





# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## A tragic day for cricket

It is perhaps the unkindest cut and beyond comprehension. It is a tragedy that has shaken the nation because of its magnitude. It was caused by a large crowd that had gathered to participate in a celebration by their cricket icons. But then, realistically speaking, it is not that celebrations have never turned into tragedies in India. We have had many instances of deaths stemming from stampedes created by die-hard fans of celebrities from the film industry out to see their heroes in life and blood. It happened at a venue where Shah Rukh Khan was to arrive, and closer home fans of actor Allu Arjun created a stampede when he was to visit Sandhya theatre in Hyderabad, which was having a special screening of his Pushpa 2 The Rule. This resulted in the death of a woman, while her young son is still to recover fully from the injuries he sustained because of the unruly crowd. Although there were no deaths, there was a massive turnout of fans when Salman Khan was in Hyderabad for the inauguration of an optical shop on a busy road in the heart of the city. However, the tragedy that struck M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on Wednesday afternoon is too tragic. In an unexpected development, thousands of fans gathered outside the stadium, which was to celebrate the maiden IPL title triumph of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), which they did in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. Even though nearly 11 deaths (including that of a six-year-old girl) have been confirmed by the authorities at Bowring Hospital in Shivajinagar, and Vaidehi Hospital on Mallaya Road, the toll may increase as some of the injured are in critical condition. The chaos created by the fans, who wanted to catch a close glimpse of their idol Virat Kohli and all RCB players, forced police personnel to resort to mild lathi-charge, which, ostensibly aggravated the situation with the fans running helter-skelter, while trying to exit from the gates that were kept open for the celebrations.

## OPPO Licenses Cellular Standard-Essential Patents to Volkswagen Group for Connected Vehicles



Hyderabad: Leading smart device company OPPO today announced the signing of a global patent licensing agreement with Volkswagen Aktiengesellschaft (hereafter referred to as Volkswagen) to license OPPO's cellular standard-essential patents portfolio to the group, including 5G. Under the agreement, OPPO's cellular standard-essential patents will be licensed to Volkswagen to enhance user experiences for its connected vehicle offerings across its global product lineup.

"We are delighted to collaborate with Volkswagen through this patent licensing agreement," said Vincent Lin, Head of Patent Licensing at OPPO. "Volkswagen IP team's hard work and foresight in recognising the value of this co-operation are highly appreciated. This partnership is further recognition of OPPO's leadership in cellular technology innovation and our commitment to creating a long-term, healthy and sustainable intellectual property ecosystem that empowers long-term innovation and industry growth." "The partnership with OPPO is an example of efficient, respectful, business-focused collaboration in the space of licensing of Standard Essential Patents," said Robin Cefai, Chief IP Licensing Officer at Volkswagen. It illustrates Volkswagen's willingness to recognise the value of IP and find sustainable solutions for all parties.

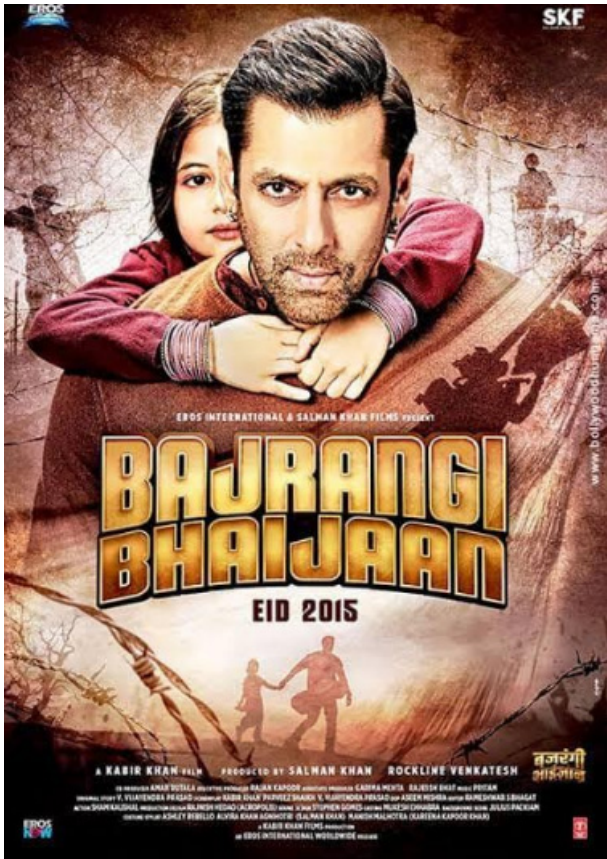
Marking OPPO's first ever bilateral patent licensing agreement with a connected-car company, the collaboration reflects the broader adaption of OPPO's cellular standard-essential technologies beyond smartphones, especially in the automotive sector. OPPO's 5G SEPs are currently distributed in over 40 countries and regions globally, and according to LexisNexis® IPlytics, a leading patent analytics platform, OPPO ranked eighth globally in overall 5G patent strength as of January 2025. As of March 2025, OPPO has filed over 113,000 patent applications and holds more than 62,000 granted patents globally. OPPO continues to invest in core technology areas, including 5G/6G, artificial intelligence, charging, imaging, and video, reinforcing its position as a global leader in innovation and high-value intellectual property.

## he Bakrid festival symbolizes sacrifices: ITDA Project Officer B. Rahul



"Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi kothagudem, June 6 (Indian Chronicle): "The Bakrid festival is a symbol of sacrifices, ITDA Project Officer B. Rahul said in a statement on Friday. On the occasion of the Bakrid festival, he extended his greetings to the tribals, Muslim teachers, lecturers, and Muslim employees serving the students in remote tribal villages of the agency area. Speaking on the occasion, he said that Muslims celebrate the Bakrid festival with great enthusiasm. He said that the Bakrid festival is the second biggest festival after Ramadan. He urged Muslims and their families to celebrate the Bakrid festival, which is a symbol of sacrifices, with enthusiasm and devotion.

## Celebrate Eid in Style with the Khans, Streaming The Eid Binge on Tata Play Binge



Hyderabad: Eid is all about celebration, connection, and a whole lot of cinematic jadoo! And who better to spend it with than the undisputed kings of Bollywood — Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, and Aamir Khan. From heartwarming tales to high-octane action and soul-stirring romance, this Khan-tastic lineup has everything you need for an unforgettable Eid movie marathon. So prepare the biryani, pour yourself a glass of Rooh Afza, and hit play — all on Tata Play Binge, where 30+ OTT platforms come together in just one subscription. Let's get the festive film-feast started!

Pathaan

If you're craving some high-flying action with a side of

desi swagger, Pathaan is your ticket. Shah Rukh Khan makes a thunderous return as an exiled spy called back into action to stop a deadly threat. Backed by a fiery performance from Deepika Padukone and a menacing John Abraham, this YRF blockbuster is packed with edge-of-your-seat stunts and slick storytelling. Add chartbusters like Besharam Rang and Jhoomo Jo Pathaan to the mix and you've got a full-blown Eid action dhamaka. Stream it now on Tata Play Binge — SRK is back and how!

Tubelight

A heartwarming story wrapped in innocence, Tubelight features Salman Khan in a rare vulnerable avatar. Set against the backdrop of the 1962 Indo-China war, the film follows Laxman, a simple man whose unwavering faith in miracles becomes his greatest strength as he searches for his lost brother. With touching moments and a strong emotional core, this Kabir Khan directorial also stars Sohail Khan and Chinese actress Zhu Zhu. The film's soulful tracks like Main Agar and Tinka Tinka Dil Mera and the famous banger Naach Meri Jaan tug right at the heartstrings. Catch it on Tata Play Binge and witness the power of faith this Eid.

Ghajini

Aamir Khan takes intensity to another level in Ghajini, a gripping revenge saga that redefined Bollywood thrillers. He plays Sanjay Singhania, a man with short-term memory loss who embarks on a mission to avenge his lover's murder, armed only with tattoos and Polaroids. Asin makes a memorable debut, and the film's action, emotion, and AR Rahman's chart-topping soundtrack with Guzarish and Kaisa Mujhe, still hit hard. Directed by A.R. Murugadoss, this one's a certified brain-and-heart twister. Tune in on Tata Play Binge and relive one of Aamir's most iconic transformations.

Jab Tak Hai Jaan

Romance meets sacrifice in this soulful drama from Yash Chopra's legendary lens. Shah Rukh Khan stars as Samar, a bomb disposal expert who's torn between past heartbreak and present love. With Katrina Kaif and Anushka Sharma lighting up the screen, Jab Tak Hai Jaan is a sweeping love story set across London and Ladakh with a poetic reminder that true love never dies. Stream this eternal tale of passion and pain and Yash Chopra's last directorial brilliance on Tata Play Binge. Bajrangi Bhaijaan

## Demise of Three Boys Tragic: Chittoor MP Daggumalla Prasad Rao Expresses Deep Condolences""•Assures Government Support to Bereaved Families"



"June 6 Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema co-ordinator ""Chittoor Member of Parliament, "Daggumalla Prasad Rao", today expressed profound sorrow and distress over the tragic drowning of three young boys from Motlapalli village, Krishnapuram Panchayat, in V. Kota Mandal, located within his Chittoor parliamentary constituency. The incident occurred when the boys reportedly went for a swim in a local pond. ""Currently in Delhi, MP Daggumalla Prasad Rao was deeply saddened upon learning the details of the unfortunate incident through local TDP leaders. He was informed that Kushal, Nikhil, and Jagan, all residents of Motlapalli, had tragically lost their lives during a recreational swim. ""On this somber occasion, the MP directed local leaders to provide immediate support and stand firmly by the victim's families during their time of immense grief. He also extended his heartfelt assurance that the government would provide all necessary assistance and stand by the affected families. ""MP Daggumalla Prasad Rao further conveyed his sincerest condolences to the families of the deceased. He also took the opportunity to urge parents to exercise utmost caution and vigilance regarding their children's safety to prevent such tragic incidents in the future.

## Academic Imposture Unmasked: AISF Demands Immediate Sealing of Narayana Junior College for Alleged Coaching Racketeering

\* Student Body Alleges Egregious Financial Exploitation and Regulatory Breaches; Calls for Criminal Action and Widespread Investigation"" June 6 Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema co-ordinator ""The All India Students' Federation (AISF) today spearheaded a vociferous demonstration outside the Narayana Junior College at M.R. Palli Circle in Tirupati, asserting that the institution is surreptitiously functioning as an unsanctioned coaching hub. The student body vehemently demanded the immediate sealing of the premises and stringent legal action against its management. ""Speaking amidst the fervent protest, AISF State Assistant Secretary \*Bandi Chalapathi, alongside District President \*\*Uday Kumar, lambasted the Narayana Educational Institutions for their purported blatant disregard of governmental directives. They accused the management of engaging in a pervasive "coaching mafia," systematically extracting exorbitant fees, reportedly ranging from \*?1,50,000 to \*?2,60,000\*\* per student, for intensive coaching modules ostensibly geared towards NEET, EAMCET, and IIT examinations. ""The student leaders further illuminated the alleged deceptive stratagems employed, wherein parents are lured by res-



plendent banners and alluring pamphlets only to discover, post-admission, mandatory and non-negotiable purchases of study materials, uniforms, and books, coercively amounting to an additional \*?22,000\* per student. A glaring contravention of Intermediate Board stipulations was highlighted: the said institutions, under the veneer of junior colleges, purportedly conduct year-long coaching regimens, relegating actual intermediate curriculum instruction to a mere three-month pre-examination period. This modus operandi, AISF contended, not only constitutes a significant "tax evasion scheme" but also represents a monumental "deception of unsuspecting parents". ""Chalapathi declared AISF's intent to esca-

late their agitation, vowing that commencing tomorrow, activists would proceed to Narayana's ancillary facilities within the city, including designated book sales points, to effectuate their closure and summon Education Department officials for official sealing. He affirmed AISF's commitment to systematically identify and address all unsanctioned Narayana Junior Colleges and school infrastructures, initiating daily protest iterations. Looking ahead, a pivotal round table conference, inviting all student organizations, is slated for Monday at GSK Bhavan in Bairagi Pattada to coalesce a comprehensive, district-wide action plan against the Narayana Educational Institutions. ""In a significant validation of AISF's griev-

ances, a government official from the Regional Intermediate Officer (RIO) office, who visited the Narayana coaching center at M.R. Palli Circle during the protest, corroborated the allegations. Following direct interaction with students, the official ascertained the absence of requisite official permissions for the building's operations as a junior college, distinct from a mere coaching entity. Consequently, official notices were promptly issued to the management, mandating the immediate cessation of all academic activities from tomorrow onwards. ""The demonstration garnered robust participation from key AISF stalwarts including Chandra Naik, Om Raj, Vinay, Vishnu, Grace, Siddu, and various city leaders.

## OPPO K13x: A Durable Performer, Coming Soon



GNS News Agency, June 6

Hyderabad: OPPO is all set to introduce the newest addition to its K Series lineup—the OPPO K13x 5G. Designed for users who demand resilience and performance in equal measure, the K13x brings a durability-first approach to India's competitive mid-range smartphone segment.

Engineered to support the dynamic needs of today's youth, the K13x reflects OPPO's commitment to crafting devices that go beyond the ordinary—offering dependable performance, lasting build quality, and smooth everyday functionality. With durability at its core, the OPPO K13x continues the brand's legacy of delivering value-driven innovations tailored for Indian consumers. The smartphone is designed to seamlessly balance strength, design, and practicality—empowering users to do more, every day. Stay tuned as OPPO gears up to unveil a device that's not just smart, but strong.

OPPO K13x – Coming Soon. Stay tuned! OPPO is a leading global smart device brand. Since the launch of its first mobile phone - "Smiley Face" - in 2008, OPPO has been in relentless pursuit of the perfect synergy of aesthetic satisfaction and innovative technology. Today, OPPO provides a wide range of smart devices spearheaded by the Find and Reno series. Beyond devices, OPPO also provides its users with ColorOS operating system and internet services. OPPO has footprints in more than 70 countries and regions, with more than 40,000 employees dedicated to creating a better life for customers around the world.

## PhonePe to Launch UPI Payments for New Feature Phone Users



Hyderabad: PhonePe Limited ("PhonePe"), today announced an IP purchase of conversational engagement platform Gupshup's proprietary "GSPay" technology stack for enabling UPI-based payments for feature phones.

GSPay is a mobile application built on top of NPCI's UPI payment solution for feature phones (UPI 123PAY). PhonePe plans to customize and extend this recently acquired GSPay IP and launch its own feature-phone based UPI payment mobile app on new feature phones in India, over the next few quarters. PhonePe aims to provide all basic UPI features such as P2P transfers, offline QR payments, and receiving of money from any other UPI customer to their mobile numbers or self-QRs seamlessly. The ambition is to create full payment interoperability between feature phone and smartphone users and bring crores of Indians who still use feature phones into the Indian digital payments ecosystem. Speaking on this acquisition Sameer Nigam, Co-Founder and CEO at PhonePe said, "We are excited about acquiring the GSPay technology stack and using it to bring UPI payments to India's extensive feature phone user base.

This segment of users has been historically underserved by the digital financial industry and the broader startup ecosystem. We hope we can enable crores of these feature phone customers to participate in India's burgeoning digital payments market." According to industry data, India had approximately 24 Crore feature phone users in 2024, and an additional ~15 Crore feature phone shipments are expected over the next five years. This represents a significant opportunity in bringing users who have so far been left out of the digital payments ecosystem into the fold, thereby driving financial inclusion.

## IET India Scholarship Award: applications close on June 22

Hyderabad: The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) has announced that applications for the 9th edition of the IET India Scholarship Award, one of the country's most prestigious honours for undergraduate engineers, will now close on June 22, extending the opportunity by three additional weeks.

Established in 2013, the IET India Scholarship Award was created with the vision of identifying and supporting engineering students who not only excel academically but also demonstrate a deep commitment to innovation and solving real-world problems. The 2025 edition offers a total prize pool of Rs 10 lakhs, with the national winner receiving Rs 3,00,000, in addition to significant exposure at major industry events, mentorship opportunities, and national recognition.



## Journalist Leaders Met Newly Appointed TTD Chief Vigilance & Security Officer“



“June 6 Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema co-ordinator ““Journalist leaders from the Andhra Pradesh Media Federation and prominent senior journalists today extended their

congratulations to “Murali Krishna”, who has recently assumed charge as the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (CVSO) for the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD). The meeting took place on Friday. “Among those who met with Officer Krishna were Andhra Pradesh Media Federation leaders “Kallupalli Surendhar Reddy, Tirupal, and Parandhama Reddy, alongside veteran journalists “Mabbu Narayana Reddy and Tiruchanur Ravi”. “During the cordial interaction, the journalist representatives assured Officer Krishna of their unwavering cooperation in upholding and safeguarding the sacred sanctity of Tirumala Tirupati. They further emphasized their commitment to collaborating closely with the new CVSO, stating that by incorporating the valuable insights and opinions of local senior journalists, they collectively aim to further enhance TTD’s esteemed reputation.

## Tiruchanur Arya Vysyas Offer Sare to Goddess Gangamma with Devotion“



“June 6 Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema co-ordinator ““On Friday, marking the occasion of the Tiruchanur Gangamma Jatara (festival), local Arya Vysya community members, under the auspices of the “Sri Padmavathi Arya Vysya Nityannadana Seva Samajam”, reverently offered ‘Sare’ (a traditional offering) to the Goddess. They also presented ‘Pongal’ as an offering and fulfilled their vows. “On this occasion, “Thanakonda Satish Kumar” stated that this tradition of offering Sare to the Goddess was being initiated for the very first time, and they intend to continue it every year. Following the rituals, prasadam was distributed to the devotees. “The event saw the participation of Secretary Satish, Treasurer Ravi, Mahila Mandal President Kumari, Mahila Kiranala President Ramya, Yuva Kiranala President Kalyan, along with Aparna, Reddemma, Indira, Pavani Kala, Kusuma, Vijayababu, and other community members.

