police had registered a case against the assailants under sections 121(1), 126(2), 115(2) 352, 351(2) of the IPC. Sajjanar warned that the management would not tolerate such attacks that damage the self-esteem and cause mental anguish of its staff and added that it would take legal action against the accused.

MANTHAN: National Awareness Workshop held at MANUU

Hyderabad, June 23 :“Meaningful change comes from creating solutions that are deep-rooted in introspection,” emphasized Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan, Vice Chancellor, Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) while inaugurating MANTHAN, a National Awareness Workshop under the project Divyang SARTHI – a Smart Accessible Resource and Tools for Holistic Inclusion for persons with Intellectual Disabilities, funded by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India. The workshop was attended by more than 75 educators, experts, and institutional leaders from across India.Prof. Hasan also highlighted the university's growing focus on research that benefits society. Dr Santosh K. Pandey, Additional Director, Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), shared the Ministry's broader vision for empowering persons with disabilities through technology-led inclusion. He spoke about key initiatives of the Government of India that aim to enhance accessibility, foster digital literacy, and promote the development of assistive technologies. Reflecting on the title MANTHAN, he described it as a symbol of collective wisdom and effort in uncovering meaningful solutions. Dr. Pandey commended MANUU's efforts in this project. He emphasised the need for establishing a Centre of Excellence in the Intellectual Disability (ID) sector, envisioning MANUU as a national hub of expertise. He also expressed hope that this project would join the ranks of flagship Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) initiatives,such as Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, and ONDC.

Prof. Ishtiaque Ahmed, Registrar, lauded the efforts of the entire MANUU team, encouraged the initiative, and assured full administrative support in taking this project forward. Prof. Abdul Wahid, Chief Investigator of the project and Dean of the School of Technology, welcomed the gathering and shared the evolution of the Divyang SARTHI initiative, which began as a concept and has since developed into a national-level project that combines technology, empathy, and research. Dr Pankaj Maru, National President of PARIVAAR – NCPO, spoke about the vital role of awareness-building initiatives like MANTHAN.

He emphasized that such efforts are key to creating a network of empowered master trainers who can effectively

use assistive portals and videos in real classrooms. Prof. Pradeep Kumar, Head, Department of Computer Science & Information Technology proposed the vote of thanks and acknowledged the core QA and development teams for their dedication. In the technical session, experts explored the multilingual, multi-sensory content developed for learners with intellectual disabilities. The workshop provided a collaborative platform for experts, educators, therapists, and technologists to discuss innovative approaches to teaching children with intellectual disabilities. It also provided a space for feedback, ideation, and future planning, reinforcing a collective commitment to accessible and equitable education.

St. Joseph's Degree & PG College achieved remarkable distinction

Hyderabad, June 23 (NSS): The Department of Mass Communication & Journalism at St. Joseph's Degree and PG College has achieved a remarkable distinction, ranking No. 1 in both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and securing the 33rd position nationwide. These rankings were announced by The Week, based on the prestigious The Week-Hansa Research Survey 2025. This achievement is a testament to the department's commitment to academic excellence, innovative research, and industry relevant education.The department's faculty and students have consistently demonstrated a high level of dedication and expertise, contributing to this outstanding recognition. The Week-Hansa Research Survey 2025 is a renowned and widely respected ranking system that evaluates institutions based on various parameters, including academic reputation, faculty quality, research output, and industry connections. The survey's rigorous methodology ensures that the rankings are a true reflection of an institution's excellence.

Congress govt committed to promotion of Urdu language: Shabbir Ali

Mahabubnagar, June 23 Senior Congress leader and Telangana Government Advisor Mohammed Ali Shabbir on Monday reiterated the Congress government's firm commitment to promoting the Urdu language and preserving the cultural and educational heritage of the Muslim community. He was addressing a gathering after laying the foundation stone for a five-storey Urdu Ghar-cum-Hajji House complex in Mahabubnagar.

Speaking at the Urdu Ghar premises, located behind the Haji Ghaffar petrol pump in the heart of the town, Shabbir Ali said that the project was not a Mahabubnagar model but a Telangana model that reflects the inclusive vision of the Congress government. “This Urdu Ghar and Hajji House will be a symbol of culture and community service, blending modern infrastructure with traditional values,” he said.

The event was organised by Mahabubnagar MLA Y Srinivas Reddy and Minority Finance Corporation Chairman Obedullah Kotwal. It was attended by MLC Amer Ali

Khan, Waqf Board Chairman Azmatullah Hussaini, Urdu Academy Chairman Tahir Bin Hamdan, TMREIS Vice President Faheem Qureshi, Food Corporation Chairman A Faheem, State Hajj Committee Chairman Ghulam Afzal Byabani (Khusro Pasha), Minority Welfare Secretary B Shafiullah, among others Calling the caste survey a historic step, he said it would enable transparent and inclusive policymaking by reflecting the actual socio-economic conditions of the people. “This survey is a step toward justice and a model for the entire country. It fulfills the Congress promise under Rahul Gandhi's vision and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's leadership,” he said. He reminded that the 4% Muslim reservation has so far benefited 22 lakh poor Muslims across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. He also appealed to the community to avoid wasteful social customs like dowry and extravagant weddings. “Poor girls are not getting married because of dowry. We are all responsible. While we talk about international politics, we ignore the poverty in our own neighbourhoods,” he remarked.

Left parties to hold protests against US attack on Iran today

Hyderabad, June 23 The Left parties from the State today decided to hold protest programs across the State condemning the US attacks on Iran on Tuesday. Condemning the bombings by imperialist America on Iran, the All India Left Parties have called for protest programs across the country. As part of this, the Telangana Left Parties have called for protest programs to be organized in all district centers across the State on June 24. They appeal to the people, democrats and those who want world peace to participate in these programs on a large scale and make them successful.They alleged that the US was carrying out the attacks to undermine the sovereignty of Iran by ignoring international laws. “Even though the International Atomic Energy Agency and US intelligence agencies have stated

that they have no evidence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, the US's attack on Iran on the pretext of developing the nuclear weapons is only provoking tensions. The US is committing these atrocities to destroy Iran and establish imperialist dominance over West Asia. This is not only disrupting world peace but is also having a serious impact on countries like India that depend on West Asia, on workers, and on the livelihoods of ordinary people,” they said.The meeting of the left-wing parties demanded that the Indian government condemn the imperialist US atrocities, abandon the US's pro-Israel foreign policy stance, and become a partner in stopping the war. The meeting called on all those who want peace to condemn the imperialist US attacks.

Kishan Reddy participates in SLBC meeting



Hyderabad, June 23 : Union Minister Kishan Reddy today took part in the SLBC meeting in the city.

Speaking to mediapersons later, he said important discussions were held on many programs and welfare schemes being implemented in Telangana State on behalf of the Central Government in the meeting. He said after the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power, the expansion of banking services in Telangana State continued rapidly. “While the number of bank branches across the State was 6,000 in 2014, nearly 600 new

branches have been added so far. Today, the banking correspondent system has been strengthened in Telangana State in particular.

He said 80,931 bank correspondents are working to bring banking services closer to the people in rural areas across the State. Through them, banking facilities are available directly to the people. In addition, three banks, State Bank of India (SBI), Union Bank of India and Canara Bank, are working as lead banks in various districts of Telangana state. These banks are responsible for implementing central schemes at the district level and disbursing loans. In addition, it was stated in the meeting that there is a need to continuously undertake programs to increase awareness among the people about banking services,” he said and noted that it was decided to conduct more awareness programs to provide clear information to the people about the services provided by the banks and the procedure for obtaining them. He said there was a need to create awareness among the people about the various types of the bank services required by the people. He said it was suggested to bring clear awareness programs on education loans for students, housing loans for house construction, Kisan Credit Cards for farmers and how to complain in case of delay in loans to Self Help Groups (SHGs).

Don't reduce your status by sitting with Kavitha, Ponnam tells R. Krishnaiah

Hyderabad, June 23 : Minister for BC Welfare Ponnam Prabhakar has lashed out at BRS MLC Kavitha for adding the political colour to the BC Reservations Bill.He said it was strange that MLC Kavitha, who had not spoken about BCs for ten years after being in power, was now chanting sermons on BCs. Speaking to the media at Gandhi Bhavan here on Monday, Ponnam Prabhakar reminded that the Congress government is working sincerely towards the BCs and it has passed the BC Bill in the Assembly and sent it to the Governor.R. Krishnaiah has taken up student movements for the weaker sections.

We all have respect for him. But, he should not lower his respect by sitting with people like Kavitha, who have not done justice to the BCs after being in power for ten years,” he pointed outThe BC Bill has been sent to the Union Government. R. Krishnaiah should take an appointment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to get the BC Bill passed in the



Parliament. The Congress party is ready to extend its support for the approval of BC Reservations Bill, the Minister said.

Exhibition-cum-sale of Handicrafts & Eco-friendly kitchen items



Hyderabad, June 23 BC Welfare Department is conducting exhibition-cum-sale of Handicrafts & Eco-friendly, home, kitchen items and utensils made by Backward Classed community artisans.

The important stalls contains products from Gouda (NEERA Stall), Kummari, Medari, Kammari, Vadrangi, Pusala, Padmashali and so on of BC Communities. There are also Food Stalls of Telangana Pindi Vantalu, Veg & Non-Veg items for the visitors. The Minister for BC Welfare appeals to the people to utilize the opportunity between June 25 to 29 (From 10 am and 9.30 pm in the ground beside Dr B.R. Ambedkar statue Imax near Neckless Road and encourage BC Artisans

Withdrawal of award to ‘Razakar’ urged

Hyderabad: A group of social activists, academicians, legal practitioners have joined hands to condemn the decision of the State government to award the controversial film ‘Razakar’. Over 70 individuals representing different sections from across the country have demanded the Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for immediate withdrawal of the award conferred to ‘Razakar’ in the ‘Best Film on History’ category and urged to initiate an independent inquiry alleging violation of the award regulations. In the letter addressed to the CM, Cinematography Minister Komatreddy Venkat Reddy and Managing Director of Telangana State Film Development Corporation Arvind Kumar, they questioned the decision to award the film ‘Razakar’ (Silent Genocide of

Hyderabad)’ describing it as a highly polarising and propaganda-driven film as the Best Film on History, under the Gaddar Telangana Film Awards. “This film, produced and promoted by BJP leaders, attempts to distort history by portraying Hyderabad Muslims as responsible for a so-called ‘Silent Genocide of Hyderabad’ under the guise of Razakars. Its clear intent is to polarise society and target Muslim community under the guise of historical representation,” they pointed out.Those undersigned include S Q Masood, Rama Melkote, Veena Shatrugna, Dr Prakash Louis, Anand Singh, Dr Ram Puniyani, Susie Tharu, Advocate L Ravichander, Shantha Sinha, Dr Jasveen Jairath, Bizeth Banerjee, Meera Sanghamitra amongst others.

Thane’s Mogharpada to host Mumbai Metro’s largest depot, supporting 4 metro lines



GNS News Agency, June 23

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) has secured 174 hectares of land in Mogharpada, Thane, for the city’s largest integrated metro car depot. The facility will serve as the central maintenance and operations hub for metro lines 4, 4A, 10 and 11, covering nearly 56 km from CSMT to Mira Road.According to officials, the land was officially transferred to the MMRDA after a government resolution, and the depot work will start immediately. The contract of Rs 905 crore has been given to the project contractor, SEW–VSE JV. The depot will have 64 stabling lines, 20 maintenance lines, control centers, automated train wash systems and other heavy maintenance facilities.Dr Sanjay Mukherjee, Metropolitan Commissioner, MMRDA, said, “The Mogharpada metro depot

stands as a cornerstone in Mumbai’s journey toward a more connected and commuter-centric future. As the central hub for Metro Lines 4, 4A, 10, and 11, this facility will ensure seamless, reliable service across some of the city’s most rapidly growing corridors.”The primary purpose of the depot will be to store and maintain the trains during non-peak hours and enable daily inspections, major overhauls and testing. The depot is planned with an emphasis on continuous operations and commuter safety, particularly at peak times.Metro Line 4 and 4A, from Wadala to Kasarvadavali and Gaimukh respectively, will carry approximately 12 lakh commuters a day and cut down on travel time by up to 50 per cent. The depot will also give service to future metro lines 10 and 11 and create much better connectivity in the entire eastern suburbs of Mumbai and Thane.Work is in progress on all four lines, and the unified depot at Mogharpada will provide centralised management and quicker response times during technical halts.To facilitate construction, the MMRDA adopted a farmer-first model similar to that of Cidco, where 22.5 per cent of the land acquired will be rehabilitated to leaseholder farmers and 12.5 per cent to encroachers as developed plots with roads and infrastructure. The process had two public hearings, led by Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik and Thane district officers. So far, 198 offer letters have been issued.Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, “MMRDA’s timely acquisition of the Mogharpada land parcel is a landmark development for Mumbai’s metro network. This milestone accelerates our goal of expanding sustainable, multimodal transport infrastructure that meets the aspirations of new Maharashtra.”

Amritpal Singh Mehron, key accused in influencer Kanchan Kumari’s murder, fled to UAE hours after crime: Police

GNS News Agency, June 23

Amritpal Singh Mehron, a self-styled radical Sikh leader who is allegedly the key conspirator in the murder of social media influencer Kanchan Kumari, popularly known as Kamal Kaur ‘Bhabhi’, fled the country within hours of the crime, Punjab Police said.Anneet Kondal, Senior Superintendent of Police, Bathinda, said on Sunday that Mehron boarded a UAE-bound flight from Amritsar airport at 9.15 am on June 10.“His travel history through passport records revealed this detail. We will now initiate the process of getting him deported from the UAE,” she said, adding that he was the main accused in the murder.



The police discovered that Mehron had been plotting Kanchan Kumari’s murder for nearly three months. Along with two arrested accused—Jaspreet Singh, 32, and Nimratjit Singh, 21, he had visited Ludhiana multiple times and stayed in hotels close to her residence to monitor her lifestyle, movements and routine.According to the police, Mehron had visited her home two to three times during this period. On June 7, when he visited, Kanchan Kumari wasn’t home, and on June 8, she refused to accompany him to Bathinda for a car promotion event saying that her mother was unwell. However, on June 9, she agreed to go, as Jaspreet and Nimratjit assured her that her car would also be renovated.“On the afternoon of June 9, Amritpal travelled with Kanchan in her Hyundai Eon car while Jaspreet and Nimratjit followed from Moga in a Scorpio. After midnight, once the car’s renovation work was completed in Bathinda, Amritpal drove while Kanchan sat in the back seat beside Nimrajit. The two men allegedly slapped her, snatched her phones, and forced her to share passwords. Then, Jaspreet and Nimratjit made her sit in the middle of the back seat while they sat on either side and used a ‘kamar kass’—a cloth belt worn by Nihang Singhs—to strangle her. They pulled it from both sides for 10 to 15 minutes until she died,” said Kondal.Escape plan and cover-up

Following the murder, Mehron left the crime scene in a separate car arranged in advance by his other associates, Tarn Taran resident Ranjit Singh and an unidentified person, both of whom have now been named in the FIR.Jaspreet and Nimratjit drove the victim’s car to a petrol pump where their Scorpio was parked. Nimratjit took the Scorpio while Jaspreet drove Kanchan Kumari’s car and parked it at Adesh Medical University around 2 am on June 10. However, he soon realised that the kamar kass was still around her neck. He brought the car back, removed the belt, and parked it again around 5.30 am, SSP Kondal added.Kanchan Kumari’s body was discovered by the police on the evening of June 11 after a foul smell began emanating from the vehicle. By that time, Mehron had already

fled to the UAE. Jaspreet and Nimratjit were arrested on June 13. A lookout circular was issued on June 14, only to reveal that the main accused had already left the country.Social media accounts blocked, interrogation underwayThe police’s cyber cell has blocked four Instagram accounts linked to Mehron—@amritpalsinghmehron, amritpalsingh_mehron, @amritpal.singh.mehron, and @kaum.de.rakhe—which now display the message: “These accounts are not available in India due to a legal request to restrict content.”Following the arrests in the case, Mehron released a video taking full responsibility for the murder and claimed it was meant as a warning to those uploading vulgar content. His sister and father have also been called for questioning.As the case widens, several influencers from Punjab and Haryana have reported receiving threats to behave or face the same fate as Kanchan Kumari’s via the video posted by Mehron on June 13.Influencer Deepika Luthra, based in Amritsar, received a disturbing message referring to the Bathinda murder scene, “Parking lots are not only in Bathinda.” She has approached the police for protection. Influencer Simarpreet Kaur alias Preet Jatti and an astrology-based content creator have also appealed for security citing online threats.What is further disturbing is the online support being extended from across the border. Pakistan-based gangster Shahzad Bhatti posted a video praising Mehron as a “brave lion” and warning other content creators of similar consequences if they continued sharing material they deemed indecent.Mehron’s supporters have questioned why many “vulgar” social media pages remain accessible while his Instagram handles have been blocked.Authorities are now awaiting forensic and postmortem reports, including the confirmation of any possible sexual assault. Security has been tightened for at-risk influencers across Punjab and Haryana. The case has reignited debate over digital safety, the unchecked spread of content of any type online, and the need for timely and comprehensive cyber surveillance.