## Manthani PACS Attains Pinnacle of Paddy Procurement in Peddapalli District for Fifth Consecutive Year

“PS Ashokan“Indian Chronicle“Manthani June,6““The Manthani Primary Agricultural Cooperative Society (PACS) has once again surpassed all previous records, emerging as the undisputed frontrunner in paddy procurement across Peddapalli district. For the fifth consecutive year, the society has exhibited unparalleled operational excellence, logistical proficiency, and unwavering commitment to farmer welfare. “In the Rabi 2025 season, Manthani PACS orchestrated the procurement of a staggering 4,26,860 quintals of paddy—setting a historic benchmark and reaffirming its status as a model cooperative institution. This monumental achievement translated into an impressive business turnover of ₹98.46 crore, benefiting a vast cohort of 5,148 farmers through 35 strategically-operated procurement centers. “Speaking on the occasion, Sri Kotha Srinivas, Chairman of the Single Window System, lauded the meticulous planning, integrated coordination, and proactive governance that enabled such a seamless and transparent procurement process. He expressed profound gratitude to Hon’ble Minister for IT, Industries, and Legislative Affairs, Sri Duddilla Sridhar Babu, whose visionary leadership and relentless advocacy ensured the elimination of exploitative deductions by rice millers—thus safeguarding every grain of the farmers’ hard-earned produce. “This exceptional performance is a culmination of collaborative synergy involving the District Collector, Cooperative Department, Civil Supplies officials, and various line departments including Revenue, Agriculture, Police, and Marketing authorities. Their unified effort ensured a procurement operation marked



by efficiency, integrity, and inclusivity. “Over the past five years, Manthani PACS has not only set but consistently redefined district-level procurement standards, demonstrating institutional resilience, administrative foresight, and farmer-first ideology. The cooperative’s journey is a testament to the transformative power of rural institutions when empowered with the right leadership, infrastructure, and policy support. “The society also extended heartfelt appreciation to board members, public representatives, hamalis (porters), cooperative staff, and the entire farming community whose trust, cooperation, and perseverance have been the cornerstone of this continued success.

## Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu Extends a Lifeline with 75,000 CMRF Assistance to Ailing Begumpet Resident.



“PS Ashokan“Indian Chronicle“Manthani June,6““In a heartfelt gesture exemplifying compassion and swift governance, Hon’ble Minister for IT, Industries, and Legislative Affairs, Shri Duddilla Sridhar Babu Garu, has sanctioned a Chief Minister’s Relief Fund (CMRF) grant of ₹75,000 to aid Ms. Ayithoju Ramya, a resident of Begumpet village, Ramagiri Mandal, under Manthani Constituency, who is currently undergoing critical medical treatment at NIMS Hospital, Hyderabad. “Upon receiving a request regarding Ms. Ramya’s deteriorating health and urgent need for financial support, Minister Sridhar Babu acted without delay, ensuring the allocation of necessary funds through CMRF. Demonstrating both empathy and administrative efficiency, the

sanctioned Letter of Credit (LOC) was formally handed over by the Minister’s aides at the MLA Camp Office in Hyderabad. “The family of Ms. Ramya expressed their profound gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to the Minister for standing by them in a time of dire need, easing their financial burden, and reinforcing faith in public service. “> “The Healing Hand of Duddilla – A Beacon of Hope for the Underprivileged” “Minister Sridhar Babu’s unwavering commitment to the welfare of the people continues to resonate across Manthani Constituency, earning him admiration as a true champion of the marginalized and a steadfast pillar of support in times of adversity.

## University of Hyderabad announces recruitment

Hyderabad: The University of Hyderabad (UoH) has announced recruitment for teacher vacancies in its campus school.

Applications are invited from the eligible candidates for the posts of Post Graduate Teacher (PGT), Trained Graduate Teacher (TGT), and Primary Teacher (PRT) on a contractual basis only. Candidates desirous of applying for the post are required to attend a walk-in interview by submitting an application duly filled in along with a set of self-attested copies of testimonials as per the details hosted on the UoH website <https://uohyd.ac.in/>.

## Revenue conferences as platforms for resolving land issues: Collector Jitesh V. Patil.



“Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem, June 6 (Indian Chronicle) District Collector Jitesh V. Patil has instructed officials to make Bhubharati revenue conferences platforms for resolving revenue- and land-related issues. The Collector inspected the revenue conference being held in Mittagudem village of Ashwapuram mandal on Friday. On this occasion, the Collector himself inquired about the problems of the applicants who came to the conference. He inquired from the officials about how many applications were received and whether they were being registered online. He advised them to be careful in recording the details without any room for mistakes. He ordered that receipts be provided for the applications received and the details be written in the relevant registers. The collector inspected the application reception, help desks, and registers and made several suggestions. He said that the applications should be divided according to the problem and records should be kept properly. He said that the applications that could be resolved at the Tahsildar level should be resolved immediately. The collector said that revenue conferences will be held in all villages till June 20th and that people with land issues should attend these conferences and submit applications. He suggested that every application submitted by the people should be accepted in the conferences and that the positive issues should be resolved on the spot as much as possible. He said that if the terms of resolving the issue are not agreed upon, the applicant should be informed in a clear and understandable manner. He advised the revenue teams not to turn away applicants repeatedly under any circumstances and to be sensitive to those who come to submit applications at the conference. He suggested that the applications should be examined thoroughly and resolved based on complete records. After the conclusion of these revenue conferences, an inquiry should be conducted at the field level, and keeping this in mind, he said that there should be no room for errors in the recording of details. The Collector said that complete justice should be done to the deserving people with a positive attitude, and only then will the government’s goal of providing a permanent solution to land issues be achieved by making the organization of Bhubharati Revenue Conferences



meaningful. Later, the Collector made the Panchayat staff and villagers aware of biochar at the Mittagudem Gram Panchayat Dumping Yard. Speaking on the occasion, the collector said that holes should be made in the bottom of the empty drum to allow air to enter. He said that this drum should be placed between three cement rings and dried leaves should be placed at the bottom and set on fire. Dried and useless plant parts were placed in the top, and the drum was closed. The Collector revealed that the charcoal formed when the plants burnt in low oxygen in the middle of the rings are cooled before they turn into ash is called biochar. He said that if this is powdered and used in the fields, the yield of crops will increase, and if animal urine is added to it, it will give good results. He explained that it has uses such as increasing biomass in the soil, increasing water storage capacity, reducing the need for fertilizers, reducing the adverse effects of climate change, and making the soil stable. The collector suggested that the Panchayat officials should take steps in that direction by selling the fertilizers prepared in this way. Later, the Collector visited the Korramenu fish farming unit run by a farmer named Korsa Soni in the same village. The collector congratulated Soni and her husband, Durga Rao, for successfully running this unit. Speaking on this occasion, the collector requested that more fish farming units be set up in the district and that Soni and her husband, Durga Rao, cooperate in training the farmers for this. On this occasion, the Collector congratulated the staff who encouraged the farmers to dig farm ponds through the Employment Guarantee Scheme. Later, while the Collector was traveling through Bangaru Gudem village as part of his tour of Karakagudem mandal, the Collector stopped and examined the Vipra seeds scattered along the road. Talking to the tribal women there, he asked them how oil is made from Vipra seeds. In how many ways are Vipra flowers used? He distributed notebooks and pens to the children of the village and interacted with them and inquired about their well-being. The Collector was accompanied on this visit by the Ashwapuram Tahsildar, Revenue staff APO Seetharamaiah, T. A. Venkatesh, F. A. Ramesh, Surf APM Satyanarayana, C. C. Soubarani, and Panchayat officers, secretaries, and others.

## Children should be admitted to government schools: District Collector Jitesh V. Patil.



Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem, June 6 (Indian Chronicle) It is the responsibility of all of us to admit children only to government schools and provide them with a golden future, said District Collector Jitesh V. Patil. On Friday, the Collector participated as the chief guest in the Gram Sabha organized at Karakagudem Zilla Parishad High School as part of the inauguration of the Badibata program. Speaking on the occasion, the collector advised that government schools provide quality education with all kinds of facilities and that parents do not need to spend money unnecessarily to buy education. He said that the government is working to provide all the facilities in government schools on par with corporate schools. In this context, he said that there is a need to strengthen them by admitting children to government schools. He said that free textbooks, notebooks, uniforms, and midday meals are provided to students in government schools. The Collector said that all facilities, like teaching in English medium, free medical examinations, and teaching by teachers with the highest edu-



cational qualifications, are being provided. “He said that Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayam in Karakagudem is being inaugurated this academic year. All arrangements have been completed for the inauguration ceremony, and since students from different places will be admitted to this school, we should treat them like our own children and work towards the development of the school. The Collector said that it is our district’s good fortune that the best quality education in the country is available to the students of Bhadradi Kothagudem district through Navodaya Vidyalayam. He inspected the ongoing work of setting up Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayam and instructed the concerned officials to complete all the work by June 12 and make the school ready for the commencement of the school. “District Education Officer Venkateswara Chari, Karakagudem Tahsildar, District Academic Coordinator Nagaraju Shekhar, Karakagudem Mandal Education Officer Manjula, Education Engineering DE, AE, Mandal Federation members, villagers, and parents of the students participated in the program.

## TUDA Chairman and TTD Ex-Officio Member Offers Prayers at Sri Padmavathi Ammavari Temple“



“June 6 Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema co-ordinator “Dollars Diwakar Reddy, in his capacity as both the Chairman of the Tirupati Urban Development Authority (TUDA) and an Ex-Officio Member of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), today visited the “Sri Padmavathi Ammavari Temple” in Tiruchanur with his family. “Upon their



arrival, TUDA Chairman Diwakar Reddy and his family received a grand welcome from Temple Deputy Executive Officer “P. Harindranath” and Temple Inspector “Prasad, who then facilitated their darshan. He began by offering prayers at the temple’s Dwajastambham (flagpole) before participating in the sacred “Kumkumarchana Seva” for Goddess Padmavathi. Following the darshan, priests offered Vedic blessings at the Veda Ashirvachanam Mandapam, and temple officials presented him with Ammavari Teertha Prasadam. “Speaking to the media outside the temple, “Chairman Diwakar Reddy” expressed his immense joy at visiting Sri Padmavathi Ammavari for the first time since assuming his role as TUDA Chairman. He pledged to further develop Tiruchanur, which falls under TUDA’s jurisdiction, in the coming years. He also assured that improved facilities would be provided to devotees to enhance the spiritual ambience. “Mr. Diwakar Reddy conveyed his perpetual gratitude to Chief Minister “Nara Chandrababu Naidu” and Minister “Nara Lokesh” for entrusting him with the opportunity to serve as TUDA Chairman. Earlier, prominent TDP leaders from Tiruchanur also grandly felicitated Dollars Diwakar Reddy.



# Bengal man roams the streets of Basanti with the severed head of his sister-in-law, surrenders at the local police station

GNS News Agency,June 6

BengalAccording to police sources, a dispute relating to the family property had been brewing between the two sides for some time now.The residents of Basanti in the South 24 Parganas witnessed the horrifying sight of a man carrying a severed head of a woman in one hand and a chopper in the other hand on Saturday morning.The deceased has been identified as Sati Mondal, the wife of the elder brother of the accused Bimal Mondal, both residents of Bharatgarh in Basanti block.

Eyewitnesses said they saw the two arguing in the field, and then, suddenly, Bimal Mondal took out the chopper and attacked his sister-in-law, who died on the spot. Thereafter, Bimal Mondal headed to the local police station to surrender, carrying the murder weapon and the severed head, while the headless body lay on the field.Palab Chandra Dhal, Superintendent of Police, Baruipur Police District, told

# Delhi Police nab 2 cybercriminals for ‘duping’ retired Army colonel of Rs 41.45 lakh

.GNS News Agency,June 6

The duo, identified as Rahim Khan and Indra Kumar Sahani, were scamming people under the guise of online gold trading and were arrested following raids in Ahmedabad.The case came to light when the complainant, a retired colonel residing in Vasant Kunj, reported that he had been lured into a bogus digital gold trading platform through WhatsApp. The platform, hosted on a website resembling a legitimate investment portal, promised high returns. Initial investments were converted into dollars at a fixed rate and displayed as profits on the website dashboard. As his earnings supposedly grew, the victim was encouraged to invest more, eventually sinking Rs 41.45 lakh into the scheme. However, when he sought to withdraw his supposed profits – now claimed to be over Rs 1 crore – he was pressured to pay an additional Rs 31.5 lakh as ‘tax’ before he could withdraw any of his profits.

A First Information Report (FIR) was registered under sections 318(4) (cheating), 319(2) (cheating by impersonation), and 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. “Using technical surveillance, digital footprints, and analysis of money trail, the team identified the accused operating from different hotels in Gujarat. The suspects used WhatsApp with fake identities, conducted frauds from hotel rooms in Ahmedabad, and dealt with mule account holders from across India who were brought in person to the hotels,” said Surendra Choudhary, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South West, Delhi Police.During raids, Indra Kumar Sahani, 36, was apprehended and found in possession of three mobile phones filled with incriminating data. Further leads led to the arrest of Rahim Khan, 24,

# Delhi Police make one more arrest in espionage case

GNS News Agency,June 6

The Delhi Police arrested one more person from Rajasthan on Friday in connection with the espionage case registered with the Special Cell, officials said.The police identified the latest arrested accused as Mohammad Hasin, the elder brother of Kasim, a resident of Deeg who was arrested on Thursday in the case. Hasin had been called in for questioning and was arrested on Friday night after interrogation, the police said.

A police officer said that during questioning, Hasin allegedly said that he had been in touch with ISI officers for the past four years. He had visited Pakistan several times and was the one who connected Kasim with them, the officer added. Kasim has been accused of being in touch with ISI officers and undergoing training in Pakistan for a month

# Heartfelt Tributes Paid to Telangana Martyr Gunda Nagaraju on His 12th Death Anniversary



.”PS Ashokan”Indian Chronicle”Manthani June,6”“In a solemn and heartfelt ceremony, the 12th death anniversary of Telangana martyr Sri Gunda Nagaraju, a proud son of the Arya Vaishya community who laid down his life for the cause of a separate Telangana state, was observed with great reverence today. The event was organized under the leadership of Sri Ellanki Vamsidhar, President of the Town Arya Vaishya Sangham.”“The program began with floral tributes to the martyr, followed by emotional speeches recalling Sri Nagaraju’s heroic sacrifice and his unwavering commitment to the Telangana movement. His memory continues to serve as an inspiration to the youth and the entire Vaishya community.”“A large number of Vaishya community members, including senior leaders, youth, and local dignitaries, participated in the event. Speakers emphasized the importance of remembering the sacrifices made during the Telangana struggle and the need to carry forward the spirit of unity, courage, and service to society.”“Special prayers were offered for the peace of the departed soul, and a moment of silence was observed in his honor. The event was marked by a deep sense of respect, patriotism, and pride in the contribution of the community to the state’s history.”“On behalf of our family, we extend our sincere gratitude to all the members of the Town

The Indian Express, “The accused has been detained, we are investigating the motive, and all necessary legal action will be taken.”According to police sources, a dispute relating to the family property had been brewing between the two sides for some time now.

They added that the son of the accused absconded after the murder, although the wife of the accused has been informally put under house arrest.Bimal Mondal reportedly showed no remorse when he surrendered before the police.An eyewitness also said that the accused was heard cursing the victim and her husband on his way to the police station. “He screamed that he had paid back for the injustice done to him for so many years. His rage was so intense that no one dared to stop him while he was roaming around with the weapon and the severed head, though some passers-by captured the video on their mobile phones,” he added.



who was also using two mobile phones linked to the crime, said the police.According to the police, the investigation revealed that Sahani had opened multiple current accounts and sold them to the scammers in exchange for commissions. Meanwhile, Khan, acting as a key facilitator, managed mule account holders and liaised with Chinese operatives via Telegram. These operatives reportedly controlled Indian bank accounts remotely using SIM-enabled devices with special apps, turning them into tools for cyber fraud.”Secret groups were made on WhatsApp and Telegram and operated through fake WhatsApp numbers. So far, 30-35 mule accounts have been traced to them. The accused Rahim Khan had booked a hotel, and account holders from all over India visited and stayed there specifically for the operation of their accounts and to receive commission,” the DCP further said.It is also suspected that the accused received commissions in cryptocurrency from their international handlers, suggesting a larger network of cross-border cybercriminals.

last year.Hasin’s mobile phone and other gadgets have been seized and sent to a forensic lab, the police said.

Kasim allegedly admitted to receiving Rs 2 lakh in Pakistani currency in instalments to execute spying activities in India, a police officer said. According to the police, Kasim was working in the guise of a maulana while simultaneously providing vital information about military establishments to Pakistan. He was also in touch with a few people in Pakistan through different social media platforms, the police alleged.

Sources also alleged that he had spoken to a few people in Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, India’s retaliatory response after the Pahalgam attack, where it carried out strikes in nine terror locations across Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Arya Vaishya Sangham, participants, and supporters who made this event a grand success. Their dedication and unity in honoring Sri Gunda Nagaraju reflect the strength and values of the Vaishya community.

# Applications are invited for self-employment courses: Project Officer B. Rahul”“Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem,

June 6 (Indian Chronicle):Integrated Tribal Development Organization, Bhadrachalam, is inviting applications for providing free training for one to two months for employment/self-employment courses in solar panel technician, photography & videography, and heavy motor vehicle driving to unemployed tribal youth of Bhadradi Kothagudem and Khammam districts, said Bhadrachalam ITDA Project Officer B. Rahul in a statement on Friday.Therefore, he requested that tribal youth who have studied in class 10 and above should apply for training at the Youth Training Center in the ITDA Bhadrachalam premises on the 13th of this month at 9 am with caste, Aadhaar card, passport photo, study documents (a Light Motor Vehicle License & Badge Number are mandatory for Heavy Motor Vehicle Driving Training), and contact 8143840906 or 6302608905 for other details.



# From costumes for shows to bridal gowns, how Pune’s Mak Drap has evolved to meet demands over 74 years



GNS News Agency,June 6

Mak Drap, a costume rental store located in Pune’s Narayan Peth, has been in operation since 1951. Established by Pranam Gokhale, a Maharashtrian businessman who wanted to explore a new field, the store is now run by his nephew, Sumit Sathe.Explaining the name of one of the oldest costume rental stores in the city, Sathe says, “Mak Drap is two words put together — ‘mak’ meaning makeup and ‘drap’ meaning drape, referring to costumes. Performers use makeup and colourful clothes to showcase themselves, and that’s what we want to provide.”

Sathe started working at Mak Drap at the age of 25. He inherited the business from his parents, Bhagyashree and Ramchandra Sathe, who ran it alongside Gokhale. “In the old days, costume rentals weren’t common in Pune,” Sathe says. “There were many shows and performances, so the idea was to explore an untouched field. That is how the store began,” he explains. “We are a family business. Even the workers here are like family because of how long they have stayed with us. I wouldn’t consider anyone an outsider.”According to Sathe, Mak Drap houses over 50,000 costume sets and more than double that number in props. “We have lost count. The variety of costumes we provide is endless, and so are the sizes,” Sathe says. Most costumes are stitched in-house by long-time tailors and designers at their warehouse in Dhayari, who have been as-

sociated with the store since the beginning. Other costumes are sourced from across India, including Delhi and Gujarat.