‘Dismissal based on religion by Shani Shingnapur Temple Trust is illegal,’ says SP MLA Rais Shaikh



GNS News Agency, June 23

Samajwadi Party MLA Rais Shaikh Sunday termed the recent termination of 114 minority employees by the Shani Shingnapur Temple Trust in Maharashtra as an ‘illegal and arbitrary act’.Speaking on the issue, Shaikh said, “Targeting Muslims and Dalits has always been part of the BJP government’s long-standing strategy. Their core agenda is to polarise votes along religious lines and seize power. This discrimination is being practiced in all walks of life, and the dismissal of 114 Muslim employees by the Shani Shingnapur Trust is a clear example of the BJP-RSS mindset in action.”The 114 minority employees terminated by the Trust were employed in departments such as waste management, agriculture, and administration.MLA Shaikh further pointed out that the NCP has the highest number of Muslim MLAs in the Maharashtra Assembly and currently holds the Minority Affairs department. “If the NCP continues to toe the BJP line, no Muslim voter will ever support them again,” warned Shaikh. He added that he plans to meet Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar soon and file a complaint against the NCP MLA who allegedly pressured the Trust to act.The renowned Shani Shingnapur Temple Trust in the Ahmednagar district has claimed that the terminated employees had been absent from duty for several months.

Notably, earlier objections had been raised by right-wing groups over minority workers being involved in the painting and maintenance of the temple premises. Tushar Bhosale of the Hindu Spiritual Front and NCP (Ajit Pawar faction) MLA Sangram Jagtap had also threatened to launch an agitation against the Trust if the workers were not re-trenched.

NIA chargesheets 3 in Punjab police post grenade attack, links it to Khalistan Zindabad Force

GNS News Agency, June 23

The attack has been linked to a wider conspiracy orchestrated by the banned Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) terror outfit. The case remains under investigation. An NIA official said, “Our efforts are focused on dismantling KZF’s terror infrastructure and foiling their plans.” In a significant breakthrough in its ongoing crackdown on terror networks, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Saturday filed a chargesheet against three people in connection with the grenade attack at a police post in Punjab’s SBS Nagar district in December 2024. The attack has been linked to a wider conspiracy orchestrated by the banned Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) terror outfit. The accused, Yugpreet Singh alias Yuvi Nihung, Jaskaran Singh alias Shah, and Harjot Singh alias Jot Hundal, all residents of Rahon village in SBS Nagar, have been booked under multiple sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Explosive Substances Act, and other relevant laws.

Amid upgrades, patients still struggle with access, hygiene concerns at Sassoon Hospital



GNS News Agency, June 23

Patients visiting the outpatient department of Pune’s Sassoon General Hospital flagged certain concerns – from wheelchairs that are not readily available, long waiting times for seeking medical treatment, to a lack of cleanliness at some of the washrooms.“There are an inadequate number of wheelchairs, and even if there are a few wheelchairs, we have to wait a long time. There are rarely any attendants to take us from one building to another, so at times it becomes difficult for a person without an attendant to be admitted to the hospital,” Kisan Khadge, 45, a patient at the hospital, said.

“There should be a connecting channel through which patients could be moved as, at present, patients have to be brought in the open amid sweltering heat and rain, thereby increasing the chances of infection,” he added.For Raju Khude, the general ward is always overcrowded. “This picture has not changed for many years,” Khude said.Ananta Devi, 27, said, at times, she was clueless which department to go to. “I need to get a sonography done as I am expecting a child, but I have no idea where to go or which department handles it. Even though the case paper mentions it, there are no clear instructions on what exactly needs to be done. It’s very confusing,” she added. Twenty-four-year-old Anuradha Wangai also raised a similar concern: “It’s hard to know which department to go to for what illness. During registration, they ask what’s wrong and send you somewhere, but when you finally reach the doctor, they often tell you to go elsewhere. At least the doctors do listen to our problems, but the process is very unclear.”Babu Dhasade, a patient’s relative who had to purchase medicines at the pharmacy at Sassoon Hospital, noted that sev-

eral times they were told that the medicines in the prescription were unavailable. “And if indeed they are available, then there is a long waiting time which can be quite bothersome for senior citizens,” he said. “Some of the staff we interacted with were also rude. All we expect is that they should show some dignity while treating us,” Dhasade stated.For Usha Waghmare, whose granddaughter is suffering from keloids on the ear, the treatment is rather time-consuming. “The registration is quick and simple, but getting treatment takes a lot of time. My granddaughter has keloids on her ear and needs special injections. The problem is that doctors don’t clearly explain the composition or brand of the injection to buy. We had to return and get the right one, which caused delays. Because it’s always crowded, she has to stand in line again and often misses her turn – and sometimes even her treatment,” Waghmare claimed.

Hygiene concerns were highlighted by a woman regarding the Urine Pregnancy Test (UPT) procedure at Sassoon Hospital. “We are given a pregnancy test kit similar to an at-home version, with a dropper and a test strip. Ideally, we should get a proper container to collect urine before using the dropper. Instead, we’re told to urinate directly into the plastic pouch that holds the test, which is very unhygienic. It is nearly impossible to do this without urine touching our hands or body. There’s also no dustbin in the washroom, so many people throw these used pouches on the floor, increasing the risk of infections like UTIs.

To make it worse, there’s no wash basin or soap in the bathroom. Since this washroom is meant for pregnancy testing, it should have basic hygiene facilities to ensure cleanliness and safety,” Madhavi alleged.Patients, however, acknowledged that the hospital does not pressure them to have a C-section, unlike in most private hospitals.When contacted, Dr Yellapa Jadhav, Medical Superintendent, Sassoon General Hospital, said there were an adequate number of wheelchairs and stretchers. “We have 128 stretchers and 110 wheelchairs,” he added. Hospital authorities also said that renovation works at several outpatient departments are underway, but measures have been taken to ensure that patient care is not affected. Boards have also been installed so that patients can find the appropriate departments that they have to go to. “A proper plan is in place to ensure the availability of medicines,” an official said.

RTI data shows staffing gaps: 50 per cent of Class IV posts vacant, over 100 doctor positions unfilled at Sassoon Hospital

GNS News Agency, June 23

A Right to Information (RTI) query filed by shows that half of the 843 sanctioned Class IV posts at Sassoon General Hospital, Pune – Maharashtra’s largest government-run tertiary care facility – have been vacant for several years. In addition to the non-technical staff crunch, the hospital has also had to deal with a shortfall in medical professionals. There are 118 vacant posts for doctors, as per RTI data. The 1,296-bed facility has an increasing patient load, and approximately 2,000 patients visit the outpatient departments daily for medical treatment. Additional workload during the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated an increase in bed capacity. However, there has been a delay in filling up corresponding staff vacancies.

Presently, there is a requirement for 190 nurses. As per RTI data, there are 1,108 permanent posts of nurses, of which 918 have been filled. There are 834 Class IV posts, of which 416 are lying vacant. Of the 301 permanent sanctioned posts of doctors, a total of 183 have been filled, while 118 are lying vacant.Data shows that of the 18 permanent posts of X-ray technicians, a total of five are vacant, while there is a need for four more healthcare professionals to operate the computed tomography (CT) scanners. This is a long-pending issue, and over the years, the government hospital has faced numerous challenges to ensure quality patient care, improve infrastructure, and maintain effective administration.Long queues are a routine sight at the X-ray department, where most patients are subjected to an entire day’s waiting period to get an ultrasound scan. Several concerns have been flagged over the years about the hospital’s sanitation and cleanliness, and the condition of wards and outpatient departments has attracted significant criticism.As per RTI data at the B J Government Medical College, a total of 18 posts of associate professors and 27 assistant professor posts are yet to be filled.While efforts are being taken to address the requirements of some of the short-



staffed departments, as per the data, the post of professor at the biochemistry and orthopaedic department is vacant. At the anatomy department, three posts of assistant professors are vacant, while one associate professor post is yet to be filled.The physiology department requires four more assistant professors. Presently, three posts have been filled. As many as 10 posts of assistant professors are lying vacant at the medicine department, while five assistant professor posts and two associate professor posts are yet to be filled at the surgery department. “Fewer faculty often can impact the focus on research activities and publications that are important for the institution’s reputation,” an expert said.

When contacted, Dr Eknath Pawar, Dean, B J Government Medical College and Sassoon General Hospital, told The Indian Express that the staff shortage is being addressed. “As part of the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) recruitment process, interviews are being scheduled, and we have urged them to fast-track the process. At the local level, through the district collector’s office, recruitments can also be done, and we are looking into that. Cleanliness services are being outsourced,” Dr Pawar said. “An advertisement will be issued and we hope to fill Class IV posts soon,” he added.

Maheshtala violence: Bengal BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari meets victims in Kolkata, demands NIA probe

GNS News Agency, June 23

Bengal Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari Saturday met with the victims of the Maheshtala communal violence and provided them financial relief at a BJP party office in South Kolkata.After meeting 23 affected families, Adhikari told media persons, “In the last 48 hours, there has been no initiative by the state government, municipal or district administration, police administration, or even local councillors, MLAs, or MPs to provide compensation to the victims. That’s why the BJP has taken the initiative to stand by the affected people.”

Requesting everyone not to reveal the identities of the victims, he said, “Women are also being threatened. An atmosphere of fear has been created there. Therefore, like Dhulian and Shamsheganj, paramilitary forces should be deployed there immediately, and there should be a route march. But the state



government will not do this, and the central government does not have this authority.”The BJP leader stated that he had full faith in the court, and added, “The court is hearing this matter again on Monday. I hope that by next week, the court will come forward to end the insecurity and the atmosphere of fear that is prevailing in the outskirts of Kolkata.”Adhikari also demanded a National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe

into the Maheshtala communal violence. He further said, “Since I am not being allowed to go there even though I have given two consecutive letters, I will go to Maheshtala, too, with the permission of the court, like in Mothabari, Sandeshkhali, Dhulian, or Shamsheganj. I hope the court will give me that permission. I will go there and see the affected Hindu families...”

On Wednesday afternoon, clashes broke out at

Ward Number 7 in Maheshtala over the setting up of a shop. It took a communal turn with some people alleging that a ‘tulsi mancha’ (a platform for a holy basil plant) was vandalised. The violence between the two groups quickly escalated, with mobs throwing stones at the police personnel who tried to control the situation.Till now, around 40 people have been arrested for their role in the violence.

How Western Railway plans to make more room for senior citizens on Mumbai local trains



GNS News Agency, June 23

The Western Railway has decided to convert luggage compartments in local trains into special coaches exclusively for elderly commuters, aiming to ease the daily commute for senior citizens. The initiative comes in response to a Bombay High Court directive and aims to improve safety and convenience for senior citizens travelling in the crowded suburban rail network in Mumbai. Currently, WR's electric multiple unit (EMU) suburban trains have 14 seats of accommodation for senior citizens, seven per side in the third and twelfth coaches from the Churchgate side. Yet, in peak hours, numerous elderly passengers are finding it dif-

ficult to access these seats as corridors are packed and seats are already occupied.

To address this issue, the Railway Board approved a proposal to convert the seventh coach from the Churchgate side, currently a luggage van, into an exclusive senior citizen coach. Each refurbished compartment will have a 13 seats and standing room for 91 commuters. The train will have separate entry and exit points to facilitate boarding and deboarding at peak hours. This will be done on a phased basis in 105 non-air-conditioned EMU rakes on the Western line. The project cost is estimated to be Rs 5.4 crore. "Tenders have already been invited and the work is likely to be finished within one year of its initiation," said Vineet Abhishek, WR CPRO.Today, over 50,000 older people travel on local trains in Mumbai every day. A public interest litigation in the Bombay High Court had brought to light the plight of the elderly and asked for special compartments for them. The railway administration initiated preparations to convert some coaches based on the court's orders. This is the inaugural installation of a special coach, other than reserved seating for senior citizens within the suburban system. Abhishek added the transformation would provide not only comfort but better safety, especially during rush hour when surging crowds on trains make it dangerous for elderly commuters.

On the run for 21 years, Doctor Death's associate arrested for Delhi murder

GNS News Agency, June 23

An associate of notorious serial killer Doctor Death, on the run for 21 years for one of his gang's murders in Sarita Vihar, was finally arrested by the Crime Branch from his native Aligarh on Saturday, Delhi Police said.On May 19, the police arrested Devender Sharma, aka Doctor Death, the leader of the gang that allegedly killed truck and taxi drivers to steal their vehicles and sell them off in the grey market. They interrogated him about the elusive gang member Rajender, whose name had cropped up in connection with seven murders committed by the gang across Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, but was never caught before by the police.The police were in for a shock when Devender revealed that an associate, Rajua, 59, convicted for life for only one murder by the gang in Jaipur in 2007, was the same person as Rajender."The accused revealed that Rajua was the same person as Rajender and was working under a false identity to hide his involvement in other murders, including that in Sarita Vihar," Aditya Gautam, DCP (Crime), said.Though Rajender, 59, did serve time as Rajua in Jaipur jail from 2007 to 2021, the police believed that he was involved in only one murder, a police official said.

"He was accused in the murder of a taxi driver in Jaipur as part of the Doctor Death gang and was convicted for life under the name Rajua. This name was fake, and didn't come up in other murder investigations of crimes committed by the gang. Hence, he served his sentence from 2007 to 2021, and was then released," a police official said.A team led by Inspector Rakesh Sharma of the Crime Branch, supervised by ACP Umesh Barthwal started tracing Rajender. Inputs were gathered from across western Uttar Pradesh, which revealed that a security guard in Kasimpur area of Aligarh matched Rajender's profile."After sustained efforts, they successfully traced Rajender to Kasimpur, Aligarh, where he had been hiding in an isolated room and working as a security guard at a local pump house. He was apprehended," DCP Gautam said.Living under the radar in Kasimpur, Rajender is named in 12 prior cases, including that of murder, kidnapping, and robbery. The police believe that he might be involved in four more murder cases in Delhi and



Gurugram, for which he is yet to be convicted.On May 19, the same Crime Branch team led by Inspector Rakesh Sharma arrested Devender Sharma, a 67-year-old Ayurvedic doctor from Aligarh, who was sentenced to life in seven cases of kidnapping and murdering taxi drivers between 2002 and 2004. In 2023, he was serving his sentence in Tihar Jail when he was granted parole and vanished.Before his arrest, Sharma practised medicine at the Janta Clinic in Bandikui in Rajasthan for 11 years. In 1994, he was scammed out of Rs 11 lakh — his entire life savings — after he attempted to open a gas dealership, said the police.The police said Sharma returned home to Aligarh, where he operated a fake gas agency. He began targeting truck drivers — killing them to steal gas cylinders they were transporting from different suppliers to Aligarh, said the police. The bodies would be disposed of in rivers.Between 2002 and 2004, the police said Sharma — who had a gang by now — was responsible for the abduction and murder of numerous taxi drivers.His modus operandi, the police said, involved hiring taxis from Delhi. He then killed the driver and dumped the body in the crocodile-infested Hazra Canal in Kasganj. The stolen taxis were then sold in the grey market for Rs 20,000-Rs 25,000 each. Sharma was arrested and charged with the murders of 21 taxi drivers, although he later admitted to killing more than 50 people, said the police.As the police could never recover the bodies of the victims, Sharma would be given life imprisonment for the murders of only seven victims.

Gujarat health minister confirms DNA match of former chief minister Vijay Rupani killed in Ahmedabad plane crash



GNS News Agency, June 23

The DNA of former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani has been matched with remains recovered from the Air India flight AI 171, confirmed Gujarat Health Minister Rushikesh Patel Sunday afternoon. Rupani's son was in Ahmedabad Saturday to provide a blood sample for the DNA identification process, which was held at B J Medical College.Rupani, 68, was among the 242 people on board the Air India flight from Ahmedabad to London Gatwick that crashed at around 1.38 pm on June 12 near the Sardar

Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport seconds after take-off. His mortal remains were loaded into an ambulance from the crash site at around the same time Sunday.Speaking at the mortuary complex of Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, Health Minister Patel said, "The DNA cross-verification of former chief minister Vijay Rupani has been completed. As soon as he received this news, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel met with the family of Rupani at their residence in Gandhinagar and assured them of all help in the transport of his mortal remains and final rites, as per the decisions of the family."Vijay Rupani was an MLA from Rajkot, and he resided there. His final rites are expected to be conducted in the city, with preparations for the same having begun, as per sources. However, the family has yet to make an official statement regarding the same.Earlier, a close relative said Rupani was set to fly to London earlier this month to join his wife and daughter there but postponed his trip by a few days because of the Assembly bypolls on June 19.A two-term chief minister, Rupani was the BJP in-charge for Punjab, where a bypoll is set to be held in Ludhiana West. There are also two bypolls scheduled in Gujarat, one in Visvadar in Junagadh and the other in Kadi in Mehsana.

Alcohol industry asks Maharashtra govt to rethink excise duty hike, calls for deliberations

GNS News Agency, June 23

Expressing concern over the increase in the excise duty on Indian made foreign liquor (IMFL) by up to 50 per cent by the Maharashtra government, the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC), the apex body of the Indian Alcoholic Beverage Industry, has urged the state government to reconsider the hike and hold deliberations with all stakeholders immediately.Sources in the excise department said the industry body was trying to protect its interest, but declined to comment on any possibility of a rollback.The decision is expected to raise the state's annual excise collection by approximately Rs 14,000 crore as the prices of IMFL and premium foreign liquor brands are likely to increase by 50-80 per cent.The CIABC claimed that while the intent behind the proposed hike may be to enhance revenue collections by Rs 14,000 crore, the actual outcome may be contrary—driven by declining sales, rising illicit trade, and border leakages.The long-term impact could be deeply detrimental, not only for industry and

employment, but also for public safety and overall state revenues.

Stating that the CIABC had already written to the Maharashtra government urging it to start a consultative process with all stakeholders before releasing any final gazette notification, Anant S Iyer, Director-General, CIABC, said the hike in excise duty was projected to push maximum retail prices up by as much as 85 per cent, a step that could severely disrupt the market, erode the competitiveness of national brands, and jeopardise the availability of legitimate alcoholic beverages in the state."Such an unprecedented escalation in duties poses a serious deterrence to consumer access of established and reputed brands, compelling a shift toward lower-category products. This poses a serious threat to the stability of the IMFL industry in the state...such a move will have a far-reaching adverse impact," Iyer said. He warned that higher MRPs often create a vacuum filled by illegal operators.The IMFL industry contributes approximately 60 per cent of the total excise revenue of the state

After CM Devendra Fadnavis meets Raj Thackeray, Sanjay Raut says Maharashtra politics is now ‘madari ka khel’



GNS News Agency, June 23

Days after a surprise meeting between Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and MNS chief Raj Thackeray triggered speculations about the possibility of a BJP-MNS alliance, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Sunday described the current political atmosphere in Maharashtra as a "madari ka khel" (puppet show), alleging that the CM was attempting to manipulate all parties to suit the BJP's interests.

"Fadnavis tries to play with everyone at the same time. He thinks every party in Maharashtra dances to his tune. What is happening in the state is not politics—this is a circus," Raut wrote in his weekly column Rokhthok published in Saamana, the Sena UBT's mouthpiece.Accusing Fadnavis of ignoring the concerns of Mumbai's Marathi population, Raut alleged that Fadnavis was working in favour of corporate interests—particularly those of industrialist Gautam Adani.

"Fadnavis is openly supporting those who want to push the Marathi population out of Mumbai. Under his tenure, prime land parcels in the city are being handed over to Adani. Is this an attempt to drain Mumbai and send everything to

‘We are partners for life’: Gay couple, whose love blossomed on dance floor and during ice cream dates, let the world know

GNS News Agency, June 23

In 2014, Shyam Konnur first saw Sriram Sridharan on the dance floor at a post-pride party in Bengaluru. "I had travelled to Bengaluru for the pride event, and when I saw that young man, I thought he was cute, so I walked up to him and said so," he recalled.Although Sriram, commonly known as Ram among friends, was busy dancing, they ended up exchanging phone numbers by the end of the evening. On June 13, 2025, Shyam, 36, and Ram, 32, exchanged commitment vows, solidifying their lifelong relationship.To return to how everything unfolded after their meeting on the dance floor, the next chapter of this story took place in Bengaluru in 2015. By that time, Shyam had moved to Pune for work, but Ram was still in Bengaluru, working for an IT multinational corporation.

"My mother was admitted to the hospital, and I had to rush back. After spending nearly two sleepless nights there, I messaged Ram to see if he would like to meet for an ice cream date. However, while I was waiting outside the ice cream shop, a group of thugs attempted to snatch my phone. In the chaos that ensued, I was seriously injured," Shyam said. So, when Ram came for what was supposed to be a plain ice cream date, he met with a bleeding Shyam, who required urgent hospitalisation.Adding another layer of complexity was the fact that Ram did not know Shyam's full name. "I called another person who knew my full name (Samuel Konnur) to do the hospital paperwork. To date, Ram holds this against me- he says here I was rushing you to the hospital, and you did not have the courtesy to even reveal your real name," he said.

Shyam comes from a mixed-faith marriage; his mother follows the Hindu faith, while his father has ties to the Methodist Church. Ram is from the temple town of Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu and is the only child of his parents who ran a driving school.By 2015, both Shyam and Ram began to realise that their innocent banter over chats and phone calls was developing into something serious and beautiful. It was no surprise when, one day, during their conversations, they popped the question. "I think Ram was the one who asked it first, but he believes it was me. In any case, we decided to enter into a long-distance relationship—he in Bengaluru and I in Pune," Shyam said. This decision was built on numerous discussions in which the two shared many secrets that solidified their relationship.For Shyam, working for the LGBTQIA+ community felt as natural as breathing. "The community is like my extended family; we support each other in times of need. I spent my holidays travelling to



Bengaluru to volunteer at queer events with Ram by my side. When I founded the Mist LGBTQ Foundation in Pune in 2009, Ram returned the favour and began volunteering at the events here," he said.Through their travels, community involvement, and volunteer work, the young men began their lives together. Ram transferred to Pune, and they began living together. Things were not always easy, as both of their families initially opposed their relationship but eventually became more accepting."Last year, when we travelled to Europe to participate in an AIDS conference, we decided to get married. It was a simple affair, but it sealed the bond between us," they said.Shyam admits that marriage was never a priority for him.

However, he feels that, in a society where norms often outweigh personal beliefs, marriage serves as a symbol of acceptance. Gay couples like Shyam and Ram cannot marry in India, as same-sex marriage is still not legally recognised in the country, unlike in many European nations and other parts of the world.Earlier this week, the couple decided to solemnise their union according to Indian customs, surrounded by family and friends. Ram said, "My mother always believed that my relationship with Shyam was deeper than that of friends. However, she struggled to accept that he was my life partner. So, when we chose to perform the rituals, it was primarily to demonstrate to her and others that we are, indeed, life partners."Ram's mother, who travelled from Kumbhakonam, brought them the silk dresses they wore for the ceremonies. While she wholeheartedly participated in the events, she sometimes felt lost. "Later, she admitted that she did not fully understand the significance of the whole event. She wanted some of the rituals to be done differently but did not know how to express that. However, she now realises that we are partners for life," said Ram.

How to explain frequent waterlogging issues plaguing Mumbai: BMC data points to spike in daily average rainfall over last 6 years

An internal analysis conducted by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has revealed that Mumbai has experienced a significant increase in the overall amount of high-intensity rainfall over the past six years. This data was compiled by analyzing rainfall recorded by the civic body's own Automatic Weather Systems (AWS). The BMC conducted this study following the heavy rains on May 26, which were caused by an early onset of the monsoon.

According to the BMC's findings, between 2014 and 2018, on days when the city recorded heavy to very heavy rainfall, the average rainfall recorded in a single day stood at 131 mm. The study indicates that between 2019 and 2024, the daily average rainfall spiked to 182 mm, with Mumbai experiencing its highest single-day average of 267 mm on July 25, 2024. This is the most significant rainfall recorded in the last ten years.Other notable rainfall amounts include 226 mm on July 2, 2019; 191 mm on August 5, 2020; 162 mm on July 17, 2021; and 132 mm recorded on both June 30, 2022, and July 27, 2023.Meanwhile, during the 2014-2018 cycle, Mumbai recorded 148 mm of rainfall on September 19, 2017, making it the highest single-day average of the cycle, followed by 147 mm on July 2, 2014."The assessment of the internal rainfall data has also shown us that there were 28 instances in the last 10 years where we have recorded high-intensity rainfall happening within just four hours. This clearly shows that the overall quantum of rainfall is increasing, as a result of which the issues related to waterlogging continue to prevail despite intervention be-

ing taken up by us every year," Abhijit Bangar, Additional Municipal Commissioner (Projects), The BMC's data furthermore showed that, on average, Mumbai records rainfall above 100 mm on 16 days every year; however, the number of days has shown a marginal rise in the last three years, with 21 days recorded in 2024, 18 in 2021, and 15 in 2020. Prior to this, during the 2014-2018 cycle, Mumbai recorded 26 days of 100 mm rainfall in 2017, followed by 19 days in 2016, and 10 and 11 days each in 2014 and 2015.Civic officials said that, as a mitigation measure, the authorities have already outlined a proposal to augment the capacity of Mumbai's drains, making them capable of handling up to 120 mm of rainfall every hour. At present, Mumbai's drains have a maximum capacity to tackle 55 mm of rainfall every hour. The augmentation of drains will lead to a smooth flow of water during heavy rainfall situations, resulting in seamless drainage."Alongside the overall quantum of rainfall, the population and demography of the city have also changed drastically in the past decades. The overall seasonal pattern of rainfall has also recorded a massive change in the past few years. Therefore, there is a need now to widen the existing width of the drains to improve their carrying capacity," Bangar said.Mumbai has an extensive drainage network consisting of 261.52 km of major nullahs (which are over 1.5 metres wide) and 411.56 km of minor nullahs (which are less than 1.5 metres wide). In addition to these, the city has other types of drains, such as arch drains and roadside drains.

Vaishali Shadangule on being the first Indian woman to showcase at the Paris Haute Couture Week: ‘Puts you in a different league’



Exactly three years ago, the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode invited Vaishali Shadangule to showcase her collection at the Paris Haute Couture Week (PHCW). Ever since, she has been a regular and feels like she belongs to a “different league” today. We caught up with the fashion designer—back after showcasing her Fall Winter ’24 Couture Collection Satori, this year—to learn more about her design process, her take on sustainability, what she feels about having showstoppers, and what the most challenging thing about being a designer is today. Read the edited excerpts below:Vaishali Shadangule: Everything changed dramatically, from different points of view. First, the widespread recognition of becoming a couturier sets a standard, like the 3 Michelin stars. People know that only a certain level of quality gets that stamp and don’t question it. You become an Olympian. Then, I must admit, self-esteem; you know you are part of an elite world, you dare more, believe more in the solidity of your creative ideas, and question yourself much less. However, this also requires you to always uphold very high standards of creativity and quality (in garments, processes, and customer service). All these factors, combined with added effort, put you in a different league from those who have never been selected.Tell us about your latest collection, Satori, and the inspiration behind the same.

Vaishali Shadangule: My career reflects my path of self-discovery. I draw my inspiration and guidance from nature, and the flow of her energy is my language. Each collection depicts a different stage of this journey. With this collection, I wish to express the realisation that every secret and discovery lies within us. It is only through moments of enlightenment that we suddenly recognise their presence. For this reason, this collection features themes very dear to me, combined with a new handwork technique that highlights the many layers of thought.We have learned that the embellishments used for this collection are leftovers! Tell us about that.Vaishali Shadangule: In all my collections, leftovers are used to create embellishments. My work upholds the values of village life—never throwing anything away. In fact, it was in the quest to maximise the use of leftovers that I discovered my proprietary cording technique, years ago. By rolling these remnants by hand, I found they could provide structure to my garments, all made with soft handwoven fabrics.

What are your views on sustainability in fashion — in India and (vs) abroad?

Vaishali Shadangule: Sustainability in fashion is essential. By now, we all know how unsustainable fashion can be—in its processes, non-circularity, etc. Making fashion ecologically sustainable can truly help the world. At the same time, fashion can become critical in having a social impact. The visibility of fashion allows it to influence people’s mindsets, particularly the younger generation, who are already more sensitive to sustainable practices and often demand them.Generally speaking, sustainability has not greatly evolved in India and is often reduced to a mere marketing gimmick, especially by some top couture brands.

In contrast, countries like Italy treat sustainability as a very serious matter. We must remember that soon Europe will not allow our garments in if we do not abide by the latest rules.Despite the international catwalk not having the concept of a ‘showstopper’, many Indian designers seem to be obsessed with it. With Radhika Apte walking for you, why do you feel the need to have a celeb face on the ramp? Does it not take away focus from the creations?Vaishali Shadangule: In many cases, this practice does steal away focus from creations, but it also attracts wider attention, resulting in a net positive effect. But yes, just making anybody walk on the ramp, as per basic marketing and branding rules, dilutes the brand equity. On the contrary, if the celebrity’s values align clearly with the brand, like Radhika with Vaishali S, it becomes a very strong brand extension and multiplication. The wider audience tends to know the celebrity very well, often much better than the brand.

Following your tryst with the global fashion scene, who would you say are your buyers today? Has the demography changed in the last three years?

Vaishali Shadangule: The more I have been showcasing during the Paris Haute Couture, where I also use more aggressive and more Western silhouettes, the more I have been widening my audience towards younger age brackets. Geographically, while I have kept my Indian and US audiences, large and fast-growing Middle East and Saudi women have started buying Vaishali S.

You focus a lot on getting your textiles right. Tell us about it in the case of Satori. Also, does it often lead to delays and extra work?

Vaishali Shadangule: My fabrics are all studied by me and all woven on hand looms. Delays are thus long and never precise. That is why I have an ongoing production of fabrics to ensure constant availability of at least ones I use the most. In each collection, I always introduce either new hand-weaving techniques or new materials on old hand-weaving techniques. This requires a head start long before the Paris shows, normally around a year.

On average, how long does it usually take to create a Vaishali S piece — from conceptualisation to sketching to final production?Vaishali Shadangule: As I said, the timeline for ongoing production fabrics is relatively quick. New projects can take years. And it does, because ideas need time to settle in my mind and feelings—this is the part that typically consumes the most time. Once the prototype fabric enters production, the timeline varies based on the level of intervention needed on the loom. Fabrics like woven pashmina, for instance, are extremely delicate and may require extensive adjustments to the loom weights, involving multiple trial and error iterations.

After experiencing the best (and also perhaps bits of the bad) of the Indian and global fashion scenes, how would you describe the two? Also, how does the former fare?