Mak Drap offers a wide variety of costumes, with Barabandi and Navari sarees standing out as their signature pieces. “Besides these, we also have chanya cholis, dhoti-kurtas, animal costumes for school plays, and uniforms like police and prisoner outfits, amongst others, which are quite popular,” says Sathe.He points out that while the designs have remained largely consistent, the main difference over the years has been in the fabric and materials used. “Earlier, there were fewer options. Now, with better trade networks and access to textiles, the costumes are far more authentic and appealing,” he explains.The store’s offerings have evolved alongside changing customer preferences. In addition to traditional and stage wear, Mak Drap now provides bridal and groom rentals, western outfits, evening gowns, and more. “This shift in demand is what inspired us to start new branches, including the New Mak Drap which offers these rentals,” Sathe says.

Costume rentals at Mak Drap typically range from Rs 500 to Rs 3,000 per day, depending on the type of outfit. A refundable security deposit of half the rental price is required. “If customers return the costume on time and in good condition, we refund the deposit. If it is late, deductions are made. If not returned at all, the deposit is retained as the costume’s value,” Sathe explains.Sathe believes the costume rental industry remains deeply relevant. “One might think the costume business is dying, but it’s not. Stage performances are ongoing, and people regularly need costumes.”

Over the years, Mak Drap has supplied costumes for numerous stage and screen productions, including the Marathi historical film on Hambirrao Mohite, the TV show Paaru, and the popular movie Fauji, among others. The store caters to school drama groups, dance academies, festival performances, and professional theatre productions.As Mak Drap enters its 75th year, Sathe reflects on the journey: “Our foundation is built on tradition, trust, and the performing arts. With my nephew now joining the business, the legacy is set to continue for years to come.”

# Yoga Andhra 2025 Preparatory Programs Grandly Held at Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam

”June 6 Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema co-ordinator”“As part of the prestigious “Yoga Andhra 2025” program being conducted statewide, the teaching staff of Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam enthusiastically participated in a yoga session today, performing various yogasanas.”“

On this occasion, Vice-Chancellor \*Professor V. Uma\* stated that daily online yoga programs are being conducted from 6:30 AM to 7:30 AM throughout this month, in addition to yoga sessions held within the university. She also mentioned that these programs are being extended to external participants through the Physical Education department. Professor Uma emphasized that yoga is essential for everyone to maintain mental and physical strength in their daily lives.”“A large number of teaching faculty participated in this program, making it a grand success. The event



was attended by Registrar \*Professor N. Rajini\*, Deans of various departments, and Heads of Departments.

# Harish takes charge as ITDA EE Tribal Welfare.”

“Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem, June 6 (Indian Chronicle):“Harish has taken charge as EE Tribal Welfare (Full Additional Responsibilities) in the Bhadrachalam ITDA Engineering Department.On Friday, he said that he was performing duties as DE in the ITDA Engineer’s Office, Bhadrachalam, and was appointed as Bhadrachalam ITDA EE Tribal Welfare (Full Additional Responsibilities) on the orders of ITDA PO Rahul. He said that he worked as an AEE in Bhupalpally Eturu Nagaram ITDA from 07 July 2013 to 2016 and worked in Palvancha Division in 2018. After being promoted as DEE, he worked in Aswaraopet in October 2019 and took charge as DEE in Bhadrachalam ITDA in February 2021. The office staff congratulated Harish on joining the streets as Incharge Tribal Welfare. He said that he will do his best for the welfare of the tribals in the performance of his duties, and for that, he thanked everyone, saying that he would like to thank the DEs, AEs, and staff of the engineering department for co-operating with him.



# Staff should ensure that pregnant women give birth in government hospitals. ITDA Project Officer B. Rahul“



“Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem, June 6 (Indian Chronicle):Supervisors, ANMs, and ASHA workers working under PHCs should coordinate and take special responsibility to ensure that pregnant women who come to PHCs do not go to private hospitals and give birth in government hospitals, said ITDA Project Officer B. Rahul. He participated in a special meeting organized with medical staff and ASHA workers at the Primary Health Center in Charla Mandal on the occasion of ASHA Day on Friday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that there is a possibility of seasonal diseases due to climate change, and health supervisors, ANMs, and ASHA workers should take special care of pregnant tribal women and young children in the villages under their jurisdiction in coordination. He said that pregnant women who have completed their months should be identified and brought to PHCs immediately for medical examinations, that doctors and medical staff should not encourage them to go to private hospitals even by mistake, and that normal delivery should be ensured in PHCs.

He said that the details of pregnant women who have completed their months should be known in sub-centers. He said that the tribals should be made aware of keeping the surroundings clean in the villages that you visit and that the tribals should be informed from house to house to keep the surroundings clean from time to time so that there is no garbage on the roads and dirty water in the drainages and that precautions should be taken for tribal families from time to time, as the accumulation of garbage and dirty water leads to the spread of mosquitoes and the spread of typhoid, malaria, dengue, and other seasonal diseases.



# HC upholds discharge of Haryana probationary judge: ‘deemed confirmation a perilous concept’



GNS News Agency,June 6

Haryana probationary judgeThe Administrative Committee had recommended that his services be dispensed with, a view endorsed by the Full Court and conveyed to the government, culminating in the discharge order.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has upheld the dismissal of former probationary civil judge (junior division) Ankur Lal, rejecting his plea against a decade-old discharge order over integrity concerns and unsatisfactory performance. The ruling, pronounced on Thursday by a bench comprising Chief Justice Sheel Nagu and Justice Sumeet Goel, dismissed Lal’s writ petition challenging the decision of the high court’s Full Court, which recommended his discharge on July 23, 2012. Acting on these recommendations, the Haryana Government issued an order on December 4, 2012, terminating his probationary services.Lal had approached the high court through Civil Writ Petition No. 17822 of 2013, seeking to quash both the Full Court’s recommendation and the discharge order. He had served as a probationary civil judge from 2009 to 2012, but his service record reflected multiple adverse remarks. These in-

cluded a ‘B-Satisfactory’ rating in 2009–10, a ‘C–Below Average’ rating with the remark “integrity doubtful” in 2010–11, and a ‘B–Average’ rating in 2011–12, during which the Bar Association of Ferozepur Jhirka submitted an anonymous complaint against him.The Administrative Committee had recommended that his services be dispensed with, a view endorsed by the Full Court and conveyed to the government, culminating in the discharge order.In court, Lal argued that under Rule 7.3 of the Punjab Civil Services (General and Common Conditions of Service) Rules, 1994, he was entitled to deemed confirmation upon completion of three years of probation, especially in light of available vacancies. The bench rejected this argument, holding that deemed confirmation requires both a permanent vacancy and satisfactory service—neither of which was applicable in Lal’s case.Emphasising the importance of integrity in the judiciary, the bench observed in its judgment: “The concept of probation is to enable the Employer to analyse the work, conduct and behaviour of the appointee... This power cannot be taken away... Deemed confirmation is a perilous concept in service jurisprudence...”

“If deemed confirmation is brought into play... then an anomalous situation would arise where the probationer, despite being unfit, is deemed to be confirmed, bringing into the service a Judge of doubtful integrity. This would be deleterious to the very concept of probity on which the entire judicial system stands,” it added.The court found no procedural irregularity in the discharge decision and ordered that Lal’s Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) be returned to the relevant branch.With this ruling, the high court has reinforced the principle that integrity and performance during probation are non-negotiable in judicial appointments, and automatic confirmation cannot override a service record marred by adverse remarks.

# Kolkata police arrest law student from Gurgaon for social media remarks on Operation Sindoor

GNS News Agency,June 6

According to police sources, a case was registered against Panoli at the Garden Reach Police station on May 15.According to police sources, a case was registered against Panoli at the Garden Reach Police station on May 15.A 22-year-old law student from Pune was arrested by the Kolkata police from Gurgaon on Friday afternoon for allegedly hurting religious sentiments with her remarks on Operation Sindoor on social media.

The police identified the student as Sharmistha Panoli. A fourth-year BBA LLB Honours student at Symbiosis Law School, Pune, Panoli had deleted the allegedly offensive post on Instagram and apologised for her remarks on X. She was produced before a Gurgaon court and will be brought to Kolkata on transit remand, officials said.“A complaint was received, and the investigation is going on. As per law, all necessary steps will be taken,” Harikrishna Pai, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Port Division, told According to police sources, a case was registered against Panoli at the Garden Reach Police station on May 15. The FIR was lodged under sections 196(1) (a) promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, caste, or community, 299 (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage the religious feelings of any class of citizens), 352 ( intentional insult with



the intent to provoke a breach of peace), 353(1)(c) (statements that incite public mischief) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.After the FIR was lodged, attempts were made to serve notice as per the law, but the accused and her family had absconded, police sources alleged. Subsequently, a warrant of arrest was issued, based on which she was arrested from Gurgaon, the sources added.In her post on X, Panoli had said, “I do hereby tender my UNCONDITIONAL APOLOGY whatever was put are my personal feelings and i never intentionally wanted to hurt anybody so if anybody is hurt I’m sorry for the same. I expect co-operation and understanding. Henceforth, i will be cautious in my public post. Again please accept my apologies.”

# Close monitoring, early identification: Karnataka issues COVID-19 guidelines for schools ahead of June reopening

GNS News Agency,June 6

economically weaker sections (EWS), disadvantaged groups (DG) category, ews, delhi news, India news, Indian express, Indian express India news, Indian express IndiaAimed at safeguarding the health of students, the guidelines emphasise the need for early identification and isolation of symptomatic children.

In light of the prevailing COVID-19 situation and the scheduled reopening of schools in June, the Karnataka Government has issued a set of precautionary measures to be followed by government and private schools. The move follows a COVID-19 situation review meeting held on May 26, chaired by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.Aimed at safeguarding the health of students, the guidelines emphasise the need for early identification and isolation of symptomatic children. According to the directive, children exhibiting symptoms such as fever, cough, or cold should not be sent to school and must receive appropriate medical care. They must be allowed to return only after their symptoms have completely subsided.Schools have been instructed to closely monitor students and immediately send home any child who displays symptoms while on campus. Parents are to be informed without delay in such cases. The advisory also extends to teaching and non-teaching staff, urging them to take similar precautions and avoid attending



school if they exhibit any sign of illness.In addition to monitoring symptoms, schools are expected to reinforce COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviour (CAB), including proper hand hygiene and cough etiquette. Authorities have called for strict implementation of these safety protocols in the interest of student health. As of May 31, according to the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Karnataka has reported 114 COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours and over 360 cases since January 2025.According to the state health department, one death was reported on May 25 – a 62-year-old man in Mysuru with comorbidities passed away due to septic shock with multiple organ dysfunction syndrome along with COVID pneumonia and hyponatremia (low sodium).

# Karnataka raises legal age to buy tobacco products to 21, bans hookah bars

GNS News Agency,June 6

tobacco ban, smoking, lung cancer deaths, health and wellness, indian expressAmong the key changes, the legal age to purchase cigarettes and other tobacco products in Karnataka has been raised from 18 to 21 years. The Karnataka government on Friday officially notified a sweeping amendment to the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, with stricter measures aimed at curbing tobacco use across the state.The COTPA (Karnataka Amendment) Act, 2024, received presidential assent on May 23 and was published in the state gazette on May 30.

Among the key changes, the legal age to purchase cigarettes and other tobacco products in Karnataka has been raised from 18 to 21 years. Additionally, the sale of tobacco products within 100 metres of any educational institution has been prohibited, and the sale of loose cigarettes or single sticks is no longer allowed.In a significant move to discourage alternative tobacco consumption, the amendment also bans hookah bars across the state. The new Section 4A introduced under the Act prohibits the operation of hookah bars in any premises, including restaurants, pubs, or cafes. Violators operating hookah bars will face imprisonment of one to three years, along with fines

ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh, under the newly added Section 21A.The definition of “use” of tobacco in public places has also been expanded to include both smoking and spitting, with a continued allowance for designated smoking areas in hotels with over 30 rooms, restaurants with seating for more than 30 people, and airports. Also, penalties for violating tobacco use rules in public places have been increased. Fines under sections 21, 24, and 28 of the Act have been raised from Rs 200 to Rs 1,000.

The Karnataka government has stated that the amendment is part of a broader effort to strengthen public health safeguards, particularly for younger populations and in sensitive areas like schools and colleges.In fact, despite a government order banning hookah bars in 2024, many hookah cafes were still illegally operating in suburban areas of Bengaluru. The Central Crime Branch has since identified and raided 20 such establishments, seizing hookah pots and flavours worth over Rs 12 lakh.The Karnataka High Court’s April 2024 ruling also dismissed challenges from restaurant owners, affirming the ban’s legality under Article 47 of the Constitution, which mandates states to protect public health. The court noted that hookah bars, even those offering ‘herbal hookah’, violate regulations due to the presence of harmful substances like nicotine and molasses.

# Why Mumbaikars queue up daily at this 86-year-old iconic vada pav outlet near CST



GNS News Agency,June 6

Around six every evening, a long queue begins to form opposite Mumbai’s Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus. These people aren’t waiting for a bus or a shared taxi, nor are they buying train tickets. About 25-30 individuals — from college-goers and first-jobbers to seasoned professionals — line up outside Aram, eager for hot batata vadas tucked into slightly larger-than-usual ladi pavs. It is their way of keeping hunger at bay until they reach home.“Our VIP guests — customers who come here daily — tell me that one vada pav and a cup of tea keeps them going till dinner,” shared Kaustubh Tambe, 55, the third generation manning the business.

Established in 1939 by Shirang Tambe, known to many as Bhau, Aram is now a city landmark. “My grandfather spotted a shut shop in the Capitol Cinema building. He approached the owners expressing interest in starting an uphar gruha (eatery), and started what was then called Aram Milk Cooperative,” Kaustubh recalled. The initial menu focused on milk-based items such as tea, coffee, basundi, gulab jamun, kheer, and among the early savoury offerings was the batata vada.vada pav mumbai People queuing outside Aram for vada pav. (Express Photo By Ganesh Shirsekar)Eighty-six years later, Aram can seat 48 people at a time and is still rooted in Maharashtra cuisine. Over time, the menu expanded to include dishes like Kothimbir Vadi, a savoury snack made from gram flour and fresh coriander leaves; Thalipeeth, a healthy, multi-grain flatbread made using dozens of ingredients including jowar, bajra and rice flour; and Zunka Bhakri, a dry and spicy gram-flour sabzi paired with a rustic jowar bhakri among many others.My mother, Shree Tambe, personally taught the

kitchen staff these dishes, always insisting on quality ingredients and consistency,” Kaustubh added. “We are also well known for our Upvas (fasting) menu, which includes Sabudana Khichdi, Upvas Misal made from peanuts, and Upvas Pattice made from potato and peanuts. A few years ago, we even introduced an Upvas Thali featuring rajgira puri, batata sabzi, misal, pattice, rajgira roll, banana, and piyush.

The separate vada pav counter, located just outside the main eatery, was introduced in 1995. “Back then, it cost Rs 5. Now it’s Rs 25,” he noted. What keeps the queue growing? “Our vadas are bigger than most. So are our pavs, specially made for us. We use Samrat besan, single-fry the vadas (not double), and cook in refined sunflower oil. The recipe is simple, but the quality and consistency is what built us this reputation.”“It is also the goodwill and management practices of my grandfather, father (Madhav Tambe) and uncle (Madhukar Tambe) that built this place. Most of our staff have been with us for 30-40 years. They feel a sense of apnapan. They know the batata vada must have a thin coating, and if someone new joins, another will step in and guide him.”Inside, it’s a no-frills operation — people eat and leave, making space for the next customer. The staff run like clockwork, especially at the evening vada pav counter, where five people are assigned daily. Rajendra Zavre, who has been with Aram for over three decades, proudly shares that Madhav Sir, now in his 90s, still comes personally to hand over the staff’s bonuses during Diwali.Aram underwent a minor refurbishment last year under the guidance of Kaustubh’s wife Bijal Tambe, ahead of its 85th anniversary. The space was made brighter, ventilation improved, and induction cooking added to the kitchen. But the real shift is yet to come.With patrons from across the city, including celebrities, politicians, real estate moguls, and film personalities, franchise requests have poured in. But Kaustubh is clear: “We can’t hand it to someone else. If we don’t own and run it, the quality might drop, and that’s non-negotiable.”The fourth generation may step in next. While Kaustubh’s older daughter is studying law, his son and younger daughter have expressed interest. “They’ll do their MBA first, work a few years, and then they will join Aram,” he shared.Meanwhile, Kaustubh has started laying the groundwork. “We are setting up a central kitchen to maintain consistency and plan to open another outlet later this year. It will be somewhere between CST and Dadar.” When asked if that’s just the beginning, he smiled and finally shared: “We’ll have 25 outlets across Mumbai in the next three years.”

# Breach in Punjab’s Abohar-Malukpura canal within 24 hours of water release sparks farmers’ fury

GNS News Agency,June 6

Farmers are questioning the efficiency and intent of the canal cleaning operationsFarmers are questioning the efficiency and intent of the canal cleaning operations A 100-foot-wide breach in Punjab’s Abohar-Malukpura canal, reported on the intervening night of Friday and Saturday, widened rapidly to nearly 200 feet, sparking fresh outrage among farmers just as paddy transplantation was set to begin. This distributary, which originates from the Sirhind feeder canal, supplies water to nearly 20 villages in the region. The water supply has now been halted again to facilitate repairs, leaving farmers staring at uncertainty during a critical agricultural window. Though this belt is not a paddy growing belt but still area under paddy is on an increasing trend in this area as well. Moreover, cotton and kinnow farming is also affected due to no water supply following a breach.What has raised serious concerns is the timing of the breach. The canal had been shut for a fortnight for cleaning and was reopened only on Thursday midnight. Less than 24 hours later, a breach was reported.Farmers are questioning the efficiency and intent of the canal cleaning operations. “The cleaning work is doubtful. Why wasn’t the structural strength checked before releasing water?” asked Resham Singh, a local farmer.

“Mud has entered our fields due to the breach, and now we have to clean it before starting transplantation. Our saplings are not even ready, so how are we benefitting from this? This has only disrupted water supply to many villages, including ours. The canal department should stop making lame excuses.”When contacted by The Indian Express, Vinod Suthar, executive engineer of the Fazilka Canal Division, admitted to the breach but maintained that repair work was already underway. “The breach will be plugged within a day. We remove vegetation and other solids during cleaning. The walls of the canal are concrete, but at times rodents make burrows from the outer side, which are not visible during cleaning. This breach has occurred from a point considered structurally strong and had never breached before. We will conduct a thorough inquiry,” he said.