Vaishali Shadangule: India and the global fashion markets are very different. Fashion weeks in India are well-organised with highly talented stylists and show directors, often surpassing those abroad. However, design is more widely understood and appreciated internationally, whereas in India, there seems to be a waning interest among people and media.

The most challenging thing about being a designer today, and why?

Vaishali Shadangule: For a creative designer, the most challenging aspect is often striking a balance between pure creativity and commercially viable designs. I understand that for new independent designers, gaining recognition and exploring their artistic identity through their work is no simple task. It is a largely polarised world where small independent designers have to find a very specific positioning and be extremely focused and resilient.

What is PM SHRI, the ‘showcase’ schools scheme that Centre is pushing in states?



GNS News Agency, June 23

The Centre has stopped funding for the umbrella program for school education in three opposition-ruled states that have refused to implement its PM SHRI scheme. The Samagra Shiksha Scheme, for which funding has been stopped in West Bengal, Punjab, and Delhi, supports implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Samagra Shiksha funds for the third and fourth quarters of 2023-24 and the first quarter of 2024-25, amounting to Rs 330 crore, Rs 515 crore, and Rs 1,000 crore for Delhi, Punjab and West Bengal respectively, have not been released.While the Education Ministry has given no official explanation, a senior official told The Indian Express that states cannot receive Samagra Shiksha funds without implementing PM SHRI (PM Schools for Rising India), which is part of the program.PM SHRI scheme

The scheme, approved in 2022, seeks to develop 14,500 schools to “showcase” the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, and be “exemplars” for other schools in their region. The scheme is for existing elementary, secondary, and senior secondary schools run by the central government and state and local governments around the country.The PM SHRI dashboard online currently lists 10,077 schools, of which 839 are Kendriya Vidyalayas and 599 Navodaya Vidyalayas, both run by the Centre. The remaining 8,639 schools are run by state or local governments.

The Centre had declared a total project cost of Rs 27,360 crore for five years until 2026-27, of which the Centre would bear Rs 18,128 crore. At the end of the five-year period, states and Union Territories (UTs) would be required to “continue to maintain the benchmarks achieved by these schools”.The government told Lok Sabha in February that Rs 3,395.16 crore had been approved for 6,207 PM SHRI schools for 2023-24, of which the Centre’s share was Rs 2,520.46 crore and that of the states Rs 874.70 crore.

UP has the most PM SHRI schools (1,865) followed by Maharashtra (910) and Andhra Pradesh (900). No state

Why the embrace between Hindu nationalists and American Christian nationalists can’t last

Depending on how you look at it, the recent warm embrace by Christian nationalists in the United States, of Hindu nationalists in India is either very strange or, perhaps, inevitable.The modern American nationalist is a curious specimen: A self-described patriot whose friends and models are all in foreign countries and whose enemies are all at home. He loves America, except for: Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Hollywood, Washington, the Ivy League, the scientific establishment, the medical and legal professions, the urban centres where most of the people and the GDP are, New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the West Coast, and the cities in Texas and Florida with more than one million people.

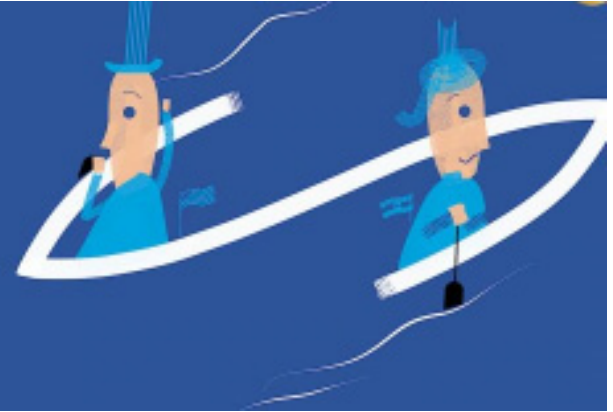
They have even turned against the military command and the upper echelons of law enforcement, which were once sacrosanct to the right. (I might have phrased that last sentence slightly differently for an American audience, but I am sure readers of this newspaper have heard quite enough about sacred cows.) Other than that, America is the bee’s knees in the estimate of the American nationalist, whose idols are Viktor Orban, Geert Wilders, and, now, strange as it may seem, Narendra Modi.Advertised as the leading voice of Indian conservatism to an American audience somewhat surprised to learn that there is Indian conservatism, Swapan Dasgupta, lately of the Rajya Sabha and often of newspaper pages, recently addressed NatCon 4, the fourth annual convention of so-called national conservatives.This is a populist-rightist faction at odds with what remains of traditional American conservatism and the old guard of the Republican Party, aligned with Donald Trump — current presidential frontrunner and, this being America, recent shooting victim.

It is fascinated by nationalist movements abroad, from AfD and Giorgia Meloni’s Fratelli d’Italia to the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid, with a special interest in religiously oriented parties such as the BJP. The fact is that American nationalism is, perversely, an internationalist tendency — Dasgupta wryly described the convention organisers as the “Conintern.”Speaking extemporaneously, Dasgupta made a familiar case for Hindu nationalism, characterising it as a movement based on religiously encoded civilisational values rather than an attempt to impose some sort of Iran-style theological regime on India. He pointedly informed the audience that US-funded Christian evangelism in India is a considerable barrier to long-term cooperation between the Indian Right and the American Right — and then, of course, patiently fielded questions from earnest young Christians who wanted to ask about “the caste system” and sati.At another panel, anti-immigration activists raised the alarm about Hindu-Sikh riots in the Canadian city of Brampton: “Import the Third World, you get the Third World,” one sneered. Many American nationalists would prefer that Indian nationalists were kept in India, and many of them regard the large, prosperous Indian diaspora in the United States, praised as exemplary by Dasgupta, as an embarrassment, a surrender of jobs, prestige, status, and political power to unwanted immigrants — and, the occasional Nikki Haley or Bobby Jindal notwithstanding, to non-Christian immigrants at that.India often doesn’t get the United States,” Dasgupta said, “and Americans don’t get India at all.” About that, he is correct. The so-called national conservatives do not know very much about Modi or his BJP, but they know enough to satisfy them: They know that he keeps winning elections, while those carrying their banner — from the segregationist George Wallace in the 1960s to the billionaire demagogue Ross Perot in the 1990s to Donald Trump in 2020 — generally fail at the polls. They know that he is despised by the same secular-minded liberals and Davos men who despise them. They know that he makes his enemies

or local government-run schools in the non-BJP states of Punjab, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, and Bihar, as well as Odisha, which got a BJP government only last month, have been included in the scheme.PM SHRI schools are selected through the “challenge mode” — schools that meet certain minimum benchmarks (including a pucca building in good condition, barrier-free access ramps, at least one toilet each for boys and girls) can apply online.They are evaluated on a set of parameters that include infrastructure, teaching staff, and learning outcomes. Schools in urban areas must score at least 70%; those in rural areas 60% to be selected. States are supposed to send a list of recommended schools to the Ministry, and an expert committee headed by the School Education and Literacy Secretary draws up the final list. Up to two schools — an elementary school and a secondary/ senior secondary school can be selected per block/ urban local body.

The state, UT, or Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan/ Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti is required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education committing to implement the provisions of the NEP “in entirety within the entire State/ UT”, and to prefix PM SHRI to the name of the selected school.States/ UTs have to work to ensure zero dropout rates in all grades within two years of implementation, comply with norms for pupil-teacher ratio, and implement “innovative pedagogy” such as activity-based, sports-based, art-based, and toy-based learning.Samagra ShikshaThe PM SHRI scheme is to be implemented at the state/ UT level through the existing administrative structure available for Samagra Shiksha, which the government describes as “an overarching program for the school education sector...from pre-school to Class 12... prepared with the broader goal of improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes”.Samagra Shiksha, which was proposed by the Union Budget of 2018-19, subsumed the erstwhile Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Teacher Education (TE) schemes.The scheme is funded in a 60:40 ratio by the Centre and states, barring the 11 Northeastern and Himalayan states, which have to bear only 10% of the cost.Delhi and Punjab have declined to participate in PM SHRI because the Aam Aadmi Party governments in these states are already implementing similar schemes for exemplar schools called “Schools of Specialised Excellence” and “Schools of Eminence” respectively. West Bengal has objected to the requirement of prefixing PM SHRI to the names of the schools, especially since the state bears 40% of the cost.

The states that have not signed the PM SHRI MoU have not received funds from the Centre under the Samagra Shiksha scheme. After holding out initially, Kerala, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha agreed to participate in the scheme in March this year.



They have even turned against the military command and the upper echelons of law enforcement, which were once sacrosanct to the right. (I might have phrased that last sentence slightly differently for an American audience,

feel fearful and humiliated, as they desire to make their enemies feel fearful and humiliated.

And they know, though they would never admit as much, that whatever the court theologians may have to say about it, Narendra Modi and Donald Trump are devotees of the same god: Power.India has often miscalculated in its relationship with the United States, but Indians have never had the luxury of being able to romanticise the United States. Americans, committed to our twin national principles that all men are created equal and that ignorance is bliss, have rarely done anything except romanticise India. Being too complex to comprehend, India provides an expansive blank screen upon which to project American yearnings: Americans know very little of Mohandas Gandhi the political leader, but Mahatma Gandhi the movie character remains very popular, even among those who have never seen the film.New Dealers who hoped for a more Fabian postwar order saw a kindred spirit in Jawaharlal Nehru, who disdained them. One suspects that if Modi had the choice between being embraced by Christian nationalists in Washington or being rid of Christian evangelists in Uttar Pradesh, he would not hesitate to prefer the latter.

I suspect that the NatCon-BJP love affair will end in heartbreak because there is no such thing as religious nationalism: There is Hindu nationalism and there is Christian nationalism, and these are not only distinct tendencies but also — given the size of India’s Christian minority and the prominence of America’s Hindu minority — ultimately incompatible.It is unlikely that the sort of Christian nationalism being contemplated by Dasgupta’s new friends in the United States will enjoy the kind of success Modi’s Hindu nationalism has achieved in India, but any such success would necessarily involve the general humiliation of American Hindus and other religious minorities, whatever rhetorical camouflage might be deployed to deemphasise the fact. After all, American political factions do not compete among themselves for mere material resources — the country is far too rich for that: They compete for status. The same already is true, or soon must be true, of India at the commanding heights.And that is the limiting factor — and the danger — of identity politics. A rising economic tide may lift all boats, but status is, by definition, a zero-sum game. As the unhappy events of September 1, 1939 — September 2, 1945 attest, successful nationalists invariably soon turn their attention to the nationalists next door.Williamson is national correspondent for The Dispatch and a writer in residence at the Competitive Enterprise Institute

What is causing widespread rainfall across India?

For the first time this season, the southwest monsoon is active over a large geographical area of India. At least 80% of the country last week reported widespread rainfall, with heavy to very heavy spells lashing Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, coastal Maharashtra and Karnataka, Kerala, and Lakshadweep.

After remaining subdued during mid-June, the southwest monsoon got the much-required impetus towards June-end. The monsoon covered the entire country on July 2, six days ahead of its normal schedule. Delhi, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Jammu and Kashmir received the spell in early July.However, since the start of this month, there have been multiple favourable weather systems that have kept the monsoon either active or vigorous (with respect to rainfall events) over southern peninsular, east, northeast, and central India regions.There have been two main contributors to the enhanced rainfall. One is the continuous incoming of moisture-laden strong westerly winds from the Arabian Sea.The other is the position of the monsoon trough — a semi-permanent, low-pressure area extending between Pakistan and the Bay of Bengal during the monsoon season — which usually oscillates between north and south within the season. Whenever it moves towards the south, as it has done in the present case, more rainfall can take place in central, eastern and peninsular India. When it shifts towards the north, the Himalayan foothills are likely to receive more rainfall but the rest of India sees a drop in rainfall.

Apart from these two factors, other weather systems have also contributed to the widespread rainfall over all regions, except the extreme north India. They are:The persistence of an off-shore trough (a shallow trough of low pressure, which develops along India’s coast during the monsoon) between south Gujarat and north Kerala for more than a week now The intermittent development of a wind shear zone — where winds move with different velocities and directions — along latitudes 20° N between central and peninsular IndiaThe development of a low pressure system over the west-central Bay of Bengal, off the Odisha coast, on Monday. The system moved over Chhattisgarh and adjoining Vidarbha on Tuesday, and over southeast Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday.

What is the rainfall status?

The Met department’s rainfall statistics indicate that the all-India rainfall went from 242mm on July 9 to 305.8mm on July 17. The country’s rainfall stands at 97% of the normal for this time of the season.Overall, 17 states have either received normal or above-normal rainfall this season. But there are a few states such as Odisha, Haryana, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Jharkhand along with high-rainfall recording states including Kerala, Nagaland,



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Manipur, and Mizoram where the rainfall, this season, has been deficient, so far this season. This is also because July rainfall normal values for many of these states are high.Since July 13, some heavy rainfall events have been recorded along the country’s west coast, especially in Konkan, Goa, ghat areas of Madhya Maharashtra, coastal Karnataka, and Kerala. Uttarakhand, west Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and West Bengal also received heavy rainfall.

What is the forecast?

The southwest monsoon will continue to remain active all through this week over south peninsular, eastern India, and over the Himalayan states. A fresh low pressure system will develop over the northwest Bay of Bengal around Friday, whose landward movement will keep the monsoon momentum high with rainfall persisting over eastern and central India regions during the next five days.With the monsoon trough most likely to remain to the south of its normal position during the next four to five days, the IMD has issued a ‘red’ alert (meaning: take action) for Kutch, Saurashtra, Konkan, Goa, coastal and south interior Karnataka where very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall (115 mm to 204 mm in 24 hours) is likely to occur on Thursday. For July 19, an ‘orange’ alert (meaning: be prepared) over Gujarat, west Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Maharashtra, Konkan, Goa, coastal and interior Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

Viktor Orban solidifies his credentials as the EU’s pantomime villain



Europeans, with their art-house sensibilities, can rarely match the dramatic heights coming out of Hollywood. At last the action blockbuster genre has crossed the Atlantic, in a series of short films released on social media in recent days. Their unlikely star is one Viktor Orban. Set to rousing music the producers of “Top Gun” might recognise, the clips feature the portly Hungarian prime minister as a latter-day Jason Bourne, striding decisively from motorcade to conference table, then back to his motorcade. Rapid-fire shots leave no doubt as to who is in charge. What the videos lack in terms of explosions and fight scenes they make up for with plenty of world leaders’ hands manfully shaken, documents assertively signed and platitudes emphatically uttered. The impossible mission having been completed, our Hungarian saviour stares into the distance, no doubt ready for a sequel.

The pound-shop James Bond remakes are designed to flatter Mr Orban as he tries to big up his new gig as leader of the country that holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union starting on July 1st. Alas, they are not the only consequence of the EU’s longest-serving national leader taking up the mantle until the end of the year. In what his official videographer has dubbed “Peace Mission 3.0”, Mr Orban has used his new position to engage in some freelance diplomacy in Kyiv, Moscow and Beijing before attending a summit of NATO leaders in Washington. The backdrops of the action-hero videos thus feature cameos by Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin as Mr Orban dropped by China and Russia after visiting Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv.

Mr Orban is not the first European leader to wilfully confuse being the leader of the country holding the rotating presidency for a job as “EU president”. In fact the gig is largely a ceremonial one, if that. While Hungarian officials and ministers chair meetings of their peers, Mr Orban as national leader has no such responsibilities (since 2009 that job has gone to the president of the European Council, a former national leader who is appointed for five years). But the media-savvy Mr Orban rarely lets a spotlight go to waste. Convinced he holds a special role in the world as a bridge between East and West, democracy and autocracy, he is determined to wade into situations his supposed European allies would rather he stay out of. In a show of solidarity with Ukraine, no EU leader had deigned to visit Moscow since the opening salvos of its full-scale invasion in February 2022. Now, one has. To the rest of Europe, the Hun-

garian showman is not so much James Bond as pantomime villain. The union’s 27 members spend interminable hours finessing joint positions on dealing with Ukraine, Russia and China—only to have this diplomatic Johnny English stumble around the diplomatic scene with his own “EU” line. Mr Orban gave no heads-up of his visits and nobody knows quite what their point was. He parroted Russian claims about heavy Ukrainian losses and lauded Mr Putin as “100% rational”—the kind of assertion the International Criminal Court in The Hague would probably be keen to get to the bottom of, given the chance. There is an irony in the career of Mr Orban. He was once part of a generation of activists who bravely denounced the Hungarian regime under the thumb of Soviet Russia. These days it is he who is repeating Kremlin talking-points he surely cannot believe to an audience he must know does not find them credible either. Like an internet troll who says he is “just asking questions”, Mr Orban has said he is “just making suggestions” and opening lines of communication for a future peace deal. As the action videos came out on Mr Orban’s X feed, so did gruesome ones of a children’s hospital bombed in Kyiv, the doing of one of Mr Orban’s co-stars.

The slapstick diplomatic initiative was greeted in the same manner in which snooty European film critics pan yet another Batman remake. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, accused Mr Orban of appeasement; the Czech foreign minister dubbed him a “useful idiot”. But the most worrying review of all came from Donald Trump Jr, son of America’s past and perhaps future president, who lauded the trip. Mr Orban is a star in America’s conservative circles; the Hungarian picked “Make Europe Great Again” as the motto for his council presidency. “The fear is that Orban is acting as a messenger for Trump, who would endorse his efforts”, says Gergely Polner of Forefront Advisers, a consultancy. The Hungarian presidency was always going to feature a heavy dose of unwelcome drama. As well as his Ukraine-related antics, Mr Orban is busy mounting an internal offensive against the EU. In the run-up to the presidency he unveiled a new political group in the European Parliament, “Patriots for Europe”, which hopes to unite parties of the hard right into a force that can take on the liberal centre. Soon derided as “Putinists for Europe”, its members feature parties like France’s National Rally and the Freedom Party of Austria with past (if not current) affinities to the Kremlin. Its first task will be to try to prevent Mrs von der Leyen securing a majority in the European Parliament for a second five-year term. The vote is expected on July 18th and will be close, despite the fact that she is backed by the main centrist political groups. Europeans tired of Mr Orban and his videos may yet try to rein him in. Over the years they have found ways to reprimand him, for example by cutting off some EU funds in response to his government’s hobbling of the rule of law, thus weakening Hungary’s already fragile economy. (By threatening to veto EU business, notably sanctions against Ukraine, Hungary has unlocked some of that money.) Peeved diplomats in Brussels are floating legal plans to bring the Hungarian presidency to a premature end, should the antics continue. Aaaand cut!

Decoding the complex relationship between microbial bugs and drugs



Our bodies contain as many, if not more, bacterial cells as human cells. Along with fungi and viruses, these microbes collectively form our microbiome. Microbes, particularly in our gut, have a profound impact on health. Major discoveries have unearthed that what we eat and the drugs we take shape the composition of our microbiome, which in turn affects the effectiveness of treatments for diseases. Everything is interconnected, creating a full circle of interaction. Antibiotics are crucial for treating bacterial infections, but since they do not discriminate between harmful and harmless bacteria, they can also disrupt the balance of our microbiome. When beneficial bacteria are wiped out, harmful ones can proliferate, increasing the risk of other health concerns.

While antibiotics are designed to kill bacteria, we are now finding out that other drugs have unintended effects on our microbiome. In a groundbreaking study published in Science in March, Amir Mitchell and colleagues at the University of Massachusetts Medical School discovered that even non-antibiotic drugs can have unintended consequences. For instance, the study found that the antidepressant sertraline and the cancer drug streptozotocin can slow down bacterial growth in ways distinct from antibiotics. On the positive side, these drugs could be repurposed to create new antibiotics. However, some non-antibiotics can inadvertently promote antibiotic resistance, complicating efforts to manage drug-resistant infections.

In India, a class of drugs known as proton-pump inhibitors (such as omeprazole and pantoprazole) are frequently taken to treat acid reflux. These drugs work by reducing stomach acidity. When the stomach’s natural acidity is lowered, it can promote the growth of certain bacteria while inhibiting others. This imbalance can lead to an increased risk of infections. Many other drugs have been found to have side effects on health that are mediated through changes in the gut microbiome. For example, antipsychotic use has been linked to weight gain and metabolic syndrome, likely caused by changes in gut bacteria. On the other hand, metformin, a common drug for type 2 diabetes, increases

several beneficial bacteria. It’s not just drugs that influence our health through the microbiome. Microbes also affect how well drugs work.

Recent research has shown that gut bacteria affect the efficacy of cancer treatments, particularly drugs known as immune checkpoint inhibitors, which help the immune system recognise and attack cancer cells. Immune checkpoint inhibitors are more effective in patients with a favourable balance of gut microbes. Laurence Zitvogel and her team at the Gustave Roussy Cancer Campus in France studied the gut microbiome of 245 lung cancer patients. Publishing their work in Cell last month, they identified two distinct groups of bacteria. One group was linked with resistance to immune checkpoint inhibitors, while the other was linked to positive treatment responses. By analysing the ratio of these bacterial communities, the researchers created a score that could predict how well a patient would respond to cancer treatment. This score was then tested and confirmed in other cancer patients. The researchers developed a simple test that looks for 21 key gut bacteria types. This test can quickly and accurately assess the balance of beneficial and harmful bacteria, providing doctors with a powerful tool to guide treatment decisions.

The beauty of this study is that it doesn’t stop at how well drugs might work to treat diseases. In the future, once we identify certain bacteria that enhance the positive effects of drugs, we can try to increase their presence in the gut microbiome. Tumours disrupt the gut microbiome, increasing harmful bacteria, and making treatments less effective. However, introducing healthy bacteria might restore balance and improve the effectiveness of cancer drugs. It’s a virtuous cycle

What’s abundantly clear from both studies is that the human microbiome is a major component of health. From the impact of antibiotics and non-antibiotics to the role of the microbiome in cancer therapy, our microbial communities are intricately linked to our well-being. As research in this exciting field progresses, we will likely uncover even more ways our invisible microbial residents shape our health.

A flood-free Assam? Promises that haven’t moved towards fruition



GNS News Agency, June 23

Experts said that despite the devastation, the annual floods are important for Assam as the silt deposited during the season adds to the soil’s fertility. It’s that time of the year when large parts of Assam battle the annual deluge. The annual floods which began in May have claimed over 90 lives and affected hundreds of thousands of people. Flood waters have submerged many important roads and damaged crops, embankments and bridges. It is at times like these when talks of how to better manage floods and excess water from rains in the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries get attention and hit the headlines. But once the monsoon gets over and flood waters subside, such debates and discussions are relegated to the back burner until the next deluge and deaths arrive the next year.

Flooding in Assam is not limited to debates and media headlines, the issue also gets highlighted in poll manifestoes and proposed policies. In July 2017, Nitin Gadkari, who was then the union minister for road transport and highways, shipping and water resources, said that the Brahmaputra river would be dredged from September that year. The announcement was made after Sarbananda Sonowal, who was the chief minister of Assam then, had promised the same the previous year. Dredging, which involves digging out excessive silt accumulated on the riverbed, is carried out with big vessels called dredgers. The exercise would “increase water retention capacity of the river” and “minimise flood and erosion”, it was announced.

Another related project to build an expressway of around 1300 km along the banks of the Brahmaputra river – along an 890 km stretch of the river – from Sadiya to Dhubri was also announced in 2017 by Gadkari. The excess silt dredged from the Brahmaputra was to be used to construct the expressway at an estimated cost of ₹240,000 crore. It was said that the project, besides expanding the road network in Assam on both banks, would address the problem of erosion on the river, which is another major concern in the state. In March 2021, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party made a promise to make Assam flood-free. Party national president JP Nadda said this in Guwahati while releasing the party manifesto ahead of the assembly polls. “Our first commitment is Mission Brahmaputra as part of which we will take measures to control the problem of floods that plague Assam each year. It will include scientific ways like dredging, management of tributaries and construction of big reservoirs to divert the extra water,” Nadda said. Implementation

Dredging on a few select stretches of the Brahmaputra river has been done annually for years by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), which is under the Union ministry of ports, shipping and waterways, to allow ferries and boats to navigate. But large-scale dredging on the 890-km length of the river in Assam with the aim of mitigating floods it yet to even start. In February last year, the Dredging Corporation of India (DCI) signed an agreement worth ₹204.5 crore with IWAI to maintain and develop national waterways on rivers in the northeast. The project on Brahmaputra, Dhansiri, Barak and Kopili rivers would involve dredging at specific stretches to maintain a fairway on them having a width of 32 metres and depth of two metres to 2.5 metres. “Our ministry has nothing to do with flood control. The agreement between DCI and IWAI is to maintain the minimum required depth at some parts of the rivers for navigability. Dredging will begin in October this year when floods are over and the flow on the rivers is less. This project

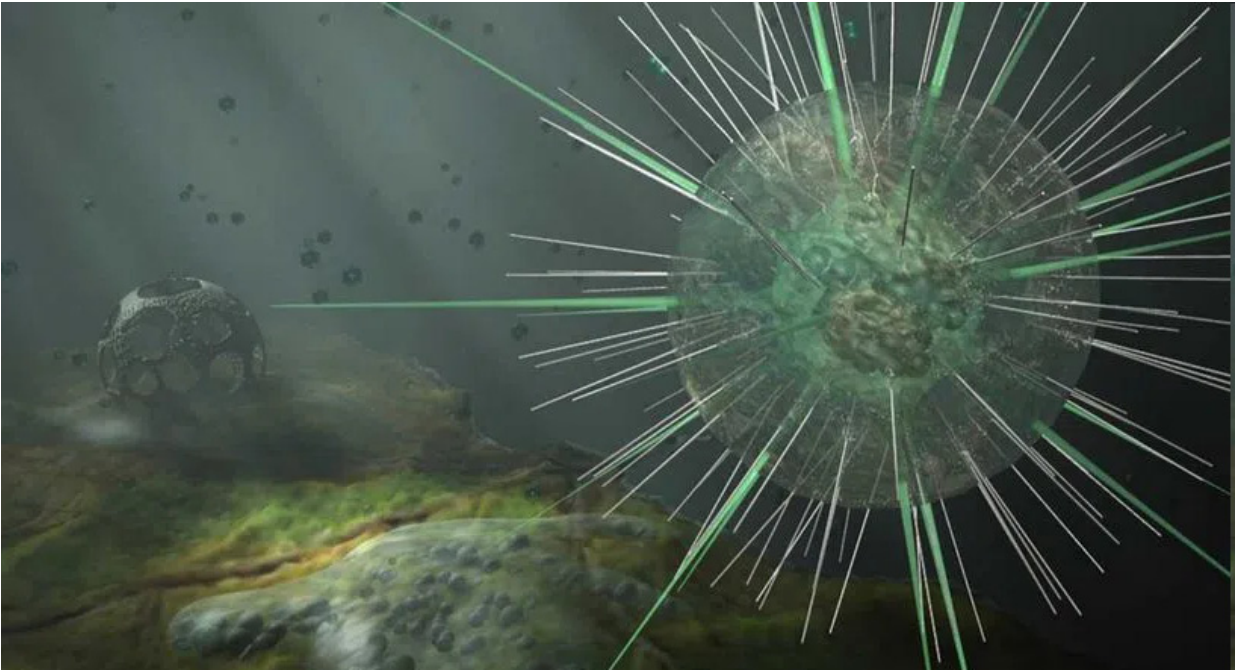
could indirectly help in reducing flood in some areas, but it’s not the primary aim,” said an official at the Union ministry of ports, shipping and waterways, asking not to be named.

In February 2021, four years after announcing the expressway, Gadkari told the Rajya Sabha that there was no proposal to construct the expressway on both banks of Brahmaputra using excess silt collected after dredging the river. Officials in the Assam government said there’s been no progress on the Mission Brahmaputra promise made by the BJP in its 2021 election manifesto. Neither the union government nor the state government — both BJP-run — has mentioned the project in their budget announcements.

Since it’s a major issue in the state and affects millions annually, political parties are quick to blame each other for failing to address the problem. “The people of the state have been squarely betrayed by the ‘double engine’ promise of (Narendra) Modi and (Amit) Shah to make Assam a ‘flood-free state’”, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge posted on X on June 21 taking a swipe at the BJP. Congress MP from Jorhat, Gaurav Gogoi, accused the state government last week of failing to address the issue. He has alleged that the water resources department is an “automated teller machine”, which has given contracts to big contractors to repair or build embankments, many of which have breached this season leading to floods. Reacting to Gogoi, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma took a swipe at Gogoi’s father, Tarun Gogoi, who was the chief minister of the state for three consecutive terms from 2001 to 2016, before the BJP came to power. “Very few embankments built by the water resources department breached this year. And we didn’t build those. What can I do if somebody blames his own father for that? In 2004, a total of 350 embankments had breached,” Sarma said last week. Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, who visited Assam and Manipur on July 8 blamed the BJP governments in Assam and the Centre for “gross and grave mismanagement”. “Dredging the entire stretch of Brahmaputra is almost impossible. The river’s banks stretch to around 9 km at some points. Making Assam flood-free by dredging a huge river is more a utopian idea than an implementable one,” said a senior BJP office bearer in Assam who asked not to be named. View of the experts. Last month, while chairing a review meeting in New Delhi on monsoon flood preparedness, Union home minister Shah advocated the creation of at least 50 large ponds across the northeast to divert water from the Brahmaputra river, which in turn will aid in flood management, agriculture, irrigation and development of tourism. It’s a new suggestion, which experts feel is another addition to the list of measures to tackle floods that haven’t materialised.

Experts said that despite the devastation, the annual floods are important for Assam as the silt deposited on the banks of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries during the season add to the soil’s fertility, which is important for an agrarian economy like the state. “Promises like making Assam flood-free come from a lack of understanding of the flood plains, which the state is. Assam is nourished, nurtured and sustained by floods. You can’t make the state free and if you do that you are taking the fertility out of the flood plain,” said Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, a water infrastructure expert based in Guwahati. Rahman said interventions like dredging, and construction of expressways and ponds are populist measures, pushed by the “politician-contractor lobby” which require a lot of infrastructure and money, which, in turn, could lead to the payment of commissions. “Resource allocation for structural measures is very high around 95%. However, the allocation of funds for research on the Brahmaputra is very low, around 5%. When there’s less research it leads to such interventions. But if there’s more allocation for research, we would understand the river system better and make policies which will lead to effective flood mitigation measures,” said Rahman. “Assam has a lot of wetlands, but they are getting lost due to unplanned and rapid urbanisation. Instead of constructing large ponds, it would have been better not to intervene and let the wetlands flourish and maintain connectivity between them, which in turn would have addressed the flood issue better,” he added.

Deaths in Kerala spark concern over brain-eating amoeba threat



Hyderabad: The single-celled amoeba is often taught in our classrooms as a harmless organism that usually causes dysentery (amoebiasis) and can be treated by anti-parasitics. However, the recent instances of fatalities of 3 children due to brain-eating amoeba (Naegleria fowleri) in Kerala is not only shocking but also a wake-up call for all to understand the ailment better and learn about preventive aspects of the ailment.

In all the three fatalities of children in Kerala, the local public health officials have reported that the kids have taken bath or indulged in fun activities in local water bodies. The Naegleria fowleri, the single-celled amoeba, is known to thrive in warm freshwater lakes and rivers. Sometimes, such amoeba is also found in tap water, which should be a cause of concern for individual households. It is often described as brain eating amoeba because it infects the brain and has the ability to destroy the brain tissue. Once the brain is infected by Naegleria fowleri, (which is rare), then it is always fatal, according to Centres for Disease Control (CDC), United States. Based on Indian studies, the brain eating amoeba enters into human beings through the nose and directly travels to the brain and causes an infection called

as primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM). PAM is acute and severe and is necrotizing, which means it causes irreversible necrosis or the death of the brain tissue. The brain infection progresses rapidly and most people die within 1 to 18 days after symptoms begin. Usually, the infection causes coma and death in 5-days. “This pathogen is believed to gain entry into the central nervous system (CNS) via the nasal passages. In CNS, the pathogen brings about the changes that are characterized by fever, severe headache, neck stiffness, altered sensorium, seizures and coma with most patients dying expeditiously from increased intracranial pressure. Only about 5 percent of patients survive as it is almost always fatal,” an Indian study by researchers from AIIMS, (Elsevier, European Journal of Protiology, October, 2020) said. The CDC on the disease said “Brain infections caused by Naegleria fowleri usually occur after someone goes swimming or diving in a lake, river, or other fresh water during summer months. Infections often happen when it’s been hot for long periods, resulting in higher water temperatures and lower water levels”. Naegleria fowleri is known as brain-eating amoeba because it kills brain tissue. Is found in lakes, ponds and warm water bodies even poorly maintained swimming pools.