Suthar said that the breach might have helped fields



by flooding them naturally. “The breach has rather benefited the fields by making them ready for transplantation,” he said, adding that further investigation is required to determine the exact cause and impact.However, this explanation hasn’t gone down well with the farming community. “After cleaning, strength checks and inspection for burrows should be done by beldars. They can’t shirk their responsibility,” said Sukhjinder Singh Rajan, an Abohar-based farmer. “This is not the first time. In April, a breach occurred in the Punjawa Minor, and again in May at a different location. Now, after a two-week cleaning drive, a breach happens again? The department is clearly at fault,” he said.Sources in the agriculture sector pointed out that fields earmarked for paddy require waterlogging to create a permeable layer in the soil. While the flooding may appear beneficial, the sudden inundation with muddy canal water creates more problems than solutions—especially when not all farmers are ready for transplantation.With tempers running high and trust in official assurances wearing thin, the latest breach has not only disrupted the irrigation schedule of a key farming belt but also exposed systemic negligence in canal maintenance and post-cleaning inspections.As the count-down to paddy transplantation begins, farmers across Abohar are demanding accountability and a complete review of the canal department’s operational practices.In April, Punjawa minor had suffered a breach which was repeated in May and now Punjawa minor has been put on cleaning for a fortnight.

# Experts to farmers: Punjab’s draft agri policy gets universal thumbs up

GNS News Agency,June 6

PolicyDespite three policy drafts on Agriculture over the past decade, Punjab still lacks an official agriculture policy, said Prof Ranjit Singh Ghuman, a renowned agricultural economist.Even as the state government continues to delay the adoption of its Punjab Agriculture Policy-2023, experts across disciplines have hailed the draft as an excellent document with some limitations that can be removed at the time of implementation. Experts said that the 200-page document offers a comprehensive roadmap for reviving the state’s ailing farm sector.They praised the draft policy for its depth, innovation, and forward-thinking recommendations. They described it as a potential game-changer — if implemented with commitment and urgency.

From scientists to economists and farmer leaders, voices from across the agricultural spectrum have urged the government to act swiftly on the policy.Gurdev Singh Khush, a renowned Indian-American plant geneticist and rice breeder who is known as the ‘Father of Super Rice’, in written communication to the committee members, said that he enjoyed the draft thoroughly.“The chapter on the good old agriculture of the past brought back memories of my childhood. The section on Green Revolution captures how it transformed Indian agriculture. Making Punjab’s farming healthier, profitable, and globally competitive should be a cherished goal. The concept of Natural Growing Areas is insightful. Marketing is rightly emphasised, and institutions like AMRII and IAMS are essential. The chapter on ecosystem and climate change is well-balanced. The alarming water and energy scenario calls for urgent implementation

of the policy’s recommendations. I found the document immensely informative — truly an Encyclopedia of Punjab Agriculture. It reflects months of dedicated work,” said Khush, who has won World Food Prize (1996), Japan Prize, Wolf Prize, and Golden Sickle Awards.

Prof Ranjit Singh Ghuman, a renowned agricultural economist and a member of high-powered committee established by the Supreme Court to address the grievances of farmers, said that despite three policy drafts on Agriculture over the past decade, Punjab still lacks an official agriculture policy.The first draft of 58 pages was submitted in March 2013 but was never adopted. The second draft of 21 pages submitted in 2018 met with the same fate. An 11-member committee headed by Sukhpal Singh submitted a comprehensive draft on October 13, 2023.“While building on earlier efforts, this version includes more detailed and innovative recommendations. It must be implemented,” Ghuman said, adding that the limitations should be addressed, and the policy must align with industrial strategy to tackle rising unemployment and declining agri-sector jobs, while factoring in processing, cooperatives, and market linkages.BKU (Ugrahan) president Joginder Singh Ugrahan also hailed the draft policy and said that the Punjab government should implement it at the earliest.Darshan Pal Singh, president of Krantikari Kisan Union, said that the majority of the recommendations in the 2023 Agricultural Policy are pro-Punjab and pro-farmer. “It should be implemented to address the ongoing agrarian crisis in the state. Along with BKU (Dakaunda) and BKU (Ugrahan), we have demanded that the government adopt this policy. In my opinion, it is a much-needed step forward.” he said.







# Amid a delay in holding Census, vital reports on births and deaths pending since 2020



With the decadal Census exercise pending since 2021 and unlikely to be conducted this year, at least two other key reports on births and deaths in the country have not been released by the Union Home Ministry for the past five years. The “Vital Statistics of India Based on the Civil Registration System” and “The Report on Medical Certification of Cause of Death” were last released for the year 2020. The annual “Crime in India” report by the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) for the year 2023 is also yet to be released.

According to the 2020 Civil Registration System report, Vital Statistics is a compilation of the “occurrence and characteristics of vital events such as births, deaths and stillbirths” recorded across the country, and is “invaluable for planning, monitoring and evaluating various programmes related to primary healthcare, family planning, maternal and child health, and education”, among others. States send their statistics to the Registrar-General of India. In 2023, the Centre enacted The Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023, which mandated that all births and deaths in the country occurring from October 1, 2023 were to be digitally registered through the Central portal crsorgi.gov.in. The Centre hence has access to real-time data.

According to publicly available information, States and Union Territories such as Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi, Chandigarh, Mizoram, Goa, Arunachal Pradesh have published reports till the year 2022. The last published Vital Statistics report for Kerala was for 2021 and Mizoram was the only State to have the report for 2023.

The Census, which was to be conducted in 2020-21, was initially delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic but persistent demands from Opposition parties for caste enumeration appears to have held up the exercise now. According to a senior government official, while deliberations on ways and measures to count caste numbers were held for the past few months, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was not in a hurry

to roll out the Census. Other than Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), caste-wise population had not been enumerated in Independent India. In 2011, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) conducted the first ever caste count under the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC), separate from the Census exercise, but the findings were never made public. According to an affidavit submitted by the Union government in 2021, the SECC data fraught with “mistakes and inaccuracies” had thrown up more than 46 lakh caste names, while the 1931 Census recorded only 4,147 such names. “For the Census to happen this year, the government should have issued the notification by November 2024. The 10-month period for conducting Census in two phases usually starts from April 1 and since it will be the first digital Census, more than 30 lakh enumerators would require fresh training, which takes three to four months,” said a former Census official. No separate allocation for conducting the Census was made in the Union Budget. Another official said though a final decision was awaited, around 24 lakh enumeration blocks were already finalised and training would not require much time as enumerators were trained in 2019 before the first phase of the Census — the House Listing and Housing Schedule — that was to begin from April 1, 2020. According to D. Sathiyavan, Head-in-Charge, Centre For Population Studies, University of Madras, a fresh Census was essential to understand the composition of population and demographic changes in the country. “The Census data in use is 13 years old, fresh census is essential to understand the composition of population, to understand the working age group, household expenditure, demographic profile, population below poverty line and vital parameters such as births and deaths..... the caste details are necessary for implementation of reservation,” Dr. Sathiyavan said. S. Irudaya Rajan, Chair, International Institute of Migration and Development, said that policies were being driven without data. “Only few people are bothered about data. If they [government] wanted to conduct the Census, they should have already started preparations. Policymakers are not interested. The new government came in 2014 and there has been no Census since then,” he said. On February 1, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said this was the first time since Independence that the government had failed to conduct Census on time. “The consequences on the State’s administrative capabilities are serious — one example being 10-12 crore individuals who have been excluded from the ambit of the National Food Security Act/Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. It also means that the Government will most certainly continue to avoid Socio-Economic Caste Census,” Mr. Ramesh had said.

# School students in India fail to apply abstract math in real life scenarios, points out study by Nobel laureates

Teaching practices in India fail to teach school students strategies to do mathematics in real-world settings, according to findings from a study titled Children’s arithmetic skills do not transfer between applied and academic math, published in the journal Nature on Wednesday (February 5, 2025). The study was done by a team of researchers led by Nobel Prize-winning economists Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo. The study divided into three sub-studies recruited 1,436 working children from vegetable markets across Delhi and Kolkata, as well as 471 children with no market-selling experience enrolled in nearby schools, approximately aged between 13 to 15 years.

Speaking to The Hindu about the study, Ms. Duflo said that the idea germinated during one of her visits to India, while on a grocery run she noticed that working children perform complex mental mathematical calculations while selling vegetables in markets with ease, and decided to investigate whether, in the urban Indian context, the arithmetic skills that are used in the markets transfer to the more abstract mathematics skills taught in school.

In the first sub-study, 201 children who sold vegetables were approached by undercover enumerators who purchased unusual quantities like 800 grams of potatoes at ₹20 per kilo, and 1.4 kg of onions at ₹15 per kilo. They would ask for total cost and hand a ₹200 rupee note. They also posed a complete set of abstract math exercises, which 95%, 97%, and 98% were able to answer correctly without need of pen and paper. These children were also presented with hypothetical working transactions based on market-based scenarios with unfamiliar goods, prices and units and 52% of them solved these transactions without help of calculators, pen or paper. While working children solved practical mental math problems of higher complexity with ease, lesser working children, about 32% could solve the division of a three-digit number by a one-digit number, and just 54% of children could solve two subtractions of one two-digit number from another, when presented in pen and paper school format in the Annual State of Education Report (ASER) test proforma, Ms. Duflo explained. Researchers found in the second sub-study of 400 working children across 39 markets that like their Kolkata counterparts, they calculated the amount due and change correctly on the three successive market problems, with 96%, 99% and 97%, succeeding by their second try. However, only 15% could correctly perform division on the written ASER test.

To check if proficiency of maths in schools transfer to real-world situations, the study also tested 200 Delhi school children attending 17 public schools from same zones as



markets, where they were given same written, verbal math problems, and a play-based market was created where school children sold items to enumerators. “Around 56% of school children completed division-level ASER tests, as compared to 15% working children. But they performed poorly in market-based scenarios. 63%, 51% and 69% of school children performed first, second and third transactions correctly despite using pen and paper and all the time they wanted,” the study notes. “In a subsequent study, we raised the complexity level of real-life math problems and only 10% of school children were able to solve for these,” Ms. Duflo said.

In addition to this, a concrete word problem was presented to both school going and working children and mimicked the activity that working children perform, that if a boy who goes to the market with ₹200 and buys some quantities of two vegetables, with a question as to how much money is he left with. “36% working children answered correctly, compared to just 1% non-working school children,” Ms. Duflo added. The study concludes that the pedagogy in place does not teach school students strategies to do math in real-world settings. It also does not take advantage of the fact that market children have developed such strategies on their own. “For instance, if you were to ask a working child to subtract 19 from 27 in an abstract way he may not be able to do it, but if you were to ask how many tomatoes remain if you take away 19 tomatoes from 27, he will perform the task quicker,” Ms. Duflo said. The study says that these findings call for a mathematical pedagogy that addresses translational challenges through a curricula that connects abstract math symbols and concepts to intuitively meaningful contexts and problems. “It also calls for changes in how math is introduced to children, and that pairing intuitive and abstract maths in pre-school, kindergarten and first grade in playway method through group games has durable impact,” Ms. Duflo explains.

# South Korean ministries block Chinese DeepSeek AI access

Seoul: The Finance Ministry plans to block access to the Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) service DeepSeek, a Ministry official said on Thursday, in the latest of Seoul’s restrictions on the use of the service among officials amid data collection concerns.

“Due to multiple technical concerns raised about DeepSeek from home and abroad, we plan to block access for the service on PCs connected to external networks,” the official said. The decision is part of a government-wide initiative to limit access to DeepSeek to prevent potential leaks of critical information through generative AI services. On Wednesday, access to the service was restricted on computers at the foreign, trade and defence ministries in South Korea. An official at the unification ministry separately said on Thursday that the ministry also plans to block access to AI services, apparently DeepSeek. “The unification ministry has (since 2023) prohibited the input of undisclosed official data into all generative AI at the request of the National Intelligence Service and the interior ministry,” the official said. DeepSeek has drawn significant atten-



tion since its release last month, impressing industry experts with its high performance at relatively low cost when compared to competing services. However, concerns over its security and data management practices have led multiple countries to scrutinise and impose restrictions on the service.

# How to know when your child is phone-ready and manage it

Hyderabad: Parents often have difficulty in deciding when to give their children their first smartphone. Safety concerns, particularly around travel to and from school, or being home after school without a parent, often drive this decision. And the pressure increases if their child’s friends already own a phone. Parents need to be aware of the concerns about children’s well-being around technology, including potential harms to mental health, if they are exposed to inappropriate content, bullying or simply use the phone too much.

Studies also show it can lead to dependence on the phone and distraction or lack of focus at school and in general. So it’s important to make good choices and provide family support alongside this. Appropriate phone ownership does not necessarily depend on a child’s age but on a child’s readiness and family circumstances. Recent studies show children who receive phones based on readiness rather than age show better long-term digital habits. These include managing the constant distraction of phones and good judgment around the content they regularly browse and engage with.

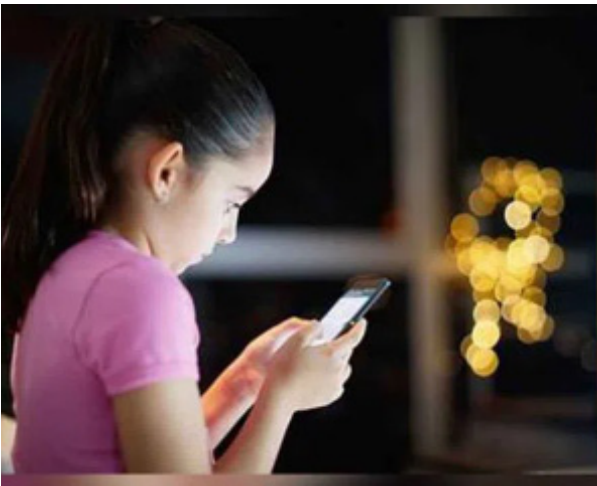
Ask yourself these questions first...

- How responsible are they with the technology they already use?
- Do they follow family guidelines around screen time?
- How willing are they to discuss their online experiences with you?
- Do they come to you if there is a problem or something they don’t understand?
- Do they have a basic understanding of digital privacy and security?
- What’s their decision-making like offline?
- What are they like with family, friends and other responsibilities?

Your child don’t necessarily have to go straight to a smartphone with all the bells, whistles and apps. Initially, a basic phone can allow your child to receive and make calls and texts, but without accessing the internet. If you want to prioritise social connection (so a child isn’t left out with friends), you could might start with a shared family tablet featuring supervised messaging apps. This allows children to maintain friendships within set boundaries.

How to manage the transition

Here, parents and the child can discuss and review



common challenges such as managing notifications, apps the child is permitted to use and where the phone can be used. This approach acknowledges full smartphone access isn’t an immediate necessity but rather the final stage in a thoughtful digital progression. Research indicates families who implement this graduated approach report fewer conflicts around technology as well as better long-term digital habits in their children. 3 ‘phone’ conversations to have Even though many schools now have phone restrictions during school hours, planning for healthy use outside of school is extremely important. There are three vital “new phone” conversations to have with your child, to make sure things get off to the right start. Friend requests: These can be over the top and often overwhelm children and parents. You do not have to say yes to all of them. Decide how to manage the continuous stream of requests and how to cull unnecessary contacts. Screen time: There will likely be a “screen-time spike” when your child gets their own device. This is exacerbated by the constant temptation to just zone out and browse content. Decide together on workable “no-tech” times and zones in the home. Notifications: Because of multiple group chats and new friends, there will be never-ending pings and notifications. This will encourage even more screen time, sometimes well into the night. Go into the phone settings with your child and together decide which notifications to turn off (ideally, most of them). This will mean children have fewer distractions and more sleep, and the entire household will be more peaceful.

# A question for the AI age: do machines and humans learn the same way?

From their origins in being able to separate data into different groups, AI today excels at too many tasks to count. Just in 2024, smartphones have started to be sold with AI models built into them while five of the seven men who won the 2024 science Nobel Prizes did so for work in AI. As it happens, the age of AI also promises to be a time in which scientists will learn a lot about the human brain as well. Existing AI models are inspired mostly by the brains of animals. Since these brains haven’t been easy to study, scientists have been looking to AI models as a proxy.

How do humans learn?

Machines excel at things that are nearly impossible for most humans, including rapidly analysing large datasets, predicting complex patterns, and learning to play chess like a grandmaster within a day. Yet neuroscientists say they also struggle with tasks that human children find easy, like understanding motives. “The paradox of today’s AI stems from the fact that the human brain has an evolutionary, biological origin and AI does not,” Celeste Kidd, associate professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, said. “It is likely that [for] the type of intelligence that we have evolved for taking care of helpless offspring, we need to be able to read the intentions of a child that is running towards a cliff [or one] that’s not yet able to feed themselves and say that they are hungry.” According to Arjun Ramakrishnan, assistant professor in the department of biological sciences and bioengineering at IIT-Kanpur, “at the heart of what drives learning in humans and animals” is a “dual focus on both meeting immediate biological needs and adapting to a constantly shifting environment.” “The need to secure resources and maintain balance in the face of an ever-changing environment,” he added, “likely spurred the evolution of sophisticated neural mechanisms, driving not just simple responses to immediate needs but also complex learning and strategic decision-making abilities.”

Learning is thus not just a process of acquiring static information but an ongoing, dynamic interaction between an organism and its environment. “The brain, shaped by evolutionary pressures, must adapt not only to predictable stimuli but also to the unpredictability of environmental fluctuations,” he added. “This complexity is reflected in the ability of humans and animals to sense and respond to rapid changes in the environment and social interactions, a key advantage for survival.” Learning is thus long-duration, interactive, and includes feedback loops between the organism’s internal state and external challenges. According to biologists at the Heidelberg Laureate Forum, a meeting held in September 2024 in Germany, machines are not curious. “Unlike AI systems, children are naturally curious, exploring the world on their own while simultaneously learning within a social and cultural context,” Kidd said at the forum. “Our curiosity is driven by knowing what we don’t know.” According to Kidd, the information children discover when they seek it is of a different type than the data fed into AI systems.

“The single experience of a child with an apple is very different from Google Photos labeling an apple in an image. A child’s experience with an apple is sensory. They’re feeling the apple, they’re seeing the apple, it’s multi-dimensional. The data people are getting is much, much richer. And there are tons of correlations you can pick up on in order to leverage things like learning and generalisation.” The human brain and the body have been “trained” on such data over millennia. Thus, human learning requires much less data to solve a problem with the same level of proficiency, according to Ashesh Dhawale, the DBT Wellcome Trust India Alliance Intermediate Fellow at the Centre for Neuroscience, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, said.

For example, although the AlphaZero model developed by Google subsidiary DeepMind is better at chess than any human player, it reached this level of proficiency only after playing around 40 million games during its training, Dhawale said. “In contrast, it is estimated that humans need some tens of thousands of training games to reach grandmaster proficiency.” “One of the key advantages humans have over machines lies in the speed and efficiency of learning,” Ramakrishnan said. “We can absorb new information rapidly, building on past experiences and knowledge in a flexible, adaptive way.” This ability to continuously improve on

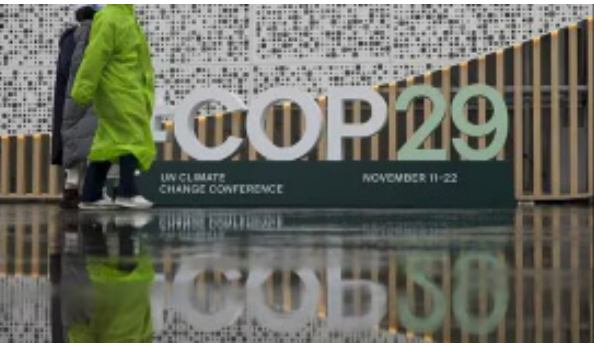
prior lessons without extensive reprogramming gives humans a significant edge in dynamic environments where new information and challenges emerge constantly.