Lamine Yamal & his joyous Trivela – combining exuberant Samba notes with dexterous Spanish passing



GNS News Agency, June 23

lamine yamalBarcelona's Lamine Yamal, centre, and Leganes' Javi Hernandez challenge for the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Leganes at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. It was the year of Spain in football. The year they were crowned the European Champions; the year the most influential midfielder in the world, Rodri, was deservedly adjudged the best footballer on the planet; and it was also the year the country's 17-year-old sensation Lamine Yamal introduced his ridiculous talents to the world. Sadly, an injury ended his year on a sombre note, but not before he had offered to the global audience a peek into his staggering gifts as well as the future of the game.

The curlers and benders from his gliding, gilded left foot in the Euros would form the montages of greatest goals scored in the championship. Those were slithering snakes in the skin of silk. He cut in, he spat away, he ripped the ball inside, he fizzed the ball outside. He feigned and floated like a frictionless gnome. As though bored of routine deception, he has been flaunting his latest toy, the trivela, one of the most outrageous tricks in the game. It's a lobbed, out-swinging cross (often a long-ranger) from outside of the boot that swerves and spins (tremendous backspin is imparted) when allowed to land.The word is Portuguese—its best exponent has been the Portuguese forward Ricardo Quaresma—originating from the expression Tres Dedos, or three fingers because the ball is sliced with the three outer toes of the foot. At first sight—the deception always begins with the eyes—it looks like he has scuffed the shot. It seems weak, with not much pace or venom, the bend floaty, as though its lone intention is to tease. Then it evades the men and their lunging legs and heads and falls to the right man in the right space.Three of nine assists for Barcelona have been the trivela. The most delightful one was against Villarreal. He received the ball in his own half, a few yards away from the half-line. He zips upfront, the defenders rather than closing in, are blocking the route of his classical in-swinger. They were anticipating him to cut into the box, so kept dragging him away to the touchline, to his weaker right foot, ready to fling their bodies to the left, unsuspicious of Yamal's deceit.

What can the budget do for agriculture



The pre-budget consultations are on. In the agri-space, what could be the possible suggestions for Union Budget 2025-26? We hold that whatever policies and budgetary allocations the government makes, it must make agriculture more productive, competitive, remunerative to farmers, and also benign to the planet's natural resources.We know that our production system is being challenged by climate change. In India, temperatures have risen by 0.7 degrees Celsius compared to 1951, and precipitation (July to September) has fallen by 6 per cent. This is increasing the risk to the agri-production basket. Developing climate-resilient agriculture will need more resources for agri-R&D. It is currently less than 0.5 per cent of agri-GDP, and needs to be doubled to at least 1 per cent.

It will also need to change farming practices to ensure soils have enough organic carbon and retain more moisture. While the recently launched Natural Farming Mission aims to promote sustainable agriculture, it cannot feed the growing population of India, which is likely to touch 1.67 billion by 2050. Nourishing soils through appropriate fertilisation, be it through biofertilisers or chemical fertilisers, is critical. But fertilisers have to be applied in the right quantities, with the right balance of macronutrients like nitrogen (N), phosphate (P), and potash (K) as well as micronutrients like iron, zinc, boron, etc. The current fertiliser subsidy policy does not promote the right usage of fertilisers. Urea is massively subsidised compared to other nutrients, leading to overuse of N and underuse of P, K, and other micro-nutrients. Technological innovations and products such as nano-urea and nano-DAP, or Single or Triple Superphosphates, etc, have limited penetration in the backdrop of the highly skewed subsidy policy in favour of granular urea. If the Narendra Modi government can set this right — it can, no doubt, be done — then that will be a big service to our farmers and soils.There is ample data on fertiliser sales, soil health cards, PM-KISAN, etc to pull all these together and do direct income transfer on a per-hectare basis. This would allow freeing prices of fertilisers from controls, will help restore the N, P and K balance, as also of micronutrients. It will plug leakages of urea, improve nutrient use efficiency, and reduce environmental damage. It is a win-win situation, provided our political leaders are able to communicate this with our farmers and earn their trust. The time to do it is now.

But agriculture today is not just the production basket. It has to be treated as a food system, from production to marketing to consumption. It should ensure the food and nutritional security of people and also augment farmers' incomes. Building value chains of agri-commodities on the lines of milk, where farmers get 75 to 80 per cent of what the consumer pays, is the way to go. The starting point has to be fruits and vegetables, where typically the farmer gets only one-third of what the consumer pays.Milk is our largest agri-commodity, the value of which exceeds the value

In 2025, where growth will come from



With the new year around the corner, it is useful to think ahead and ask: What is going to be the big economic issue in India in 2025? There is little doubt that it is going to be the growth slowdown. For a rich country like the US with an annual per capita GDP of \$86,000, slowing growth does not hurt a lot. But for a poor country like India, with a per capita GDP of only \$2,700, slowdowns are painful and worrisome. To become an advanced country, India will need to grow rapidly for a long period of time. And this is not easy. Only a handful of countries have made it into the elite club. In order to have a good shot at it, India will need a coherent and well-defined growth strategy.

The recently released GDP growth figures have triggered much discussion over whether the slowdown is merely a temporary blip or a warning of a more serious trend. Official statistics show that growth has declined in four out of the last five quarters. In the middle of 2023, the economy was growing at a healthy rate of more than 8 per cent. But by the September 2024 quarter, growth had fallen to less than 5.5 per cent. Official data is plagued by measurement issues, but this slide does seem to reflect the reality because it is confirmed by several high frequency indicators. Clearly, there is a growth problem.There are also no evident drivers that could reignite the engine of high growth. Consumption demand has been subdued, especially in urban India. Partly as a consequence, private investment has been weak, even though corporate balance sheets are healthy. After all, what is the point of building more factories when existing ones still have plenty of unused capacity? While government investment has been growing rapidly over the past few years, propping up demand, it is soon going to run into fiscal constraints.

So, is India doomed to slow growth? Fortunately, the answer is no. There is one major opportunity, waiting to be seized. Consider some basic data. India's GDP is roughly \$4 trillion while global GDP is a little more than \$100 trillion. That means that India's share of the global economy is around 4 per cent. But its share in global goods exports is much smaller, less than 2 per cent.This mismatch suggests a thought experiment. Assume that India decides to bring its export share in sync with its share in the global economy. This would take some time, but it seems reasonable to target pushing up India's export share by 1 percentage point over the next five years. If this could be achieved, it would

How 2024 was a bright spot in India's concert music scene

For India's music lovers, the year 2024 has been a treat. From international music acts such as Jonas Brothers, Sting, Ed Sheeran, Maroon 5, Bryan Adams and Dua Lipa to its own Punjabi star Diljit Dosanjh, the year has been a series of concerts. With Coldplay's Music of the Spheres World Tour, Ed Sheeran's a seven-city tour that includes Shillong, and Mr. Big's return to India after 15 years and even talks of a possible Eminem tour of India, 2025 also looks to be promising.

Data too appears to back this spurt in concerts. According to a year-end report by the online ticketing platform BookMyShow, 2024 saw "30,687 live events across 319 cities" — an 18 percent growth in India's live entertainment consumption compared to the previous year. Significantly, the most dramatic growth — an astounding 682 percent — came from Tier-2 cities, with Kanpur, Shillong, and Gandhinagar emerging as strong markets for live events."The footfall at big-ticket concerts in India, such as those featuring artistes like Dua Lipa, Bryan Adams, and Diljit Dosanjh, has been substantial, and drawing over 30,000 concertgoers, filling stadiums and arenas to capacity," a spokesperson from Zomato Live, a live entertainment platform, told While cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore have been at the forefront of India's burgeoning live music scene, the demand is also extending to Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Jaipur, Indore, and Goa."This growing demand is evident in the fact that over 50 percent of the ticket buyers for the Zomato Feeding India concert with Dua Lipa (in November) hailed from cities outside of Mumbai," the spokesperson added.Analysts believe that India's billion-plus population, diverse musical tastes, growing appetite for live entertainment, and increasing disposable income is making it a hotspot for global artistes. According to Schubert Fernandes, a Mumbai-based publicist and indie artiste advisor, this concert boom was inevitable and would have happened earlier if not for the pandemic."An iconic and legendary band like U2 finally coming to India (in December 2019) would have opened doors for everyone else, but then COVID happened. Last year actually opened everything up for the country, and that's also when Lollapalooza India (Music Festival) entered India, putting the country on a different league globally because it is arguably one of the top five concert franchises in the world," he said.But it's not only the big names but also mid-level acts that appeal to the Indian musical taste."For instance, Karnivool, an Australian band, fills very small clubs back home, but the appetite for their music in India is incredible. Even niche acts like Animals as Leaders are surprised by the number of fans here," said Yama Seth, head of talent at Level House — a management agency under Gurugram-based ticketing platform, SkillBox.Another factor that could have added to the concert line up in India is the improved production standards in India. Anil Makhija, COO for live entertainment and venues at BookMyShow, cites the example of India's first all-black-steel VerTech stage, used in the Maroon 5 concert at Mumbai's Mahalaxmi Racecourse earlier this month. It was designed with a loading capacity of 50 tonnes—significantly higher than the typical 15-tonne capacity of most Indian stages.This upgrade meets the production demands of A-list international artistes who require advanced setups for their high-energy performances," he said. "Infrastructure investments, coupled with evolving audience tastes, are cementing India's position on the global entertainment map."He also credits digital platforms for Indian audiences' exposure to diverse music and live entertainment. "In fact, India is the second-largest audio streaming market for many global artistes. This translates effectively to heightened on-ground demand for concerts by these artistes," he said.Experts also believe there's also a shift in social currency, where attending high-profile events is now seen as a marker of cultural engagement — especially in the younger demographic. This is exemplified by the Indian audience's willingness to spend on "live entertainment and immersive experiences". "A lot of entertain-

do wonders for growth.To see why, let's pursue the experiment further. Assume conservatively that the global market grows merely at the rate of inflation. In that case, an increase in market share from 2 per cent to 3 per cent would mean a 50 per cent increase in India's export volumes. Translated into annual growth rates, this would imply a 9 per cent real increase in goods exports per year. Since goods exports constitute around 13 per cent of GDP, this means that the export drive would add more than 1 percentage point to growth every year.

The best part is that such an opportunity is, in fact, knocking on our door. Many multinational companies are wanting to move out of China. And the only other country with a large population base and strong growth prospects is India. In other words, there is now a historic opening to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in manufacturing, which all across Asia has been the key to increasing countries' global export market share. The government, to its credit, has been trying to seize this opportunity by rolling out the well-funded Production Linked Incentives (PLI) subsidy scheme.So far, however, the results have been disappointing. Last fiscal year, inward FDI was only \$66 billion — exactly the same as it was back in 2019-20. Only about one-fifth of this total was in manufacturing. Partly as a result, from March 2022 to September 2024, average year-on-year growth in goods exports was just 4.5 per cent. In other words, we have not succeeded in taking advantage of the massive opportunity that still exists.most read

Therefore, what needs to be done? India should adopt a well-defined export-led growth strategy, the critical component of which would be minimising risk and policy uncertainty. To give an important example, the country needs a consistent and coherent trade policy that does not involve frequent changes in import tariffs or worse still, import or export bans. It also needs a re-liberalisation of the foreign trade regime, which has become increasingly protectionist and an exchange rate that responds to market forces as opposed to being very actively managed by the central bank in a way that erodes the competitiveness of Indian exports. And it needs a level playing field for all firms.More generally, policy needs to be much more transparent and predictable, without sudden flip-flops. If we can create such an environment, not only would foreign firms feel confident to set up shop here and export from here, but this could provide a fillip to domestic investment as well. All firms look for the same thing when they contemplate a major investment that might last 10-20 years: They want an assurance of macroeconomic stability and policy certainty.India is facing a historic opportunity to achieve rapid growth by increasing FDI and raising its share of global good exports. What is urgently needed for this growth strategy to work is predictability and certainty on the policy front, as well as a reorientation towards a free-trade mindset. It could be a costly mistake to let this opportunity pass, especially if India aspires to become a developed economy by 2047.



ment spending has moved from films to live experiences. People are even planning vacations around concerts now," Seth says.But it's not only music festivals in India — from Sunburn Goa to other niche ones like Mahindra Blues Festival, Percussion Fest, Magnetic Fields — that are gaining traction. There's also a noticeable trend toward intimate performances in smaller venues that help create a close connection between artistes and audiences."For instance, Shan Vincent de Paul (a Tamil Canadian artiste), who first came to India in 2020 and performed at VH1 Supersonic during their debut tour, returned and performed at The Piano Man in Delhi and Bonobo in Bandra as part of their new IP (Intellectual Property), Big Artist Small Room," Rani Kaur, who works with emerging and established indie artistes, said.The target audience for concerts too are diverse, ranging from Gen Z and millennials to Gen X. For instance, it was the Gen Xers that flocked to the Bryan Adams concerts earlier this month. "Then, there are also casual listeners attending festivals for social experiences and corporate attendees leveraging concerts as networking opportunities," Kaur said.A long road aheadDuring his Dil-Luminati concert in Chandigarh's Sector-34 Exhibition Ground on December 14, Punjabi star Diljit Dosanjh highlighted a significant problem in holding large concerts in India — the lack of appropriate infrastructure."Here, we don't have infrastructure for live shows," he told his audience in Punjabi. "This is a source of big revenue; many people get work and are able to work here. I'll try next time that the stage is at the centre so that you can be around it. Till this happens, I won't do shows in India, that's for sure."Dosanjh's remarks, coupled with a LinkedIn post of how a concertgoer — a seasoned media and entertainment professional who's diabetic — "peed his pants" due to inadequate washroom facilities, reignited a debate on how India lacks venues specifically designed for live performances, leading organisers to use spaces originally built for other purposes, such as sports stadiums.This becomes significant especially given the distances people travel to attend concerts. Data from BookMyShow shows that in 2024, 4.77 lakh fans travelled outside their cities to attend live music events."Venues are a challenge," admitted Fernandes. "Today, we are seeing high-calibre artistes performing at clubs that can accommodate only 100-400 standing guests because there's no suitable venue. Music festivals are seeing international artistes expressing interest in performing in other cities, but venues remain a major hurdle."Globally, concerts are seen as an integral component to boost the economy and are often vied for. In March this year, Singapore became the only Southeast Asian country that hosted Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour concerts, reportedly generating between US\$260 million and US\$375 million in tourism receipts.Fernandes too believes that concerts have a huge economic potential in India — provided infrastructure keeps pace. He cited the example of how Trinamool Congress MP and spokesperson Saket Gokhale took to social media in November after his visit to Musichation festival in Bir, Himachal Pradesh to ask musicians about how governments could help their art. Gokhale had also promised to take up the issue in Parliament.Asked what the government can do, Fernandes said: "

Biggest problem for insurance industry is fraud: GIC Re chief



RAMASWAMY NARAYANAN, Chairman and MD of state-owned General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC Re), says the biggest problem for the insurance industry is fraud — whether it is health or motor or agriculture. In an interview to HITESH VYAS, GEORGE MATHEW and SANDEEP SINGH, Narayanan said the unregulated healthcare sector needs a regulator and GIC Re is discussing with the government on introducing a catastrophe insurance for the country. Excerpts:

How do you see economic activities at the ground level? Are you seeing demand coming in from industries?