Humans are also remarkably good at “transfer learning”. “We can apply knowledge and skills from one context to entirely different, unfamiliar scenarios with relative ease,” Ramakrishnan said. This ability to generalise is still a significant challenge for machines and artificial networks, which are typically confined to narrow domains and struggle to adapt to new or unforeseen contexts without retraining. The communication between neurons in the human brain takes the form of biochemical processes that operate more slowly than the channels between neurons in artificial neural networks, according to Brigitte Röder, professor of biological psychology and neuropsychology at the University of Hamburg. Yet the human brain makes decisions stunningly fast using abstractions and generalisation whereas machines still struggle to do this. Dhawale used the example of chess. “If you are proficient at chess, this ability will likely extend to other board games like checkers. This means humans can learn the structure underlying a task and generalise it to quickly solve new tasks — that is, they can learn to learn,” he said. Researchers are now attempting to bring this paradigm to machine learning, an approach called meta learning. It’s not unlikely that machines will catch up here as well. Humans also excel at motor-skill learning. “Somehow humans and animals are very efficient at learning how to move,” according to Dhawale, “but we don’t know exactly why this is the case.”

Neural networks are great at navigating tasks involving discrete choices but they stumble with movement. One reason is because being able to make a simple motion, such as reaching for a fruit on a table, requires a learning agent to optimise for many independent parameters varying continuously across many degrees of freedom. Then there’s energy efficiency. According to Ramakrishnan, the human brain’s low power consumption becomes readily apparent when recognising patterns, making decisions, and conducting social interactions. Machines can operate very fast but their energy consumption is also much higher, especially when they process large datasets. Unlike machines, which are built for repeatability and can perform the same task again with consistent precision, humans contend with fatigue, emotional decision-making, and distractions. “While we are designed to operate in volatile, ever-changing environments and our ability to explore and adapt is one of our greatest strengths, this flexibility often comes at the cost of consistency,” Ramakrishnan said. In contrast to the brain, neural network models are often trained to search exhaustively for solutions to complex tasks, Dhawale explained. This means they are more likely to discover new, better solutions to problems than humans can. At games like chess and go, AI models have been known to develop moves that surprise even expert players. “One could argue that the strategies used by humans to learn may be more efficient but can’t discover the most optimal solutions because they are not designed to search exhaustively.” From artificial to human? The differences between human and machine learning could elucidate where the neural network of each brain — artificial or biological — falls short. “Neurons are often treated simplistically as point processes that communicate via electrical impulses, essentially operating in an on/off mode,” Ramakrishnan said. “This reductionist approach has nonetheless allowed us to uncover fundamental principles that underlie complex cognitive behaviours.” At its core is the idea that feedback loops drive learning. Researchers used it to develop reinforcement learning, a training algorithm that has also been remarkably successful at explaining how organisms update their knowledge and adapt based on their experiences, according to Ramakrishnan. The development of artificial neural networks has also expanded our understanding of how memories could be stored and accessed in the brain: as dynamic processes that can be activated and adjusted over time rather than remain preserved in particular areas. Artificial neural networks with this ability can perform better. “The development of algorithms that handle short-term and long-term memory processes in artificial networks has provided us with a deeper understanding of how the brain may operate in these domains,” Ramakrishnan said.



# COP29 president scrambles to save deadlocked talks



The COP29 presidency moved to rescue stalled climate negotiations on Monday, appointing ministers from Egypt and Australia to broker agreement on the contentious new climate finance goal, following a week of deadlock that threatens to undermine the Baku talks.

The ministerial intervention comes as developing nations warn of a potential breakdown in negotiations over two critical issues: the scale of climate funding and expectations for enhanced climate action. Ministers from Norway and South Africa will separately lead consultations on mitigation goals in an effort to bridge the widening divide between wealthy and developing nations. "We've worked closely with the Presidency... but we can't lose sight of the forest because we're tussling over individual trees. Nor can we afford an outbreak of 'you-first-ism'," UNFCCC executive secretary Simon Stiell told the opening plenary. He delivered an unusually blunt warning about negotiating tactics, urging an end to "bluffing, brinksmanship, and pre-meditated playbooks that burn up precious time and run down the goodwill needed for an ambitious package." The talks face a fundamental deadlock: developing countries refuse to commit to stronger climate action without clear financial commitments from developed nations, which, particularly the Environmental Integrity Group (including Switzerland, South Korea, Mexico) and Umbrella Group (including the US, Australia, and Canada), accuse them of "blocking progress" of mitigation. "How can these discussions take place without agreement on finance or means of implementation in developing countries?" an Indian negotiator asked, speaking on condition of anonymity. The dispute centres on implementing paragraph 28 of the Global Stocktake decision from COP28 in Dubai, which calls for tripling renewable energy capacity, phasing down unabated coal power, and transitioning away from fossil fuels. The Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) group, which includes India among 30 other nations, delivered a stark message during Monday's plenary: "This is a finance COP. Week one has been quite disappointing... We do not need an investment goal, nor a multi-layered goal. We do not want something

that is pledged and forgotten. Nor do we want something that cannot be traced." The group emphasised that the new collective quantified goal (NCQG) "must be a cyclical goal whose quantum responds to the needs of developing countries, whose delivery can be tracked and which makes a difference to the lives of our peoples. Grant-based public finance is central to the NCQG."

COP29 president Mukhtar Babayev highlighted the G20's potential role in breaking the impasse. However, he indicated numbers wouldn't be discussed until the final days: "Today we are not ready to talk about any numbers. We have different approaches now regarding structure, contributor list and quantum. We think the G7 or the donor countries need to demonstrate their leadership." G20 leaders convened for the first day of their two-day leaders summit in Brazil on Monday. Simon Stiell reinforced this message with unusually direct language: "I've been very blunt: climate finance is not charity; it is 100% in every nation's interest, to protect their economies and people from rampant climate impacts," he noting that G20 represents "80% of global emissions, 85% of global GDP".

The LMDC raised serious concerns about the negotiation process, calling for "party-driven, transparent and inclusive" negotiations where "issues must progress in a balanced manner." They specifically requested co-facilitators to "take all Parties' views into account to offer a level-playing field and to avoid situations where Parties end up negotiating with co-facilitators." Multiple negotiators suggested the talks are heading toward a "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed" scenario. "There is a lot of frustration at the moment. Last week we saw some parties taking talks hostage as it became an either-or situation," one negotiator said, speaking on background. Others noted that Rule 16 has already been invoked on several issues - meaning they could be pushed to COP30 in Brazil next year. Adding to the concerns, Babayev revealed they haven't begun drafting a cover text summarizing the summit's decisions: "We are not commencing the process to develop a cover decision. From our consultations, parties priorities should be addressed under the mandated items of COP29." These developments unfold against a backdrop of broader challenges to international climate cooperation. Argentina's recent withdrawal from the negotiations and uncertainty about future U.S. participation under a potential Trump presidency have raised questions about the stability of global climate commitments. The ministerial consultations represent perhaps the last chance to bridge the divide between developing nations' demands for substantial, predictable climate finance and developed countries' preference for an investment-focused approach that would include private funding. Success or failure in Baku could significantly impact countries' ability to enhance their climate commitments at COP30 next year.

# Books that imagine that history took a different course

THEY MAY not have the cachet of the Pulitzer or the Booker, but the Sidewise Awards for Alternate History deserve respect. The what-if genre of fiction is growing fast, with work of startling quality and originality. Take the last Sidewise long-form winner, "Cahokia Jazz" by Francis Spufford. A noir thriller that takes place in the 1920s, it imagines an America in which the native population had not been nearly wiped out by smallpox. Other winners of the 29-year-old prize include Laurent Binet's "Civilizations", which imagines that the Incas invaded Europe in 1531, 39 years after Christopher Columbus did not discover the Americas. Tweaking history is surely as much fun as a novelist can have: losers become winners, and not quite everything changes. What if General Lee had won at Gettysburg? What if Napoleon had seen off Wellington and Blücher at Waterloo? The Nazis are overrepresented on alternate-history bookshelves as they are in other sections of most libraries. "The Plot Against America" by Philip Roth, for example, places Charles Lindbergh, a suspected Nazi sympathiser, in the White House. Not far behind is John F. Kennedy, who skipped that visit to Dallas, or perhaps fell victim to the mafia/Cubans/Russians/Lyndon Johnson. As this selection of the best alternate-history novels demonstrates, the world of imagined pasts is rich and potentially endless.

Martin Luther did not lead the Protestant Reformation. Instead, he became pope, and the Roman Catholic church continued to hold sway over all of Europe. That's the backdrop to "The Alteration". The action is set in England in 1976 (the year Kingsley Amis's book was published), but it is an England ruled by a theocratic government and stuck in the Middle Ages. The church has suppressed the scientific revolution, so there is no electricity, horse-drawn carriages share the streets with diesel-powered "omnibuses" and most people live in the countryside. Common folk dress in "brownish tunics and trews" (tight-fitting trousers). Amis softens his implicit indictment of Catholicism by allowing that art and architecture flourished. The plot revolves around ten-year-old Hubert Anvil, a chorister with the voice of an angel. Pope John XXIV's representatives decide he must become a "castrato" (the alteration of the title) so that he will sing for the glory of God in Rome. Hubert flees, taking refuge with a variety of colourful characters in London, setting up a thriller that is infused with Amis's cutting comic style.

The spoilers are apparently right there in the title. In 1780, with the American revolution in full swing, Lord North, Britain's prime minister, authorises a plot to capture the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, George Washington. Special agent Jeremiah Black is charged with sailing to America where, with the help of loyalists, he will kidnap Washington and bring him back to London, to be imprisoned in the Tower and tried for high treason. Charles Rosenberg drew inspiration from rumours that the governor of New York, appointed by the British, really did scheme to capture Washington with the help of his personal armed protection unit, the "Life Guard". Mr Rosenberg's novel does not have the high literary merit of Amis's, but it is a clever reimagining of a tumultuous period in British-American history and a rollicking read. Relish a twist or two at its conclusion. In October 1962 families gathered around televisions and radios, praying for the news that Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Union's leader, would solve the Cuban missile crisis. "Resurrection Day" imagines that they failed. A decade later nuclear war has turned the Soviet Union to ashes. The United States has fared better, but has lost New York and Washington. Much of the rest of the country is a wasteland. Aid from Britain and Canada sustains the much reduced American population. Enter Carl Landry, a young reporter for the Boston Globe, who sets out across a blackened landscape to investigate the killing of a veteran of the war in 1962. The murder, he learns, holds the key to revealing a terrifying conspiracy surrounding the missile crisis. "Resurrection Day" mixes genres: detective



tale, political thriller, dystopian fiction and alternate history. It's a white-knuckle ride and a sober reflection on nuclear proliferation. On a vividly imagined post-apocalyptic chessboard Brendan DuBois moves the pieces most convincingly. We could have published an "Economist reads" just on novels that imagine the Nazis had won. It would have included Philip K. Dick's "The Man in the High Castle", which posits a German-Japanese carve-up of America. Robert Harris's "Fatherland", set in 1964 in Nazi Berlin, would have been another entry. The best is "Dominion", by C.J. Sansom, who died in 2024. The action takes place in 1952. Britain, governed by appeaser Lord Halifax, surrendered to Germany without firing a shot in May 1940. Now it's a downtrodden satellite of the Third Reich. Lord Beaverbrook, a newspaper magnate, is prime minister; the fascist Oswald Mosley is home secretary; Winston Churchill leads the resistance from the countryside. Writers critical of the Reich, like J.B. Priestley, E.M. Forster and W.H. Auden, have been erased from history. A giant picture of the Führer hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. Like Mr Harris, Sansom packs his reimagined world with evocative details, from London's "soot stained" brick to the bureaucratise of Whitehall's nazified civil servants. At its heart "Dominion" is a spy thriller: a civil servant, David Fitzgerald, feeds information to Churchill's resistance. But there is a larger secret that Fitzgerald and his wife, Sarah, will uncover. Curtis Sittenfeld imagines what might have happened to Hillary Rodham Clinton (pictured), and to American politics, if Hillary and Bill Clinton had broken up in 1975. Hillary becomes a politician and Bill leaves politics and becomes a rich tech entrepreneur. Their paths cross again in startling fashion in 2016, when Donald Trump also makes an appearance. Ms Sittenfeld finds a way to include the Clintons' famous "60 Minutes" interview in 1992, in which Hillary declared herself to be no Tammy Wynette "standing by my man". The glamour, the rough and tumble and the sheer grind of American politics are well captured. Above all, Ms Sittenfeld convincingly transports us into Hillary's inner world. The book's surprising denouement seems entirely plausible.

The U.S. Department of Justice will ask a judge to force Alphabet's Google to sell off its Chrome internet browser, Bloomberg News reported on Monday, citing people familiar with the plans. The DOJ will also ask the judge, who ruled in August that Google illegally monopolized the search market, to require measures related to artificial intelligence and its Android smartphone operating system, the report said. The DOJ declined to comment. Google, in a statement from Lee-Anne Mulholland, Vice President, Google Regulatory Affairs, said the DOJ is pushing a "radical agenda that goes far beyond the legal issues

# Sinner's sublime surge in shifting power centre of men's tennis



Mumbai: When Carlos Alcaraz won his second Grand Slam of 2024, he'd become the youngest to win majors across all three surfaces, at a rate quicker than Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer. When Jannik Sinner won his second Grand Slam of 2024, he'd captured his first two majors in the same season, something even Djokovic, Nadal and Federer could not manage.

These couple of standout achievements tell you everything about the shifting dynamics of men's tennis in a season in which Djokovic did not win a single title on the professional tour for the first time since 2005 and Nadal will bid goodbye as a professional player this week. Defined by a collective stranglehold of the Big Three, the nerve centre of men's tennis for a large part of the last couple of decades has finally been replaced by a newer, younger power centre. And within that, a 23-year-old soft-spoken Italian is ruling the roost like few men have before. Sinner's ATP Finals triumph in Turin on Sunday was emblematic of the kind of season he's had. He beat American Taylor Fritz 6-4, 6-4 in a no-frills, utterly dominant performance in the final of the year-ending tournament where his opponents — each of them established top 10 players, mind you — at times felt like there was "nothing you can really do", as Fritz put it. Sinner did not drop more than four games in a set across any of his five matches, and did not lose a set (again, something even the Big Three can't flaunt in their record-setting CVs).

This dreamy dominance goes back to the start of the season, or even to the back end of last year when Sinner won a couple of ATP titles and led Italy's victory charge in the Davis Cup Finals. That was Sinner warming up as a newly inducted top five player. This is Sinner as a red-hot runaway world No. 1 after a season of sweeping two Grand Slams and six ATP titles while losing just six matches out of the 75 he's played so far this year. None of those defeats

# An electoral history

Seven politicians have become Chief Minister of Jharkhand since the state was carved out of Bihar in 2000, but only one — Raghubar Das — has had an unbroken five years in the position. No party has won a majority of its own in the five Assemblies elected in the state so far. The BJP and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) have remained the dominant political players in the state.

A sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly on excluded and partially-excluded areas (other than Assam) that looked at the question of drawing up a scheme for the administration of tribal and backward areas, had very briefly considered a suggestion to create a new province in South Bihar. After Independence, Jaipal Singh Munda's Jharkhand Party fought the 1952 election on the issue of a tribal state, and won three seats in Lok Sabha and 32 (out of 330) in the Bihar Assembly. Subsequently, 36 members of the Bihar Assembly from the Chhotanagpur division and Santhal Parganas district made the case for a new state comprising today's Jharkhand and parts of present-day Odisha and West Bengal before the States Reorganisation Commission. The Commission rejected the demand on the grounds that "the plains are predominantly agricultural and the Chota Nagpur plateau provides an industrial balance", and "the separation of South Bihar will affect the entire economy of the existing State". If Chhotanagpur were to be taken out, "the residual State... will be a poorer area with fewer opportunities and resources for development", it said. Jawaharlal Nehru and later, Jaiprakash Narayan, were in favour of a separate state; however, Bihar remained united. Through the decades, only one of the (undivided) state's Chief Ministers (K B Sahay, 1963-67) came from this region; his predecessor, Binodanand Jha (1961-62), belonged to Deoghar (in present-day Jharkhand) but represented a different constituency.

On November 15, 2000, the NDA government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee created three new states — Jharkhand, Uttarakhand (then called Uttaranchal), and Chhattisgarh out of (undivided) Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh respectively. Jharkhand, comprising 18 out of the 55 districts of undivided Bihar, got 81 of the state's 324 Assembly seats and 14 of its 54 Lok Sabha seats. The tribal-dominated state, which was founded on the birth anniversary of Birsu Munda, is among India's richest in mineral reserves. At the time Jharkhand was created, the most important tribal face of the BJP was Karia Munda. However Babulal Marandi, a 42-year-old tribal leader with a long association with the RSS, was chosen to be the state's first CM. Marandi had helped the BJP win 12 of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in the Jharkhand region in 1998, and had himself defeated JMM stalwart Shibu Soren in Dumka.

The BJP in Jharkhand quickly split into two factions within the party, led by Marandi and Arjun Munda, a former JMM leader whom the first CM had brought into the saffron camp in 2000. Ranged against the BJP were, besides the JMM, Lalu Prasad's RJD and the Congress. In March 2003, Marandi had to make way for Munda as CM. In the Lok Sabha election of 2004, the BJP suffered a setback — Marandi won in Koderma, but the other 13 seats were swept by an alliance of the JMM, Congress, RJD, and CPI. In the first Assembly election in the new state in 2005, the BJP

came in straight sets, and in no tournament has he exited before reaching at least the quarter-finals. All this, going through nights when he "didn't sleep well", as Sinner revealed after winning the ATP Finals. Sinner's sublime season of surge was somewhat dragged down by a doping saga that engulfed him just before the start of the US Open and refuses to go away. The Italian had tested positive in two separate dope tests in March, the results of which were made public only months later even as he continued playing on the tour. The decision to clear him of wrongdoing has been challenged by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), which seeks a two-year ban. The case will spill over to early next year when the Court of Arbitration for Sport is expected to arrive at a ruling. All through, the youngster kept playing — and largely winning — as if it were business as usual. Except, it wasn't. "I've kept on thinking about where we went wrong and what we could have done better," Sinner said on Sunday about the doping saga that eventually saw him fire two members of his team. "I had days where I wasn't feeling great."

Through those days only one opponent has managed to beat him multiple times this season. He happens to be the other cog in this narrative-spinning wheel of men's tennis. Alcaraz and Sinner couldn't be more contrasting to each other as personalities and tennis players. One is fire, the other ice. One is flashy and funky, the other solid and sublime. One is an all-court artist, the other an all-season force. Their rivalry will define men's tennis over the next decade but as far as this year goes, the 21-year-old Spaniard has had the upper hand. Alcaraz has beaten Sinner in all their three meetings in 2024, including in a high-quality ATP Beijing final and a high-stakes French Open semi-final. Alcaraz went on to win in Paris, and then in London at Wimbledon as he split the Slams with Sinner. Any player would take a season of two Slams and as many ATP titles, yet with Sinner setting the benchmark this year, Alcaraz would feel like he could step up (he's also dropped to world No. 3, for the record). Especially in the second half of the season when he tends to lose steam competing on faster and indoor hard courts. One can be sure, though, that the sport's hottest rivalry will only pick up pace. Speaking of rivalries, there was another one involving Sinner that pretty much went one way. Djokovic could not beat his younger opponent in their two official meetings this year (three including the Saudi exhibition). Djokovic could not win a single title on the tour this year. A first-ever Olympic gold in Paris was indeed exceptional and emotional for the Serbian 24-time Slam champion. But the 37-year-old flagbearer of the Big Three senses the winds of change, and would be eager to turn it around again next season.



fell short of the halfway mark in the 81-member House, and the Governor invited JMM's Shibu Soren to form the government. However, Soren failed to prove his majority, and had to resign in 10 days. After the BJP cobbled together the numbers, Arjun Munda became Chief Minister of a coalition government. The following year, Babulal Marandi quit the BJP and formed his own party, the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha-Prajatantrik (JVM-P).

After a year and a half in power, Munda was forced to make way for Madhu Koda, an Independent MLA who pulled support from the government and replaced him as Chief Minister with the backing of MLAs from a number of parties, some Independents, and the Congress. But Koda lost power after the JMM ditched him, and Soren became CM again. In 2009, Koda was arrested for alleged corruption. Subsequently, he was convicted in the alleged coal scam and was sentenced to three years in prison in December 2017. After a spell of President's Rule, the BJP and JMM reached an alliance and Arjun Munda formed the government again with the JMM's Hemant Soren as his deputy. However, the alliance did not last, and in July 2013, Hemant Soren became CM for the first time, with Arjun Munda as Leader of Opposition. In 2014, the Narendra Modi wave powered the BJP to 37 seats in the Jharkhand Assembly election (that followed the Lok Sabha election of that year). After putting together a majority, the party made the bold experiment of picking a non-tribal leader, Raghubar Das, to lead the state. Das, who is now Governor of Odisha, served for a full five years. In 2019, however, the BJP was reduced to 25 seats, and the JMM-Congress alliance won a majority in the Assembly. Hemant became CM again, but had to resign after he was arrested in a case relating to an alleged land scam earlier this year. He installed senior JMM leader Champai Soren in his place, but took back the chair on July 4 after returning from jail.

A miffed Champai Soren is now with the BJP. Also back in the BJP is Babulal Marandi, whose JVM-P contested various elections in the state until 2019. Marandi is now the president of the Jharkhand BJP, and the face of the party in the state. Arjun Munda, who was a Minister in the Modi government at the Centre until earlier this year, is keeping a low profile.

# Google could be forced to sell off Chrome by U.S. DOJ: Report

in this case," and would harm consumers. The move would be one of the most aggressive attempts by the Biden administration to curb what it alleges are Big Tech monopolies. Ultimately, however, the re-election of Donald Trump to the presidency could have the greatest impact over the case. Two months before the election, Trump claimed he would prosecute Google for what he perceives as bias against him. But a month later, Trump questioned whether breaking up the company was a good idea. The company plans to appeal once U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta makes a final ruling, which he is likely to do by Au-

gust 2025. Prosecutors had floated a range of potential remedies in the case, from ending exclusive agreements where Google pays billions of dollars annually to Apple Inc and other companies to remain the default search engine on tablets and smart phones, all the way to divesting parts of its business, such as its Chrome browser and Android operating system.

Google maintains its search engine has won users with its quality, adding that it faces robust competition from Amazon and other sites and users can choose other search engines as their default.



# What the U.S. social media vetting for student visas means to applicants: Explained



The story so far: Foreign students hoping to study in the U.S. may soon face increased scrutiny as the Trump administration is considering taking measures to collect more information from the social media accounts of foreign student visa applicants. Ahead of these changes, reports emerged that the scheduling of student visa interviews have been put on hold as officials worldwide await further guidance. This triggered panic among students worried that their education in the U.S. could be delayed or blocked.

What is the new social media vetting rule for U.S. visa applicants?

The U.S. Department of State defines a social media identifier/handle as “any name used by the individual on social media platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.” A cable in late May that was signed by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and shared by the Politico outlet, ordered a temporary halt to scheduling visa appointments. “Effective immediately, in preparation for an expansion of required social media screening and vetting, consular sections should not add any additional student or exchange visitor (F, M, and J) visa appointment capacity until further guidance is issued septel, which we anticipate in the coming days,” Mr. Rubio’s cable quoted by Politico stated, referring to telegram guidance that would be issued separately.

The collection of visa applicants’ social media handles is not a new measure. The U.S. Department of State noted that it updated its non-immigrant visa online application form (DS-160), the paper back-up version of the non-immigrant visa application (DS-156), and the online immigrant visa application form (DS-260), to collect applicants’ social media identifiers. The changes were implemented from May 2019, citing U.S. national security as a top priority. However, Mr. Rubio’s latest cable suggests closer scrutiny of visa applicants’ social media posts in the future, and especially if they are foreign students. Foreign visa applicants heading to Harvard University may also face this treatment.

Why does the Trump administration want to vet social media handles?

The new updates come as the U.S. government seeks to clamp down on American universities where students are participating in anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian protests. Because Israel is a U.S. ally, the administration has deemed many anti-Israel demonstrations and forms of protest to be a form of antisemitism (anti-Jewish bigotry) aimed at Jewish Americans, rather than a form of anti-Zionism (opposition to Israel’s statehood and violence against Palestinians). Many pro-Palestinian protesters on university campuses have been termed as Hamas supporters by conservative Americans. A White House factsheet published this January saw Trump stating, “To all the resident aliens who joined in the pro-jihadist protests, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, and we will deport you.

Ozempic, or the “fat shot” medication, as United States President Donald Trump calls it, is transforming the way America eats, dresses and shops. Alexandra Sowa, who just released ‘The Ozempic Revolution: A Doctor’s Proven Plan for Success to Help You Reverse Obesity, End Yo-Yo Dieting, and Protect Yourself from Disease’ (published by HarperCollins) says that as a doctor specialising in obesity, GLP-1s are the most effective tool she has to treat patients today. She adds that one in eight Americans use the medication at this point, leading to huge cultural shifts in the country. “It has changed how people buy clothes and how they shop at the grocery store. There is a reduction in the sale of junk food. When you are on it, your tastebuds change, you want healthier food,” she says, over a Zoom call from New York, where she runs SoWell, a clinic and brand tailored to support GLP-1 users. GLP-1s are Glucagon-like peptide-1 agonist drugs that include Ozempic, Wegovy, Mounjaro and Zepbound.

There is still a lot of confusion about the medication, which is why Dr. Sowa, who is a dual board-certified physician in internal and obesity medicine with more than 10 years of experience working with GLP-1, says she felt the need to write the book. “I was one of the first doctors using this in the US, so this is the first comprehensive user guide out in the market. People have so many questions: how does it work, how you eat, how do you think, how do you move... I try to answer all that.” She adds, “You see people on social media talking about ‘Ozempic face’ and ‘Ozempic hands’, but those are headlines wrapped around the fear people have of these medications.” She cautions that the weekly injectables, hailed as a miracle drug by actors and influencers, do not guarantee a cure. “Medication is not an easy fix... We need to take lifestyle into account,” she says, adding “We have to make sure we are focussing on protein. We have to strength train.”

As she says in her book “You still need to put in the work. You still have to do the work to change your underlying habits and thought patterns related to food and weight. The drug only provides a window in which making these changes is easier and more effective long-term, because the medication normalises the underlying hormonal dysfunction. GLP-1s will almost guarantee you’ll lose weight, but only by using them in partnership with lifestyle changes will you maintain the loss long-term.” Also, contrary to what social media tells you, not everyone can or should take it. “I still advocate just diet and lifestyle changes for some people,” says Dr. Sowa, adding “What I fear is with this widespread acceptance there has been abuse. I only prescribe it for someone who has a BMI of 27. For people who have high cholesterol, insulin resistance and significant weight gain on their waistline. This is not about getting skinny.”

GLP-1 medication will also evolve. “We have a lot of new drugs in the pipeline — they are going to become tailor-made for specific needs. Maybe one for fatty liver or one that is very effective with diabetes. We are going to become better at how we make it, and with the pill version, access will become easier,” she says. While this is certainly altering the weight loss industry, she says that it does not make it any less relevant. “I don’t think gyms are going

I will also quickly cancel the student visas of all Hamas sympathizers on college campuses, which have been infested with radicalism like never before.” The U.S. Department of State’s ‘Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application’ (DS-160) form has a sub-section dedicated to the applicant’s various social media handles that they can choose from a menu. A screenshot shows how certain visa applicants are asked to list their social media handles. A screenshot shows how certain visa applicants are asked to list their social media handles | Photo Credit: U.S. Department of State website There is a separate section for other platforms/ websites that the applicants wish to flag or identify independently. Visa applicants are also allowed to volunteer other social media handles and websites. Visa applicants are also allowed to volunteer other social media handles and websites | Photo Credit: U.S. Department of State website

The social media platforms already mentioned on the DS-160 form include names such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as Chinese options such as Douban, Qzone, Weibo, and others. VKontakte is a Russian social media platform. The Trump-endorsed Truth Social, however, is not on this list. Vine, meanwhile, has shut down. Visa applicants are being asked to provide social media handles they have used in the past five years. One point of focus appears to be Chinese immigration. In a recent press statement titled, ‘New Visa Policies Put America First, Not China,’ Mr. Rubio confirmed that government bodies would start “aggressively” revoking visas belonging to Chinese students, “including those with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields.”

What can foreign students do to safeguard their visa application?

First and foremost, carry out a social media audit of your own. This means making a list of all your accounts to make sure no key platforms are left out. Delete — not deactivate — inactive accounts or nearly forgotten handles you have not accessed in more than five years, to avoid confusion. Carry out this step as early as you can, because some social media companies keep even deleted accounts visible for 30-90 days to prevent fraudulent activity. Next, compile a list of core social media identifiers — your existing usernames/handles — that you will submit as part of your visa application. Never share your passwords with others. You can then choose whether to lock your social media accounts or not. While it might be natural for minors, privacy-minded users, or non-professional visa applicants to have private accounts, it will arouse suspicion if a major influencer or public figure with thousands of followers suddenly locks their official account before their visa application. Make the choice that fits your privacy requirements. Whether your accounts are public or private, be sure to vet your own social media content. Be on the lookout for content you posted in the past that is outdated, inaccurate, offensive, abusive, or glorifies criminal activity even as a joke. Also check your replies, ‘likes’, and uploaded media for any content that could hurt your visa application. Take note of accounts you follow or interact with to ensure that they are in compliance with international laws. You may also want to check content that does not strictly count as social media activity, such as your YouTube comment history. You may feel strongly about potentially taking down content related to social causes that are important to your heart. Make an informed choice that aligns with your personal position. Foreign students hoping to obtain a visa to study in the U.S. should stay in touch with their universities and international admissions officers in order to learn the latest updates.

SEBI confirms ban on LS Industries, key individuals amid fraud investigation

Mumbai: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has confirmed the suspension of LS Industries, its promoter Profound Finance, and four other individuals from participating in the securities markets.

The action comes as part of an ongoing investigation into allegations of fraudulent activities and manipulation of the company’s share price. The individuals barred include Jahangir Panikaveetil Perumbarambathu, the promoter of Profound Finance, as well as Suresh Goyal, Alka Sahni, and Shashi Kant Sahni HUF, a Dubai-based NRI shareholder of LS Industries. SEBI has extended the deadline for completing the investigation until November 15 and has directed all involved parties to cooperate fully with the inquiry. Back in February 2025, SEBI had issued an interim order banning LS Industries and its associates from trading in the stock market due to suspicious activities. The regulator also ordered Perumbarambathu to return illegal gains of Rs 1.14 crore that he allegedly earned through the sale of shares under the suspected scheme.

SEBI’s probe centres on LS Industries and its associates being involved in a scheme to artificially boost the company’s share price. Despite having reported almost no revenue for three consecutive financial years (FY22 to FY24) and the first three quarters of FY25, the company’s stock surged dramatically. Between July 23 and September 27, 2024, the share price skyrocketed from Rs 22.50 to Rs 267.50 — raising the company’s market valuation to an eye-popping Rs 22,700 crore. This sharp rise in share price occurred without any improvement in the company’s financial performance, raising red flags.

# A nine-year-old bonded labourer



Last week, a duck farmer was arrested on charges of keeping a child from Andhra Pradesh as ‘collateral’ for a loan and then killing him in Tamil Nadu. Though bonded labour has long been banned by law, it continues to be practised, say activists. Nellore Sravani reports on how the boy’s mother, Ankamma, a woman from a tribal community, tried in vain to bring her child back home

Two years ago, Mannepalli Ankamma, a woman from a tribal community in Andhra Pradesh, who does not know her age, decided to work for N. Muthu, a 60-year-old duck farmer. He promised her a salary of ₹24,000 a month for herding cows and helping him run a sweet shop in Satyavedu, a town in the Tirupati district of Andhra Pradesh. Ankamma took an advance of ₹15,000 from him. When she was unable to repay the amount, Muthu took away her youngest son, M. Venkatesh, as ‘collateral’. He also allegedly inflated the amount she owed him to ₹42,000. On April 9, Ankamma spoke to Venkatesh over the phone. The nine-year-old boy told her that he was busy tending to Muthu’s ducks in Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu. Ankamma lives in Thurakapalle village in Duttaluru mandal of Nellore district in Andhra Pradesh, where she works in her current employer Siva Reddy’s lemon orchard. She assured her child that she would be there in two days with ₹42,000 of cash in hand. She promised that he would be home soon. Before ending the call, Ankamma asked Venkatesh what he had eaten for lunch. Curd rice, he said, an improvement over the previous day’s meal of rice mixed with water. A week later, clutching wads of cash, Ankamma travelled to Satyavedu, about 270 kilometres from her village. But Muthu refused the money.

“He used casteist slurs against me,” she recalls. “He also told me that my son had run away with his phone and some cash.” Dejected, Ankamma returned home. When a month passed and there was still no word from Venkatesh, Reddy helped her file a First Information Report (FIR) at the Satyavedu police station on May 19. The police began their investigation. On being questioned, Muthu told them that Venkatesh had died of jaundice on April 12 at a private hospital at Pudupalayam in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu. He confessed that he had buried the boy near the Palar river. The police found Venkatesh’s decomposed body and informed Ankamma. “I knew it was him. He was wearing a vest and shorts. I knew it was my boy though he had become unrecognisable,” says Ankamma, her cheeks wet with tears.

While the medical officer from the Chengalpattu Government Medical College declined to share the post-mortem report, the Puttur police quoted the report and said that the stated cause of death was “blunt force injury to the head by (a) heavy weapon”. The injuries were “sufficient to cause death in ordinary course of nature”. At first, Muthu, his wife, and son were arrested under the provisions of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976; the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986; the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2016; and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. On May 24, Deputy Superintendent of Police G. Ravi Kumar, who probed the case, said Section 103 (1) (murder) under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, was also added to the FIR. Bonded labour is a system where creditors force debtors to repay debts through labour. The Act prohibits any person from making advances under, or in pursuance of, the bonded labour system. It also prohibits compelling a person to render bonded or forced labour. However, the practice continues till date, say activists.

A debt that cost a son

Sitting on a flat rock outside Reddy’s house on the outskirts of Thurakapalle village, Ankamma cries softly. Thurakapalle is 8 km from Duttaluru town. A narrow muddy pavement leads to the village, which is populated by about 10 people in the morning. The silence of the surroundings is broken by the crowing of roosters. Reddy’s house stands in the midst of a vast expanse of lemon orchards. Ankamma and her husband Prakash get paid ₹15,000 a month for taking care of Reddy’s 12-acre orchard, tending to 10 buffaloes, and doing other odd jobs for him.

Ankamma and Prakash do not have a house. “This is home,” she says, pointing to a small hut-like structure, perched precariously on four logs. The logs are covered on top by a tarpaulin sheet. There is just enough space for them to sleep. When Reddy is around, Prakash and Ankamma sit on the ground. “They are Reddulu (Reddys). They are ‘big’ people,” Ankamma says with a reverential tone. She believes that what happened was all her fault. “We will not leave Siva Reddy until our last breath. We had left him to work for Muthu and that is why this happened to us. From now on, we will be loyal to him.” Two years ago, Ankamma and Prakash went to work for Muthu after Ankamma’s mother told her that he may pay more. Taking an advance of ₹15,000 from Muthu, they began taking his ducks for grazing. Though he promised them a salary of ₹24,000 a month, Muthu did not give them anything more than the advance amount.

The couple slept in the fields under the sky. They often stayed awake at night, fearing snakes and scorpions. They moved from place to place every week, foraging for feed. They offered to repay the debt in instalments, but Muthu refused. Ankamma has three children from her previous marriage — Chenchu Krishna (15), Ravu Lakshamma (12), and Venkatesh. When her first husband died last year, she and Prakash left for Guduru, near Tirupati district, for his final rites. When they did not return, an enraged Muthu went in search of them. He took Venkatesh away, saying the boy was ‘collateral’. “Everyone says we will get some cash (compensation),” says Ankamma. “But we will not demand anything except justice for my son.” The Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer - 2021 states that immediate financial assistance of up to ₹30,000 is guaranteed to individuals rescued from bonded labour. Once the accused is convicted, the aid can go up to ₹3 lakh, depending on the severity of the case. Ravi Kumar, the administrative officer at the Revenue Divisional Officer’s (RDO) office in Sullurpeta, says the Tirupati administration is considering providing a housing site and compensation to the family. Satyavedu falls under the purview of the Sullurpeta RDO.