Yes, it has happened. We are looking at good avenues of growth, definitely at the corporate level. At the retail level, it goes up and down, depending on how people look at insurance. We also have a big role to play in trying to educate people to look at insurance in a more positive way. When COVID happened, health insurance went up. Motor insurance is an area where we have found that some of the compulsory insurances are not taken by people. Overall, I look at the market growing very well. There are different areas or different pushes coming in, such as the regulator bringing out the slogan saying 'Insurance for All by 2047', which is pushing people to perform. As an industry, there is a huge amount of work that we need to do. The growth or the competition is here in the metro and tier 2 cities but we have not done enough in tier 3 cities or villages. We need to do that.

Any particular sector where you see more activity happening which may be leading this phase of uptick in growth?

Infrastructure is an area where we are seeing a lot of growth and demand. So, obviously, that augurs well and this also means that the country is growing in the right direction. That is something which looks positive and we are seeing growth there.

Why is the level of insurance penetration not increasing?

We are not creating new markets. We are still fighting in the same markets today. Companies are present in metros and tier 1 cities but if you go to very smaller towns or villages, they are not there...maybe the cost of having an establishment, or the premium figures may not be as big as you get in a branch here (metros or tier 1 cities). That is really pushing back people from doing it probably. Unless the insurance industry starts distributing it (products) to the last man in the country, I don't think penetration levels will go up. Penetration levels have to go up. We are abysmally low.

Do you see scope for a war insurance cover?

We had spoken to insurance companies and brokers that if somebody wants additional cover, we are willing to look at it. Basically, the normal traditional cover, especially in property and other products, do not cover war or war-like situations. It is completely excluded.

I was waiting to see if somebody, especially close to the border, would be interested in a war cover. But I realised that the time frame was small, and also people would have realised that looking for a cover then would mean that it is very expensive. The event happening and you ask for a cover, people obviously charge a very high price. Going forward, maybe people will start thinking about this cover. So, we look at it positively. This is another area of insurance that can come up. So, we are ready for that, in case people want that.

Why have health insurance premiums shot up in the last two years?

The issue is higher claims. And yes, we are also worried about it and are pushing hard. It is an unregulated industry. Hospitals, unfortunately, don't have a regulator. When you go to a hospital, the first question they ask is whether you have a policy. The moment you say yes, the treatment that you get will be the same but the cost will go up by a factor of something. This, according to me, is not legitimate. Whether I am insured or I am paying from my pocket, the cost of the service cannot go up. It has to remain the same. This is something that needs to change.

The insurance industry is trying to control the cost. They are trying to control and see whether one is being subjected to tests that they don't need for the problem that they have gone for (in a hospital). There is a lot of resistance from the hospitals. There are complaints that people have to pay money upfront for treatment at the hospital. If everyone is regulated, why not healthcare also? The general insurance and life insurance councils have approached the government. They are seriously in talks with them and something should happen, I am sure.

Why is there no catastrophe insurance scheme for the entire country?

Hopefully, it will come sooner. We are discussing this with the government. We are obviously in the business of taking catastrophe risks. We understand how it is changing, in terms of frequency and severity going up. When a catastrophe happens in India, about 8-12 per cent is the insured loss, depending on where it hits. The rest is completely uninsured, which is the problem area for us. Most of the time, these are people who cannot afford and take the brunt of the shock. Once the event has happened, they depend on the government for doles. So, we have been in talks with the government saying, rather than doing that (offering doles), take a cover, pay for it yourself because other people just can't afford it. So whatever budget you have, you use it to pay the premium. And then once the event happens, let the insurance and reinsurance take over.

This will work well according to me because once the insurance industry gets in, they will also start looking at ways to reduce losses.

We are also looking at doing it in a slightly different way other than the traditional method. We are proposing what is known as parametric insurance, which is not traditional. It is based on certain triggers being met. So if I say that in a day 200 mm of rain happens, then you get the claim. I don't even send somebody to see whether you have suffered a loss. You are in that policy, you get it (claim amount). This will help the government also as they know that immediately there is a relief going to the people who have suffered.

The Insurance Amendment Bill is awaited. The government has allowed 100 per cent FDI. What will be the impact on general insurance and on the reinsurers?

For reinsurance, it makes no difference because any way you can have a 100 per cent branch. All foreign reinsurance branches (FRBs), such as Munich Re and Swiss Re are 100 per cent owned, they don't have any local partnership. On the insurance side, I am a little doubtful. First of all, when it moved from 49 per cent to 74 per cent, we didn't see a major take-up by foreign players, saying we would come to 74 per cent. My personal feeling is that you need to have a local partner in a market like India. You need to have a great distribution network. I think a strong local partner will always help. The local partners are the ones who are driving it. The foreign partner can bring in global best practices, best products, right pricing strategies and insurance knowledge.

How are you dealing with scams in the agriculture sector?

The insurance company on ground has to be very strong. For us, as a reinsurer, we try to see how strong they are, how they are able to manage the scheme, do they understand what they are doing, and the pricing. Unfortunately, today in agriculture, pricing has been horrible because new schemes have come up. Currently, the most popular scheme is the 80-110 scheme, where your risk coverage or your risk transfer is only 30 per cent. You give a cover and in case your losses are below 80 per cent, the balance you repay back to the government. If the losses go beyond 110, the government steps in and pays the losses. So really the risk transfer is only 30 per cent. As far as we are concerned, I don't think that's the way insurance should work. Secondly, fortunately for us, when it is the 80-110 scheme, most companies don't come for reinsurance support at all because they know their losses are capped, they don't need reinsurance. As a result of all these, the pricing is horrible, and at that pricing we will never write, that's very clear. Why talk only about agriculture? For the insurance industry, the biggest problem is fraud — whether it is health or motor or agriculture. The General Insurance Council is now pushing hard. They are trying to get the companies together. The IRDAI came out with this concept of Bima Sugam — a platform where everybody shares the data on insurance. So you know whether there is any fraud. I think initiatives are coming out but the market is still at a stage where a lot of things need to be done.

Why did the growth in the insurance sector decline in FY25?

Typically, the industry has gone 12-13 per cent year on year. This year (FY25) it was 6.2 per cent. Two reasons — one, I would say is the fact that there was a change in the accounting. So, earlier long-term products, such as housing and motor, were accounted for the year they were taken. Now the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has said it must be accounted for the number of years that it has to go through. For example, matching with your 15-year housing loan, if you take a 15-year home insurance product, then it needs to be accounted for over 15 years. So obviously, this being the first year, there was an immediate impact. Second, I would say that the premium in the property class of business fell last year, which we are hoping to correct this year.

How do you see prices this year?

This year, prices should hold up. So as reinsurers, we have also put in place different ways by which to control the prices from falling too much. We need to understand the market well. Sometimes people tend to take decisions without going through the entire gamut. Property is about 8 per cent of the total portfolio. So, for a company which is writing probably 35 per cent of its business in health and another 30 per cent in motor, compromising a little on that 8 per cent may not seem too big, but overall, the big losses that we expect here, we need to ensure that it is priced.

India is that way a cat-prone country. Every year we have some kind of event happening. Climate change is a reality today. The kind of losses that we used to see previously, the frequency has gone up, severity has gone up tremendously. With all that, we need to ensure that the prices match up to those losses or at least to those risks we are taking... at least you have to provide. When the loss happens, you should have some buffer to pay out.

Do you think a concept like sharing credit score should be implemented in the insurance industry?

There have been some discussions at the General Insurance Council level that claims and the so-called frauds need to be reflected in a person's CIBIL (credit) score also. So it is not just about you missing out on an EMI payment, it is also about the fact that if you have done something fraudulently, it should hit you on your CIBIL (credit) score.

Your investment income grew by 4.5 per cent in FY25. What was the reason for the slower growth?

Typically, about 73 per cent of my book is debt, which is normally government securities or AAA-rated bonds. Close to 17 per cent is equity on a book value. Nearly 8 per cent is money market, which is FDs or liquid mutual funds, and about one per cent is alternative funds. This year (FY25), markets were pretty volatile and at some points, they fell drastically. We used those opportunities to buy. In FY25, the profit on sale of investments was comparatively lower. This is the reason you see the growth is only about 4 per cent.

Your premium from the international business has come down in FY25. What do you attribute this to?

The growth (in international business) has started. You need to have a very good credit rating to underwrite international business. Going forward, we will be growing our international book along with our domestic book. The growth will happen typically 10 per cent year on year. Currently, our domestic book is 75 per cent and 25 is international. We would like it to be 50-50 at some point. But in the short to medium term, it will remain where it is because internationally, economies are not doing well. We don't see growth.

How about investment in new projects? Is it taking off?

It is definitely taking off. Investments from private promoters and from the government in areas such as highways, bridges and metros, are definitely happening. People are happily focusing on the Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) side, and so a lot of investments are happening on wind and solar farms, which is very encouraging.

Amitabh Kant resigns as G20 sherpa

New Delhi: Amitabh Kant, who managed diverse assignments during his 45 years in government service, has resigned as G20 Sherpa. Kant, a retired 1980-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Kerala cadre, was appointed as India's G20 Sherpa in July 2022, months before India assumed the G20 Presidency. In a LinkedIn post titled 'My New Journey' Kant said: "After 45 years of dedicated government service,

Lung gene linked to post-COVID symptoms, large genetics study says



More than four years since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the disease remains a global health concern — not because of new surges but because of what persists. Long COVID, or technically post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC), refers to symptoms that continue for weeks or months after the initial illness clears. These include fatigue, breathing problems, and cognitive issues. The World Health Organization defines long COVID as symptoms that begin within three months of infection and last at least two months without another explanation. Why some people develop long COVID while others recover quickly remains unclear. A recent genome-wide association study published in Nature Genetics analysed genetic data from six major global ancestries to investigate whether inherited differences play a role.

The study, conducted under the COVID-19 Host Genetics Initiative at the Germans Trias i Pujol research institute in Spain, used a Genome-Wide Association Study (GWAS) to identify genetic risk factors for long COVID. GWAS scans the genome for small 'spelling mistakes' — also known as single-nucleotide polymorphisms — in the DNA sequence that appear more often in people with a condition than in those without. This method has helped uncover links to many complex and chronic disorders.

The analysis used data from 33 groups across 19 countries, making it one of the largest efforts to date in this area. The researchers first analysed data from 6,450 long COVID cases and over one million population controls. In this discovery phase, they identified a genetic signal near the FOXP4 gene. This signal was then tested in a separate replication cohort of more than 9,500 cases and nearly 8,00,000 controls, and the association was confirmed. The researchers applied two definitions of long COVID: a strict one requiring test-confirmed infection and ongoing symptoms, and a broader one that included self-reported or clinical diagnoses. Controls were also defined strictly (infected but recovered) or broadly (general population without long COVID). This helped the team test whether its results held up across different clinical definitions.

The analysis found a strong association between long COVID and a region on chromosome 6, near the FOXP4 gene. A specific variant in the region, called rs9367106, increased the risk of developing long COVID. People with the "C" version of this variant were about 63% more likely to have long COVID symptoms than those without it. Notably, FOXP4 increased long COVID risk even in people who weren't hospitalised, suggesting its effect is not tied solely to the severity of the initial infection. The variant's frequency also varied across populations. It appeared in about 1.6% of non-Finnish Europeans but up to 36% of East Asians. Because it was more common in some groups, its effects were easier to detect, even in smaller samples. This highlights why genetic studies that include diverse populations are more reliable and globally relevant. To understand the connection between FOXP4 and long COVID, the researchers examined how active this gene was in different tissues and cell types and how its activity related to the condition. The authors noted that the variant lies in a stretch of DNA that is especially "active" in lung tissue, suggesting

it may affect how lungs function. Using GTEx, a large gene activity database, they found that a nearby variant (rs12660421), often inherited with rs9367106, was linked to higher levels of FOXP4 expression in the lung. This made it more likely that the gene influences how the lungs respond to infection and injury.

Going further, the researchers checked which lung cells produced FOXP4 most strongly. They found high activity in type 2 alveolar cells, key players in keeping air sacs open, clearing fluids, and repairing tissue damage. These cells also help coordinate the immune response to respiratory viruses like SARS-CoV-2. The same genetic region has also been associated with lung cancer in earlier research, suggesting that FOXP4 may influence multiple lung-related conditions via shared biological pathways. To test whether FOXP4 activity — and not just the genetic variant — might be linked to long COVID, researchers analysed blood samples from people who had recovered from the initial phase of infection. They found that individuals with moderately higher levels of FOXP4 had more than twice the odds of developing long COVID. This association persisted even outside the acute illness phase, suggesting a longer-term role for the gene. Finally, a technique called co-localisation analysis showed a 91% probability that the same genetic signal affects both FOXP4 activity and long COVID risk, reinforcing the gene's biological importance. The study has important implications for India, given its large population, genetic diversity, and significant COVID-19 burden. Multiple waves of infection and unequal access to care mean many Indians may continue to face lasting symptoms, often undiagnosed or untreated due to limited awareness and clinical follow-up. Indian studies suggest a wide range in long COVID prevalence:

from 45% to nearly 80% depending on design, follow-up, and illness severity. One multicentre study across Hyderabad, Vellore, Mumbai, and Thiruvalla found that 16.5% of hospitalised patients self-reported symptoms like fatigue and breathlessness even a year after discharge. Although the GWAS included participants from six ancestry groups, the authors said most datasets were of European origin. South Asian representation was limited or unclear. This is a broader issue across GWAS in general, many of which have focused on European populations. Thus, it remains uncertain how frequently the FOXP4 variant occurs in the Indian population or whether its effects are similar in local contexts, particularly given region-specific factors such as air pollution, metabolic risk, and healthcare variability. India's growing genomic infrastructure is beginning to close foundational data gaps. The GenomeIndia Project has released genomic data on 10,000 individuals from diverse Indian populations. While the project is not focused on disease mapping, it provides a foundational catalogue of genetic variation across populations. This reference can support future studies, such as an India-specific GWAS on long COVID, thus building confidence in translating findings into clinical or diagnostic settings in local contexts.

Some limitations This large-scale international study identifies FOXP4 as a genetic factor linked to long COVID, offering a new clue as to why some individuals experience prolonged symptoms after a SARS-CoV-2 infection. However, the authors also note several limitations. Most data were collected before widespread vaccination and the emergence of newer variants like Omicron, making it unclear if the findings apply to all populations today. They also caution that evolving definitions of long COVID may have led to misclassification in some cohorts. Additionally, the overall genetic contribution to long COVID appears modest, suggesting that other factors, including immunity and pre-existing conditions, also play key roles. As India continues to address the long-term effects of the pandemic, studies like this highlight the importance of including diverse populations in genetic research.

Blistering heat continues in north, central India; hills scorch



A relentless heatwave continued to scorch large parts of north and central India for the sixth consecutive day on Saturday, with maximum temperatures exceeding 45 degrees Celsius in several cities and high temperatures reported in parts of the hilly states. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said maximum temperatures remained more than 5.1 degrees Celsius above the seasonal average in parts of Himachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya and at isolated places in sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim. Temperatures were also appreciably above normal in many areas of Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir. Experts warn that persistent heat in these hilly regions could lead to faster glacier melt, increase the risk of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and intensify forest fire vulnerability. Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar and Churu were among the hottest places in the country on Saturday, each recording a maximum of 46.5 degrees Celsius, 5 and 4.1 degrees above normal, respectively.

In Uttar Pradesh, Prayagraj and Kanpur recorded highs of 45 and 44.9 degrees Celsius, while Ghazipur (44.5) logged a departure of 6.3 degrees above normal. In Madhya Pradesh, Hoshangabad reported 45.2 degrees Celsius, followed by Khajuraho (44.7 degrees), Nowgong (44.6 degrees) and Gwalior (42.5 degrees). Rohtak in Haryana recorded 44.3 degrees Celsius, while Chandigarh reported 42.2 degrees Celsius. In Punjab, Patiala and Amritsar saw temperatures of 42.6 and 42 degrees Celsius, respectively. The national capital also experienced scorching conditions, with

maximum temperatures of 42.2 degrees Celsius at Aya Nagar and 42 degrees Celsius at Palam. The heat index, a measure of how hot it feels when humidity is factored in, soared to an alarming 53.8 degrees Celsius in Delhi. India experienced a relatively cooler May this year due to the early arrival of the monsoon and frequent thunderstorms in the northwest and central regions. But a sharp drop in rainfall since early June has caused temperatures to rise rapidly, triggering widespread heatwave conditions since June 8-9. Even parts of the hill states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir have been experiencing hotter-than-usual weather over the last few days. According to the IMD's extended range forecast, the monsoon is now likely to cover the remaining parts of central and eastern India and some areas of northwest India by June 18. It is expected to advance over most of northwest India between June 19 and June 25. An IMD official said the system is likely to reach Delhi by June 22-23, ahead of the normal onset date of June 30. The southwest monsoon usually makes its onset over Kerala by June 1, reaches Mumbai by June 11 and covers the entire country by July 8. It starts retreating from northwest India around September 17 and withdraws completely by October 15. Severe and frequent heatwaves are making life harder for low-income households with limited access to water and cooling. Experts warn that outdoor workers, the elderly, and children are at high risk of heat exhaustion and heatstroke. Last year, hospitals in India reported nearly 48,000 cases of heatstroke and 159 deaths due to extreme heat.

achieved some great things," Johnson said. "It's essential to consider when the right time is to make some tough calls. The upcoming three-Test Windies tour seems like an excellent opportunity to give deserving players a chance to shine, and the finger injury to Smith might have the silver lining of prompting some regeneration. Finding a specialist No.3 is crucial, and with the form Labuschagne has shown over the past 18 months, it's hard to justify moving him back into that position. Trying to make changes in all top-three batting slots at once would indeed be risky, and I don't think the selectors will go that route," he added.

‘Pilots were probably distracted by unexpected emergency’: Gaurav Taneja, aka Flying Beast, explains possible cause of dual engine failure on Ahmedabad Air India flight



Gaurav Taneja explains what could have happened in the Ahmedabad plane crash. Gaurav Taneja explains what could have happened in the Ahmedabad plane crash. Popular YouTuber and former commercial pilot Gaurav Taneja, widely known online as Flying Beast, has shared his perspective on the tragic plane crash in Ahmedabad. Speaking to Times Now, Taneja offered a technical explanation of what may have gone wrong shortly after take-off. “First of all, we are very sad to hear this news,” he said, adding that modern aircraft are equipped to give warning signs even prior to take-off, and that he believes that the problems arose only after the plane took off.

He said, “Actually, if you’re taking off, the aircraft will show you a message if there is any severe error in the flight or in the system. And it will ask you to reject the take-off until you’ve rotated the aircraft off the runway. If the aircraft has taken off, that means there was no indication or warning from the aircraft itself, so the pilots could proceed. If there’s any minor warning that does not affect the safety of the flight, since take-off is a critical phase, the aircraft systems inhibit that warning. It essentially says: ‘Okay, let the pilots take off. This is not anything major. Let them reach a safe altitude of 4,000–5,000 feet, and then I can flash this error,’ so that the pilots, if they choose to, can turn back and land safely at the departure airport.”

Taneja went on to explain that the absence of a warning at take-off suggests the aircraft systems were likely functioning normally at first. “So, if there was no such warning at take-off, that means there was no major error in the aircraft or its systems. Aircraft usually take off as part of a routine, once you cross 100 or 400 feet, you put the autopilot on. In this case, I don’t know whether the pilots had time to do that. The landing gear was still down. The usual procedure is: you take off, confirm there is a positive rate of climb, and then the pilot flying calls it out, and the gear is taken up. But here, the gears were left down, indicating that right after take-off there was some emergency. The pilots were distracted, they were trying to solve that problem. There was no time or perhaps no confirmation of a positive rate of climb, and the aircraft was sinking, about

Aamir Khan says PK wasn’t against religion, addresses claims it promoted love jihad: ‘My sisters and daughter have married Hindus’



Aamir Khan finally addressed allegations against him that have been floating on social media ever since the release of his 2014 blockbuster, Rajkumar Hirani’s satire PK. He defended the film against claims that it targets religion. Along with that, he also responded to the allegations that PK endorses love jihad. “They’re wrong. We’re not against any religion. We respect all religions and all religious people. That film just tells us to be cautious of those who exploit religion to fool the common man in order to extract money from them. You’ll find people like that in every religion. That was the film’s only purpose,” said Aamir. In the interview with India TV, Aamir also clarified his take on the scene in which he shows an Indian Hindu woman (Anushka Sharma) trying to marry a Pakistani Muslim man (late Sushant Singh Rajput). He said that when people from two religions, particularly Hindu and Muslim, fall in love and get married, that’s not always love jihad. “This is just humanity. It’s above religion,” argued Aamir. He asked if his sisters and daughter marrying Hindu men is love jihad. Aamir’s sister and actor Nikhat is married to Santosh Hegde whereas his other sister Farhat’s husband is Rajeev Dutta. Meanwhile, Aamir’s daughter Ira Khan tied the knot with Nupur Shikhar last year. Aamir himself has married two Hindu women — Reena Dutta and Kiran Rao — in 1988 and 2005 respectively. When asked while he married Indian women, the names of his kids are Ira Khan, Junaid Khan and Azad Rao Khan, Aamir answered, “My kids have been named by my wives. There wasn’t any interference from my end. Husbands ki zyada chalti nahi hai (Husbands don’t have too much of a say).” He revealed his first wife Reena named their kids Junaid and Ira. “Let me tell you, Ira is another name for (goddess) Saraswati. Have you heard of Irawati? It’s just that Reena wanted to pronounce it differently,” explained Aamir, claiming Ira’s name was taken from former BJP minister Maneka Gandhi’s book Aamir also explained that his second wife and filmmaker Kiran Rao named their son Azad after his legendary ancestor, Maulana Azad, who was a freedom fighter and the first Education Minister of Independent

400 feet per minute.” Reflecting on emergency training scenarios, Taneja added: “In the simulator, we’ve done so many exercises after take-off, so many emergency scenarios. But we’ve never practiced a dual engine failure right after take-off. And when you’re taking off from a city that’s right in the heart of the city, there are buildings in front of you, you can’t do anything. If it were a desert or a stretch of plain farmland, I could still try to land the aircraft there. But when there are buildings and highways, what do I do? I have no training for that. I’ve been through such simulated situations. The instructor puts us through it just to show how terrifying it can be. And at the end of the scenario, the instructor finally ‘saves’ the aircraft, just to make the point, and we all exhale and say, ‘Thank God, it’s a sim.’ But what if it’s a real aircraft? It’s a pilot’s nightmare: both engines not responding.”

He also addressed what the crash does not appear to be. “It doesn’t look like a stall, because the angle of attack wasn’t that high. It doesn’t seem like a compressor stall either, as far as I can tell, because in a compressor stall, you don’t lose total power. If you’re taking off at 100% thrust, and something causes a compressor stall, you still retain 30% or 40% engine power. The engine doesn’t go completely dead. And even if one engine fails entirely, aircraft are still certified to fly safely with just one engine. At least that would give you enough to circle back and land safely. So this is very unfortunate. Everyone is wondering what went wrong, because this is something we’ve never seen in this industry.” On the day of the crash, Taneja had posted his immediate thoughts on his account on X (formerly Twitter), suggesting a rare and severe technical issue. “Looks like a Dual Engine Failure after Take Off. Nothing short of a complete power loss can force a modern aircraft into that kind of sink rate, right after take off. Praying for everyone on board,” he wrote.

Taneja is known for creating content that explains aviation topics to a wider audience, including detailed breakdowns of air accidents. A pilot for over 10 years, he previously worked as a captain at AirAsia. In 2020, he became a whistleblower, accusing the airline of compromising safety by pressuring pilots to conduct risky landings and penalizing them for taking mandated rest days. His YouTube video on the issue has since garnered over 10 million views. An Air India Boeing 787 Dreamliner flying from Ahmedabad to London Gatwick with 242 people on board crashed shortly after takeoff on Thursday afternoon. Besides those onboard, at least 24 people, including four medical students, were killed on the ground, as the plane crashed into the hostel building of the BJ Medical College in the Meghani Nagar area. While one person survived, most passengers were Indian, along with 53 British nationals, seven Portuguese, and one Canadian. Former Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani (68), who was headed to London to meet his daughter, was among the people who lost their lives in the crash.

India. “Azad isn’t a Muslim name. Haven’t you heard of Chandrashekhar Azad? He was also a freedom fighter. It’s a neutral name,” said Aamir. Aamir added that since he gets trolled from both sides of the fence, that only proves he’s doing the right thing. “I’m very proud I’m a Muslim. I’m also proud I’m a Hindustani. Both of these statements are true,” Aamir said. He pointed out that no other Indian actor has been as socially conscious as him. Case in point: his TV show Satyamev Jayate and his NGO Paani Foundation. Aamir claimed he brought attention to issues in Satyamev Jayate which cut across all religions. “Have you seen the film Secret Superstar? What’s the religion of that family? So there’s nothing like that,” said Aamir. His 2017 blockbuster coming-of-age musical Secret Superstar, starring Zaira Wasim, revolved around the issues of domestic violence and curbed ambition in a Muslim family.

Kushal Tandon announces breakup with Barsatein co-star Shivangi Joshi, deletes post later: ‘It’s been 5 months...’

Although Kushal Tandon said that they broke up five months ago, Shivangi Joshi had shared a heartfelt birthday message for him in March this year, which has now left fans puzzled. According to reports, romance blossomed between Kushal Tandon and Shivangi Joshi while they were working together in the television romantic drama Barsatein. (Credit: Instagram/@therealkushaltandon)

Although it’s just another Sunday for most, for fans of renowned television actors Shivangi Joshi and Kushal Tandon, it feels like the end of an era. In a sudden and somewhat confusing move, Kushal has confirmed that he and Shivangi are no longer together, revealing that they parted ways a few months ago. While he made the announcement via an Instagram Story, the actor later deleted the post, leaving fans bewildered.

“To all the people I love, just wanted to say, me and Shivangi are not together anymore. It’s been 5 months so yes (sic),” he wrote in the now-deleted Instagram story. The two are also believed to have unfollowed each other on Instagram. What has caused even more confusion among fans is the fact that, despite Kushal stating they broke up five months ago, Shivangi had shared a heartfelt birthday message for him on March 28 this year.

Alongside photos of the two together, she wrote: “Wishing you a wonderful day and an amazing year ahead. May this year bring you happiness, success, and everything your heart desires. Hope it’s filled with exciting opportunities, growth, and beautiful moments that make you truly smile. Wishing you everything good in life.

Her first film was a blockbuster, second had Prithviraj; but Akhila Sasidharan vanished after that: ‘We live in a time where...’



Actor Akhila Sasidharan has finally opened up about her life after Kaaryasthan and Teja Bhai & Family, shedding light on what she’s been doing since her brief stint in cinema. Akhila Sasidharan recently revealed that after her brief foray into films, she spent over five years in Mumbai, continuing her artistic journey. (Credit: Facebook/@AkhilaSasidharanNair) The chances of anyone making it big in cinema have always been significantly low. Not only is finding success in this field extremely difficult, but surviving and consistently getting work is also a herculean task, and only a few manage to build a truly fruitful career. Among the many actors who managed to break into the Malayalam film industry with a successful debut is Akhila Sasidharan. However, her story is not the same as that of many others who went field-out because of a lack of opportunities or back-to-back setbacks.

Interestingly, her debut film Kaaryasthan (2010), directed by Thomson and penned by the hit screenwriting duo Udaykrishna and Sibi K Thomas, was a major blockbuster. Having made a name for herself in the television dance reality show Vodafone Thakkadhim and as an anchor on the popular musical reality show Munch Star Singer Junior, Akhila was already a familiar face to Malayalam mini-screen audiences. Hence, her transition to the silver screen only amplified her fame, even though she was paired oppo-

Jonita Gandhi recalls being cyberflashed, receiving ‘d**k pic with my photo in the background’ on Instagram: ‘It’s disgusting’

Recently, singer Jonita Gandhi recalled being a victim of cyberflashing, where a person posted a picture of his genitals with her photo in the background. Jonita Gandhi also opened up about facing racism and body image issues as an Indian growing up in Canada. There’s no exaggeration in saying that almost every woman has faced online sexual abuse or harassment in one form or another. While commoners themselves endure such traumatic experiences frequently, the situation is far grimmer for celebrities, who live in the public eye and are constantly subjected to hypersexualisation. Recently, singer Jonita Gandhi shared a disturbing experience she faced online, which served as a stark reminder that just when you think perpetrators can no longer shock you with their actions, they find new, even more unsettling ways to do so. In a recent interview, Jonita recalled being a victim of cyberflashing, where a person posted a picture of his genitals with her photo in the background. “Some things are kind of traumatic. On Instagram, you can check your mentions, and I’d see that I’d been added to someone’s Close Friends stories. Then I’m seeing it’s a d**k pic. It has a watermark with their thing and my photo in the background. It’s disgusting. It’s harassment. But I keep ignoring such things,” she told Hauterrfly. Post Credits Scene | Bhool Chuk Maaf: Rajkumar Rao has become the poster boy for losers; he plays the same character over and over again. She also opened up about facing racism and body image issues as an Indian growing up in Canada. “I used to get a lot of racist comments about my facial hair while growing up. They used to call me Godzilla, and even the Punjabi boys in my class would make fun of me. Growing up, I was convinced that I was



never going to have sex because of the same issues. I couldn’t accept my own body; how can someone else accept it? I still have some of those issues; I still avoid swimming sometimes, but music made it better. I feel like I am the ugly duckling who became the swan.” Renowned for lending her voice to superhit songs such as “Chennai Express”, “Mental Manadhil”, “The Breakup Song”, “Gilehriyaan”, “Sacchi Mohabbat”, “Main Tumhara”, “Deva Deva” and “What Jhumka?”, she has also sung in Urdu, Telugu, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali languages.

‘Rishi Kapoor refused to do workshop, agreed only when Amitabh Bachchan...’: 102 Not Out director on the two actor’s relationship

102 Not Out director Umesh Shukla recently opened up about working with Amitabh Bachchan and Rishi Kapoor on the film. During a podcast, Umesh shared some interesting anecdotes about both the actors and pointed out their dedication towards the craft. He even revealed how Rishi Kapoor had immense respect for Amitabh Bachchan, and recalled how Chintuji was quite moved by Big B’s performance in the film. Talking about 102 Not Out, Umesh revealed how it was to work with actors who were quite different from one another. He recalled, “It was an experimental film we made with two yesteryear superstars who have different acting patterns – Rishiji believed in spontaneity, while Big B is a method actor. He is so perfect that you can never tell that he has done his homework; there is a lot to learn from them, especially if they came together. They had different levels of discipline, too.”

Recalling an incident from the shoot when Rishi Kapoor only agreed to do a workshop for Amitabh Bachchan, Umesh said, “I remember, I had said that we would do a workshop for 102 Not Out, while Big B said yes, Rishiji refused. He said, ‘We usually get the script and we act on it’, but when I told him that Mr Bachchan had agreed to do the workshop, he also agreed. Chintuji had immense respect for Bachchan sahab. They have done so many films together, and the relationship I have seen between them was brilliant.” Umesh even shared another incident about Rishi and Amitabh’s discipline. He said, “Both of them were playing Gujarati characters, something they had not done earlier. I had said that when we act on the set, actors will not wear slippers because Gujaratis don’t wear slippers at



home. I used to keep the set very clean so that they wouldn’t have any inconvenience. I used to tell both of them that they could wear slippers in close-up shots, but they were so disciplined that they wouldn’t.” Umesh spoke about another interesting anecdote about the late Rishi Kapoor, revealing that the actor wasn’t big on giving a take two. “Chintuji didn’t like retakes; he would say that what he delivered in the first take was always the best. He was an actor who wanted proper reasoning for a retake. Sometimes he would just confuse the director by checking how much he knew about his job.