Activists say the administration should also issue a ‘release certificate’ to Ankamma’s family. “Release certificates can be issued only to those in bonded labour. Technically, only the boy was a bonded labourer. Since he is dead, the family is not eligible for the certificate,” Kumar explains. ‘Poor, unlettered, and fearful’ Andhra Pradesh is both a source and a destination State for bonded labour. “The problem is not as prevalent as it used to be, but many cases do not come to light these days. In addition to migrant labourers from Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Chhattisgarh, the most marginalised locals fall prey to the system,” says Raavi Sunil Kumar, convener of the Vetti Vimochana Coalition, a group of NGOs working on bonded labour issues. According to data compiled by the group, 402 people have been rescued from bonded labour in the State from January 2023 to date. Most of them, including Ankamma, belong to the Yanadi community. A report from the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, published in 2008, says the Yanadis are one of the 59 Denotified Tribes and 60 Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh. As per the 2011 Census, there were more than 5 lakh Yanadis in the composite State of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Noorbasha Babavali, a research assistant at the Centre for Study of Social Inclusion at Andhra University in Visakhapatnam, says the Yanadis are extremely poor. Only 35.35% of them are lettered. “They have been exploited as they don’t know about the legal system. Their fear of society keeps them away from the mainstream. They don’t own any assets and stay on the canal bunds and in hilly areas.” Ankamma says she did not know that vetti chakiri (bonded labour) is illegal. “Many Yanadis do not open up to strangers even if they are offered help,” says Ch. Venkateswarlu, a Yanadi leader from Alluru, a village near Ongole in Prakasam district. “Unlike Ankamma, others do not share their troubles. They fear being beaten up by their employers.” He recalls another incident in which two bonded labourers died of electrocution while working in a field in Palnadu district. “Though this happened a few months ago, the labourers’ families still work as bonded labourers,” he says. Kotaiah’s escape

Kotaiah, 56, who also belongs to the Yanadi community, escaped the clutches of his employer at Chilakaluripeta town. Kotaiah lives in a Yanadi colony at Alluru, a village near the Kothapatnam beach in Prakasam district. About 400 Yanadis live in the colony. At least 10 members live in one hut.

Like Ankamma, Kotaiah blames himself for what happened. “It was my fault that I accepted a loan of ₹10,000 from a creditor in Chilakaluripeta in Palnadu district. At the time, we had no work, no food, and no access to drinking water. So, I took the money,” he says. To repay that amount, his family of seven, including three children, had to work as bonded labourers for around 20 years. “We set out to work when my son’s three children were toddlers. Now they are between 16 and 20,” he says. By the time of their release last year, that debt of ₹1,500 had risen to ₹15 lakh. The family was sold more than thrice, and worked as bonded labourers under different employers, says Kotaiah.

Katti Kotaiah, 56, who also belongs to the Yanadi community, escaped the clutches of his employer at Chilakaluripeta town. Kotaiah and his wife Katti Gangamma (in the centre) depend on fishing for their livelihood these days. Katti Kotaiah, 56, who also belongs to the Yanadi community, escaped the clutches of his employer at Chilakaluripeta town. Kotaiah and his wife Katti Gangamma (in the centre) depend on fishing for their livelihood these days. [Rao] He says their job was to cut Subabul logs, used primarily in the pulp and paper industry. He and his wife cut two tonnes of logs every day. “In a week, if we cut 14 tonnes, we would get ₹1,500,” he says. As per current rates, a worker is supposed to get around ₹500 for cutting one tonne.

“These jobs were always fine in the first five months. Then, our employers would not give us wages daily. They would give us just ₹1,000 a week. We had to work even when we fell sick. They restricted our movements,” he says. Kotaiah says a policeman asked him to leave the employer during the pandemic. “But I told him that I owed my employer ₹2 lakh,” he says. Kotaiah sold his house, received as part of a government scheme, for ₹1 lakh to clear the debt.

It was only when Kotaiah’s friend died that he decided to leave. “We told our employer that we have to vote in the election (June 2024). He let us go. We never went back, despite warnings.” This year, too, the employer created a ruckus in Alluru demanding that they all come back, he recalls. District officials of Prakasam intervened and gave the family protection and release certificates. Venkateswarlu says that while the government hands out release certificates to survivors, the rehabilitation takes place so late in some cases that a few people, who find themselves without land and work after their release from bonded labour, go back to their old employers. Today, Kotaiah lives in a spacious hut with a sofa, cot, and cooler. He says civil society members got him these necessities. Kotaiah sells fish for a living. “Some days, I get ₹200 and some days I make ₹400. Today I got only ₹100. But at least no one is torturing us,” he says. No action plan in place

“Apart from duck-rearing units, bonded labour cases are reported from areas where Subabul is grown extensively,” says Ramesh, who belongs to the Rural Organisation for Poverty Eradication Services, a registered NGO. In duck-rearing units, children are mostly chosen as labourers. “One has to be agile and quick to stop the ducks from escaping. Duck farmers, mostly Yerukulas (another Scheduled Tribe community), hire Yanadis to work for them. The conditions are harsh, with no electricity and no proper food,” says Ramesh. In his report ‘Bonded Labour in India: Its Incidence and Pattern’, former Jawaharlal Nehru University professor Ravi S. Srivastava says that the Supreme Court directed all the States to collect information on the prevalence of bonded labour in India. The survey was held in 1996. No cases were identified in Andhra Pradesh. However, the government subsequently identified and released 37,988 bonded labourers till 2004. Since then, no systematic survey has been carried out. Bonded labour persists both in the agricultural and non-agricultural sector, although vestiges of hereditary bondage only exist in traditional sectors,” he says. Of the 402 people who have been rescued in the past two years by the Vetti Vimochana Coalition, members say FIRs have been booked only in seven cases. “There is no Standard Operating Procedure or State action plan for the identification, rescue and rehabilitation of bonded labourers in Andhra Pradesh. On the other hand, States such as Tamil Nadu and Delhi have a robust system in place,” explains Kumar.

While the Bonded Labour Act provides for punishment for up to three years, there is no data on how many people have been punished. The law mandates a district-level vigilance and monitoring committee to be in place. “This was formed in Prakasam only last year,” Kumar says. Officials of the Revenue, Tribal Welfare, Social Welfare, and Labour Departments say they are not sure which of them is responsible for enforcing the Act. “It is important to identify bonded labour as an organised crime,” says Venkateswarlu. “The government should have a nodal department to deal with pre- and post-rescue operations. It should also have a toll-free number for people in distress. If there had been one, Ankamma would not have lost her son.”



# As carmakers struggle to integrate software systems into vehicles, Toyota weaves in its Arene toolkit



Toyota, the world's biggest carmaker, unveiled its latest RAV4 compact sport utility vehicle that would be the first model to feature its Arene software development platform. In the new RAV4, the Arene platform has helped with the development of software powering the car's new multimedia system's cockpit voice agent and centre console display, as well as advanced safety technologies. Tokyo-based Toyota sells more cars each year than any other auto major in the world. So, justifiably, it had similar big ambitions when it created its own in-house technology startup in 2021 as it set about trying to build software for its newer cars, especially hybrids and battery electric vehicles. This is in keeping with the reality of new-age cars being more of a software product than being just an over-engineered, hardware product. But like in the case of other legacy carmakers, Toyota struggled somewhat to get started with its project – initially called Woven Planet when it was set up in 2021, and subsequently re-christened Woven by Toyota. The Arene platform is the first big commercial product to come out of this repurposed venture, which, Toyota says, combines the company's "decades of manufacturing expertise with modern software capabilities".

Toyota says Arene gives its suppliers a common platform and standardised processes for better management of complex, multi-stakeholder development projects. With Arene, Toyota and its suppliers are able to "maximise co-ordination, ensure cross-stream visibility, and simplify integration and testing". This new platform would also help the carmaker expand and accelerate software testing. Physical testing is complemented by virtual testing, which allows for software features to be analysed discreetly and on any model or trim for more exhaustive quality assurance.

Arene is built on the concept of 'kaizen', or continuous improvement — an integral feature of the Toyota assembly line philosophy. Rather than traditional linear development, the new platform is designed to "make use of the latest iterative development methodologies" and leverage "the best value of software breakthroughs". "Through abstracted APIs (application programming interface, or the connections between computers or between computer programmes), architected software layers and advanced testing protocols, Arene applications are interchangeable across platforms and reusable across vehicle generations, meaning a bigger return on investment," a company executive said.

Toyota, just like pretty much of the legacy auto indus-

try, is faced with the prospect of enormous technological disruptions that could upend production processes and change the nature of their products – from a hardware offering to a supercomputer-on-wheels. Consumers of electric vehicles want immersive entertainment systems and features such as autonomous driving. These are not areas that companies like Toyota have had expertise in in the past, whereas EV makers such as Tesla and China's BYD or Nio are far more invested in the software side of the business. So Toyota's goal with this new startup was to create a separate organisation that was at an arm's-length from the parent group, with its legacy of manufacturing and obsessive bureaucracy. A Google employee was brought in late 2021 as CEO for this project. It was called Woven Planet initially, to acknowledge Toyota's history as a loom maker in the 1920s. This distinct software project was in line with what Volkswagen tried out with its CARIAD software unit.

Things, however, started to go wrong over the next 24 months, and Toyota announced significant changes at the venture, and subsequently renamed it 'Woven by Toyota'. The unit was then infused with Toyota executives and a clear signal was sent out that there would be more collaboration between this new venture and Toyota Motor. Arene is therefore a milestone for Toyota's new project. A senior executive from Toyota Kirloskar Motor, the Japanese car major's India venture, said that the Japanese parent company had also launched retraining programmes for workers for the transition and that software engineers make up for a significant chunk of its mid-career hires, led by the company's autonomous driving unit. More software also means more data on consumers and on their driving behaviour, which legacy carmakers have been slow to tap as compared to EV makers..

This transition has been far easier for EV makers, who have progressively taken their software focus to near obsessive levels. The learning from both Tesla and BYD, the two EV market leaders, is that car brands are increasingly being differentiated by the consumer experience of using their inbuilt features, which is now determined much more by their software than the hardware. Amid this transition, software is also proving to be a weak link for legacy automakers. Like Toyota and Volkswagen, Japanese carmaker Honda Motor too plans to double the number of software programmers it employs to around 10,000 by 2030. This would involve deepening its partnership with Pune-based Indian software company KPIT Technologies, alongside building its own software engineering team. Amsterdam-headquartered Stellantis, formed after the merger of the Italian-American conglomerate Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and France's PSA Group, and is now the world's fourth largest automaker, plans to hire over 1,000 software engineers in India by 2025, including for its autonomous vehicle plans. Volkswagen's CARIAD has now tied up with a Chinese software company in a collaborative approach. Most other legacy carmakers are falling back on Google's Android Auto and Apple's CarPlay to dovetail in-car plug-and-play software solutions. This is, however, accompanied by the problem of carmakers having to relinquish control and user data to Apple and Google.

# Centre's FY25 net tax collections miss revised estimate by over Rs 58,000 crore

taxThe miss in the net tax collections – which is the tax accruing to the Centre after paying states their share from the gross tax revenue – was led by a Rs 9,747 crore shortfall in the excise mop-up. The central government missed its revised estimate for net tax collections, which includes direct and indirect taxes, for 2024-25 by Rs 58,075 crore, data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) on Friday showed. As per the data, the Indian government collected Rs 24.99 lakh crore as net taxes in the last fiscal, 2.3 per cent lower than the revised estimate of Rs 25.57 lakh crore. However, compared to the previous year, the net tax collected by the Centre in FY25 was up 7.4 per cent.

The miss in the net tax collections – which is the tax accruing to the Centre after paying states their share from the gross tax revenue – was led by a Rs 9,747 crore shortfall in the excise mop-up, which came in at Rs 3 lakh crore as against the revised estimate of Rs 3.10 lakh crore. Direct taxes – which include corporate tax, personal income tax, and Securities Transaction Tax, among others – were around Rs 6,500 crore less than anticipated at Rs 22.30 lakh crore even though corporate tax collections exceeded the revised estimate by Rs 6,767 crore in FY25. Personal income tax collections, inclusive of Securities Transaction Tax and other taxes, were around Rs 13,000 crore lower than the revised estimate, while the customs duty mop-up was Rs 2,104 crore lower at Rs 2.33 lakh crore. Despite the miss in net tax collections, the Centre met its fiscal deficit target of 4.8 per cent of GDP for the year ended March 2025, with total expenditure during the year 1.3 per cent lower than the revised estimate of Rs 47.16 lakh crore. The fall in expenditure during the year was because of a 2.6 per cent reduction in revenue expenditure, while capital expenditure exceeded the revised estimate of Rs 10.18 lakh crore by Rs 33,578 crore. The government's capex picked up pace in the last four months of FY25 after a slow start in the beginning of the year that had made the government revise down the target. It had initially budgeted the capital expenditure for FY25 at Rs 11.11 lakh crore.

Higher-than-expected non-tax revenues also helped



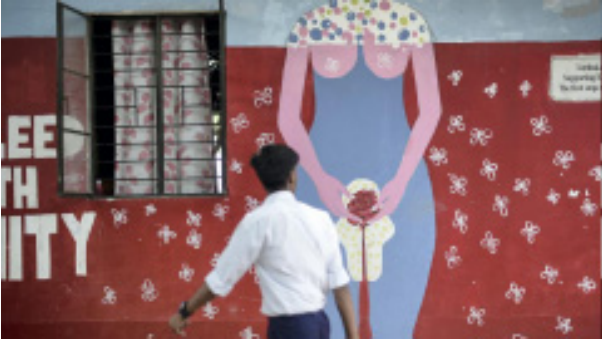
the Centre achieve the FY25 fiscal deficit target. At Rs 5.38 lakh crore, the Centre's non-tax revenues were Rs 6,544 crore higher than the revised estimate. The CGA on Friday also released data on the central government's finances for April 2025, which showed that capex in the first month of the new fiscal stood at Rs 1.60 lakh crore, up 61 per cent on year, accounting for 14.3 per cent of the full-year target of Rs 11.21 lakh crore.

The Indian government's capex had got off to a slow start last fiscal due to the general elections, amounting to Rs 1.81 lakh crore in the first quarter – just Rs 21,261 crore more than what the Centre spent in April 2025 alone. The fiscal deficit for April stood at Rs 1.86 lakh crore as against the budget estimate of Rs 15.69 lakh crore for FY26. As a percentage of GDP, the Centre is targeting a fiscal deficit of 4.4 per cent for the current fiscal.

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) record dividend of Rs 2.69 lakh crore for FY25, transferred to the government earlier this week, is likely to show the Centre's finances in a very healthy state when data for May is released at the end of June. The RBI's dividend makes up much of the Centre's non-tax revenues, with the government having estimated in February 2025 that it would get Rs 2.56 lakh crore as dividend from the central bank and public financial institutions this year. The budget estimate for non-tax revenue for the current fiscal is Rs 5.83 lakh crore.

that he allegedly earned through the sale of shares under the suspected scheme. SEBI's probe centres on LS Industries and its associates being involved in a scheme to artificially boost the company's share price. Despite having reported almost no revenue for three consecutive financial years (FY22 to FY24) and the first three quarters of FY25, the company's stock surged dramatically. Between July 23 and September 27, 2024, the share price skyrocketed from Rs 22.50 to Rs 267.50 — raising the company's market valuation to an eye-popping Rs 22,700 crore. This sharp rise in share price occurred without any improvement in the company's financial performance, raising red flags. SEBI's interim findings noted dubious transfers of shares to Perumbarambathu and unusual trading patterns by some individuals. The regulator stated that these factors strongly suggested a deliberate plan to mislead investors and manipulate the stock. SEBI emphasised that it appeared,

# The politics of periods: why India cannot afford to ignore menstrual health



Imagine Priya, a bright 13-year-old in a village nestled miles from the nearest town. Her first period arrives not with understanding or support, but with hushed warnings and a palpable sense of shame, passed down through generations. Given a rough, inadequate piece of cloth, she's quietly instructed to avoid the kitchen, refrain from touching the shared water pot, and crucially, stay home from school during those five days each month. The school's basic toilet lacks water, privacy, and disposal facilities, making managing her period there an unthinkable ordeal. Fearful of leaks, whispers, and breaking unspoken rules, Priya isolates herself, her education disrupted, her potential dimmed with each recurring cycle. Priya's story, sadly, is not unique. It echoes the lived experience of countless girls and women across India, particularly in rural areas. As Menstrual Hygiene Day observed on May 28 prompts reflection, it is crucial to acknowledge that while awareness around menstruation is growing in India, it remains largely absent from the mainstream political agenda and public discourse. Menstrual health is often relegated as a "women's issue," shrouded in a pervasive culture of silence and coloured by patriarchal notions that limit knowledge and open conversation. This silence translates into a chronic health and social challenge, where many lack adequate information, access to necessary products, and face stigma, impacting their well-being and participation in society. While efforts to distribute sanitary pads are visible and sometimes feature in government schemes, we must recognise that true access demands a fundamental shift beyond products towards systemic policy change and robust infrastructure.

Focusing solely on period product distribution dangerously simplifies this complex reality. While commendable progress has been made, with National Family Health Survey-5 data indicating that around 78% of individuals who menstruate in India may use commercial period products, this statistic masks a deeper infrastructural gap. The figure plummets dramatically when we consider those who have access to both products and essential water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities – clean, private toilets with water and soap. Shockingly, only about 27.7% benefit from this comprehensive access. This stark difference highlights a critical point: distributing pads achieves little genuine progress towards dignified menstrual health if individuals lack the basic infrastructure needed to manage their periods hygienically and privately, particularly in schools and public spaces. This lack of essential WASH facilities remains a persistent barrier, often highlighted during crises that disrupt normal life.

The current political landscape shows some commendable, albeit limited, steps. Various Central and State government schemes, such as those under the National Health Mission or State-specific initiatives like 'Asmita Yojana' in Maharashtra or 'Swechcha' in Andhra Pradesh, aim to provide subsidised or free sanitary napkins, primarily targeting adolescent girls in schools. While valuable, these initiatives often face limitations. Their focus frequently

excludes women outside the school system, those in the workforce, or other vulnerable groups. Additionally, distribution can be hampered by external factors like school closures, and the focus often remains narrowly on disposable pads, without adequately expanding knowledge on diverse, sustainable options like menstrual cups (despite pioneering efforts in States like Kerala and Karnataka) or addressing the crucial need for safe disposal and the environmental impact of sanitary pads. This lack of strong, consistent political backing, often stemming from the underrepresentation of women and their allies in decision-making spaces, means menstrual health remains a relatively neglected public health concern, susceptible to policy oversights like initial exclusion from essential items lists during emergencies or debates around taxation.

Integration into national policy framework. Therefore, building a truly stigma-free, inclusive menstrual health infrastructure demands its integration into the core of our national policy framework. This means legislating for mandatory, comprehensive, and scientifically accurate menstrual health education within school curricula for all students, treating it not just as biology but as essential for equity and empowerment. It requires prioritising and funding national standards for MHM-friendly WASH facilities in all public institutions – viewing this as critical infrastructure essential for public health, education continuity, and enabling of full economic participation. Health policy must be reformed to train healthcare providers for sensitive care, integrate MHM screening and treatment into primary healthcare, ensure insurance coverage, and use inclusive language for all who menstruate. Fair fiscal policies, such as eliminating discriminatory taxes on essential menstrual products and exploring targeted subsidies, are needed to ensure affordability is not a barrier to dignity. Policy levers should encourage supportive workplace environments with adequate facilities and understanding for menstrual health needs, recognising its impact on labour force participation.

Crucially, these comprehensive interventions must be framed not as an expenditure, but as a strategic political and economic investment. Ensuring economic viability requires moving beyond siloed projects. Funding for MHM should be integrated into existing budgets for Health, Education, WASH, Gender Equality, and Rural/Urban Development, leveraging existing political and administrative structures. Smart fiscal tools like tax reform and targeted subsidies offer cost-effective ways to improve access. Supporting local social enterprises producing affordable, sustainable menstrual products can boost local economies, create jobs, and reduce import dependency, aligning with national development goals. Most importantly, policymakers must recognise and champion the significant return on investment: improved educational attainment, increased workforce participation, better public health outcomes, and accelerated gender equality far outweigh the costs. The economic and social cost of inaction – perpetuated by silence and policy neglect – actively undermines India's broader development objectives.

This Menstrual Hygiene Day, the call must be for decisive political action. We need political leaders and parties to champion menstrual health not as a marginal issue, but as fundamental to human rights, public health, and national progress. It requires integrating MHM robustly into national development plans, legislative agendas, and resource allocation. While the efforts of NGOs and local champions are vital, sustainable change at scale hinges on political will. It is time to break the silence in our policy chambers and build an India where everyone can manage their menstruation with dignity, safety, and informed choice – unlocking the full potential of half our population.

# The cheapest way to prevent NCDs: reducing salt consumption

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 70% of deaths in low- and middle-income group countries are due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Poor lifestyles, smoking, the use of alcohol, lack of exercise, air pollution, and other factors contribute to this figure. It is of paramount importance to prevent NCDs, as their treatment can be a huge burden to the health budget of a country. One of the easiest and most cost-effective ways of preventing NCDs is reducing salt consumption in the population. Salt consumption, the WHO says, should be less than 5 grams per day from all sources: this includes natural sources, salt added while cooking, and hidden salt in processed and packaged food. Indians consume way above the recommendation at around 8 to 11 grams per day. It is important to clarify the confusion between sodium and salt. Two grams of sodium is equal to 5 grams of common salt.

The relationship between salt and blood pressure is well known. High salt intake leads to increased blood volume, and unless the endothelium (lining of the blood vessels) produces nitrous oxide, the blood vessel fails to dilate, leading to hypertension. This is called salt-sensitive or resistant hypertension and is genetically determined. However, what is not common knowledge is that salt-resistant hypertension can become salt-sensitive over time. High salt in the absence of hypertension can also lead to endothelial dysfunction. All NCDs have a common pathology of blood vessel damage. The ill effects of hypertension: contributing to heart attacks, strokes, and kidney failure are well known. And so, it is essential that salt intake is followed to the recommended level even in the absence of hypertension.

There are more than 100 studies that have shown the benefit of salt reduction in the population. Studies from Japan, Portugal, and Finland are the oldest. A study from the U.K. showed a reduction of strokes by 24% and heart attacks by 18% when salt intake was reduced. The latest and the largest study from China, showed a considerable reduction in strokes with the use of low-sodium salt substitutes. The other ill effects of salt, such as kidney stones, worsening of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), stomach cancer, and osteoporosis, must be included in the benefits of salt control. The first step is creating awareness at all levels of the general population, health providers, the government, and food manufacturers.

The best way to find out daily salt consumption is by estimating urine sodium over 24 hours. In general, the salt we eat is removed from our urine. Only a very small quantity is lost in faeces or sweat. It is a common misconception that with increased sweating, the body requires more salt: only more water is required. Unfortunately, only about 3,000-odd people have been studied for urinary sodium excretion, which is miniscule considering our population. Studies using dietary recall are not reliable, however, knowing the average family consumption may help to monitor and advise accordingly. Salt meters have been used in some countries but do not help in determining salt in traditional



Indian foods. Studies from our country still show that the majority of salt is added while cooking at home. But this is likely to change, since eating out and consumption of packaged food have been on the rise. The average person cooking at home needs to be educated on the skill of lowering salt through the use of spices and condiments to improve taste. More salt is not required to improve taste. On the contrary, salt is a dominant taste and masks other flavours. The saltshaker need not be displayed on the table, since it is often used without tasting the food. Taste is often an acquired habit, and desensitisation may help with this. Eating out is another source of salt intake with poor control. This has increased with families becoming small, and where both or all adults are working. The Sapiens Health Foundation in Chennai, which has been campaigning for low salt intake for the past 15 years, has successfully persuaded several restaurants to not display saltshakers on the table. The public procurement of food is also an area where salt can be controlled. Midday meals at schools should be an important target. The benefit of this can be immense since the habit is inculcated from childhood. The United Kingdom, for instance, has a very strong policy where meals in schools are served without salt. There is also a lack of awareness about how much salt children require. It is only by the age of 12 that they must reach the recommended intake of 5 grams per day. The transport sector is an important site of public procurement of food. For instance, travellers buy fresh food from stalls at railway stations. Unfortunately, a majority of the airlines serve packed food. These are areas that need to be looked into. The government plays a very important role in controlling the salt intake of the population. Here, food labelling is crucial: labels for sodium should be made mandatory. Labels need to be on the front of the package and need to be clear and legible. Food labels should be marked for high salt content since the common man may not be able to interpret the sodium content. Signal labelling, using red to indicate high salt has been used successfully in the UK. The government can also increase taxes for high-salt items just as it has for cigarettes. Creating awareness in the population is another step and should be taken up by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has initiated the 'Eat Right India' movement which is a collaborative effort with multiple sectors.



# Karun Nair scores 200 for India A against England Lions



GNS News Agency, June 6

Karun Nair continued his stellar run in the red-ball format as he completed a magnificent double hundred during the game between India A and England Lions at the St Lawrence Ground in Canterbury on Saturday. Continuing from his overnight score of 186 runs, Nair looked resumed with the same comfort as yesterday this morning. He got to his landmark in 273 deliveries, which included 26 boundaries and one gigantic six. Nair is no stranger to batting in English climes, having spent multiple stints with Northamptonshire. The experience shone through as he etched a typical hundred in these conditions, conforming to the well-worn tenets of giving the first hour to the seamers, under grey skies, the ball nipping both ways, before mak-

ing hay under the blazing sun.

The strokes were exquisite, especially the cover drives, a fatal stroke in England and its secure execution the telltale sign of a batsman's comfort. The big takeaways of his batting came at the start of his innings, when he exhibited the technical competence to survive the late-moving ball. He stood a couple of strides outside the off-stump, defended close to the body, late and with soft hands and seldom reached out for the ball.

Coach Vijayakumar Madyalkar vividly remembers the sombre evening when his former Karnataka U-25 ward had checked into his academy with a desperate plea to revive his career. India's second Test triple-centurion, Karun Nair, suddenly had nowhere to go after Karnataka — his domestic abode throughout his formative years — had landed a stunning snub after the 2022 season in June. An emotional tweet in the winter of 2022 wouldn't have been enough to tether the widening gulf between him and 'Dear Cricket.' Picking himself up, one watchful step at a time, Nair plotted his deeply personal attempt to fight back from the wilderness with Madyalkar and a WhatsApp group. "Six months. Every alternate day, he used to come to bat 600 balls precisely, facing the side-arm throwers and other bowlers in our academy." Having seen the likes of KL Rahul and Nair since their age-group days, Madyalkar insists the duo stressed intensity and shot refinement above overt technical adjustments.

## 'I'll never be 'Mr-I-apologise' too much': Kagiso Rabada on recent drug suspension

GNS News Agency, June 6

Kagiso Rabada said that he has discussed his recent doping suspension with his South Africa teammates ahead of the WTC final. (AP) Kagiso Rabada said that he has discussed his recent doping suspension with his South Africa teammates ahead of the WTC final. South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada has opened up on his recent one-month suspension for recreational drug use, confirming that he has cleared the air as much as possible with his national teammates and is willing to discuss the incident further if required ahead of their maiden ICC World Test Championship final in London in the second week of June.

Rabada had served out a month's suspension in April, following which the South African Institute for Drug Free Sports (SAIDS) said that he had completed a one-month ban and had also completed an education and awareness programme to prevent further substance abuse. "I think I owe it to them [to talk about what happened] — they're my team-mates," Rabada told reporters when asked about speaking to the squad about his suspension. "We've come from so far, you know, and to my closest people I owe it to them." "Look, this is not an ideal situation. I don't need too many pats on the back here. I'm going to be joining with them again. I've already spoken to them and I guess we can do so in more detail when we get together for an extended amount of time." Featuring in the IPL 2025 season with the Gujarat Titans, the 30-year-old Rabada decided to fly back home at the end of March to serve out the suspension and relieve the burden on himself as much as possible. He returned in May to feature in two more games for the Titans.

"It led me to a bit of introspection about myself, and I

## 'It's very simple...': Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya explains when to bowl Jasprit Bumrah

GNS News Agency, June 6

Mumbai Indians brushed aside Gujarat Titans in the Indian Premier League 2025 Eliminator at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium in Mullanpur, New Chandigarh as the five-time champion moves ahead to play Punjab Kings in the second Qualifier to vie for a spot in the final against Royal Challengers Bengaluru. In a humdinger clash on Friday, the match was open for both teams until MI's biggest weapon in the arsenal, Jasprit Bumrah, showed up to skew the game in Mumbai's way. Bumrah broke the all-important and dangerous-looking stand between Washington Sundar and Sai Sudharsan. He cleaned up Sundar with a fiery yorker, taking him down along the way.

MI skipper Hardik Pandya was all praise for their big-gest match-winner. On being asked when to bowl Bumrah, he said, "It's very simple. Whenever you think the game is going away, just bring him (Bumrah). When you have that it's a luxury."

"It's like Mumbai housing prices — he's that expensive. I was just watching the scoreboard and I thought if we can keep extra runs at the end, I had the bowlers to bowl it. It was important that Jassi comes and bowls that over so that the margin becomes longer (the 18th over). Very important to recover well. Looking forward to the next game," Bumrah explained. Mumbai, after winning the toss, put 228 runs on the board courtesy of a strong start by a new open-

## You cannot replace experience, says Jayawardene

GNS News Agency, June 6

HYDERABAD: Mahela Jayawardene said that Rohit Sharma always made sure that he batted differently in the big games to give the team the best chance of success. Speaking to media after Mumbai Indians scored a 20-run win against Gujarat Titans in the IPL Eliminator in Mullanpur on Friday night, head coach Jayawardene said that Rohit could have gone about his way of bashing the ball from the first over itself, but chose to take his time and understand the pace of the game. "Rohit batted brilliantly. I think he took his time a little bit, letting Jonny take control initially. And, then when he knew it was his time, he got into a brilliant tempo," he said.

"The pressure that he put on Sai [Kishore] and Rashid [Khan] in that situation was absolutely brilliant," Jayawardene said. "In big games, he does have a different gear that he plays. That's what experience does, and you cannot replace that," Jayawardene said. The coach said that Mumbai were smart to shift to a yorker barrage after realising that the slower ones were not sticking into the wicket. "We couldn't get our grip. Planning-wise, we changed our plans to bowl yorkers as much as we could because the length

ing pair of Rohit Sharma and Jonny Bairstow. Pandya lauded the opening duo and said, "The way Jonny batted and started... for him to make his debut for us, it's a special franchise, coming in and playing the way he played. The way Ro (Rohit) batted. He took his time and once he got into rhythm, it was beautiful." Chasing 229, GT got off to a bad start after skipper Shubman Gill departed for just one. But Sai Sudharsan, the orange cap holder, played a sublime inning, stitching valuable runs with Kusal Mendis and Sundar to keep GT in the hunt. "At one point of time the game was even-steven. I thought the wicket got better in the second innings. It started to come on well, they got into rhythm and we realised we need to hold our nerves and back our boys," said Hardik.

balls were skidding through. The variations were not happening. I think it was a tough last 10 overs for us, but the experienced heads held together and we executed brilliantly," Jayawardene explained. When you have a winning culture, it's easier to try and have that same thing going through. We have a very experienced core group within our ranks. That winning mentality itself comes through from those senior players," he said. "Players who have won trophies do help. My job is to try and cultivate the new guys who are coming into the squad. After the big auction, we had quite a few new faces," Jayawardene said. "I think telling them about how we operate and having that attitude that we'll never die from a situation always works," said Jasprit Bumrah is a massive asset for us, the experience that he carries through to the team and the situations that he's been bowling for us as well. It's great to have him around the group. The experience that he brings, talking to Ashwini in that last over before he bowled that as well, those things, it's very, very important," Jayawardene said. "Ashwin (pacer) is a great talent. I think the first season itself, the way he has responded to the challenges that we put him through. He's done brilliantly. I know he hasn't played much state cricket as well.

## 'I'll never be 'Mr-I-apologise' too much': Kagiso Rabada on recent drug suspension



GNS News Agency, June 6

Kagiso Rabada said that he has discussed his recent doping suspension with his South Africa teammates ahead of the WTC final. (AP) Kagiso Rabada said that he has discussed his recent doping suspension with his South Africa teammates ahead of the WTC final. South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada has opened up on his recent one-month suspension for recreational drug use, confirming that he has cleared the air as much as possible with his national teammates and is willing to discuss the incident further if required ahead of their maiden ICC World Test Championship final in London in the second week of June. Rabada had served out a month's suspension in April, following which the South African Institute for Drug Free Sports (SAIDS) said that he had completed a one-month ban and had also completed an education and awareness programme to prevent further substance abuse.

"I think I owe it to them [to talk about what happened] —

they're my team-mates," Rabada told reporters when asked about speaking to the squad about his suspension. "We've come from so far, you know, and to my closest people I owe it to them." "Look, this is not an ideal situation. I don't need too many pats on the back here. I'm going to be joining with them again. I've already spoken to them and I guess we can do so in more detail when we get together for an extended amount of time." Featuring in the IPL 2025 season with the Gujarat Titans, the 30-year-old Rabada decided to fly back home at the end of March to serve out the suspension and relieve the burden on himself as much as possible. He returned in May to feature in two more games for the Titans. "It led me to a bit of introspection about myself, and I took some time away from the game," he said. "I think the biggest thing I took away from it is having gratitude for playing the game that we love. I'm just glad to be playing again... the process was handled really well," Rabada added without divulging details of the banned substance that he had tested positive for in January during the SA20 competition.

"The decision to come back early [from the IPL] was brilliant, and that's a decision that I made," Rabada said. "I could have tried to contest it and whatnot, but coming home was the best option, and I was in good hands. All the parties that were involved made the whole process smooth. While Rabada repents the situation, South Africa's pace spearhead added that he wouldn't be excessively apologetic about the incident. As you would have seen in my statement there are some people who would have been disappointed. And to those people I'm deeply sorry," Rabada said. "The people closest to me are the ones I felt I let down.

## There is disappointment, says GT's Sai Sudharsan

GNS News Agency, June 6

HYDERABAD: Gujarat Titans opener Sai Sudharsan, who had a dream run this IPL season scoring 759 runs, says playing for the country is obviously a dream for everyone and that he would love to do that on the forthcoming tour to England. "When I look back at the IPL, there are a lot of things to improve as a T-20 batter. There are so many facets of the game, or so many sectors I should improve when I play T20 again. So I'm focusing more on that. Of course, when I get an opportunity, I will give my best for the country," Sai Sudharsan said in a chat with the host broadcaster after the Titans lost to Mumbai Indians in the Eliminator in Mullanpur on Friday night.

"It's good to see that I had a good season or I was consistent enough for my team, but I think when the job is not finished, you don't get the ultimate satisfaction when you get back home. So, definitely, there's a lot of disappointment in the environment because of the way we played the first 12 or 13 games, which was fantastic to see as a group or as a team from outside," he explained. "Even when in hindsight when you look at a season like this, I think our team was so good they did a lot of jobs really well. So finishing a tournament like this definitely doesn't give that complete satisfaction. But, yeah, appreciating the performances and of course learning from it is the thing forward," Sai Sudharsan said.

"Yes, definitely a batter like Shubhi when he gets out, it creates a little difficulty in the environment and of course in the game of play," Sai Sudharsan said. "So again, I was aware of it and it was clear that we know how Kusal bhai can play. We've seen him play quite a lot of times in the nets, so I was confident enough that we could get those



runs of course," he said. "And I believed in myself, I was even telling Kusal bhai that we can definitely do it if we have a good play. And likewise, we had a fantastic powerplay. I think we believed more in ourselves and took the game forward and the game was on course for a long period of time," Sai Sudharsan said. "I mean it can (the stoppage of play when Surya Kumar Yadav got some medical attention)," Sai Sudharsan said. "It can definitely make a difference, but I feel we were aware of it. That was a good thing about me and Washy, we had a conversation about it and we were together," he said. "We were not waiting for the game to start. We were just looking at all the things we had to see. I think it was the 12th or 13th over. So we were aware of it because we've seen certain occurrences before, so we were having that conversation and thinking about what we have to do rather than, you know, losing that momentum there," the most consistent opener in this IPL said.

## Despite torn spikes, teenager Pooja leaps to high jump gold at Asian Athletics – and is leading a revolution in her village

GNS News Agency, June 6

Even a torn spike, patched up using Kinesiology tape, didn't deter teenage high jumper Pooja from taking aim at the women's national record of 1.92 metres at the 26th Asian Athletics Championships in Gumi. The mason's daughter from Bosti village in Haryana's Fatehabad district made a statement by attempting to rewrite Sahana Kumari's mark, dating back to 2012. Pooja had already pocketed the gold medal, only India's second in the women's high jump in the history of the competition, by clearing the bar at 1.89 metres. Last time an Indian woman high jumper won gold at the Asian Championships was in 2000, when a 26-year-old Bobby Aloysius cleared 1.83 metres.

From humble beginnings — a bamboo pole as the bar and sacks filled with rice husk and hay as the landing mat — at her coach Balwan Patra's academy in Patra village, next to Bosti, Pooja challenged the best in Asia and won.

The national record would have been a bonus. But 18-year-old Pooja had entered the record books by rewriting her own national Under-20 record, an improvement of four centimetres, en route to winning her first senior international medal. Since Aloysius's gold — she also won a silver in the next edition — the top of the podium place has been the preserve of the jumpers from Kyrgyzstan, China and Uzbekistan. Coach Balwan believes the national record would have fallen if not for the torn spike Pooja wore on her left foot during the final. Balwan said Pooja wears Nike spikes. But the left spike frayed and came apart during a practice session. "Her regular Nike shoes split. She had an Adidas pair too, but she didn't get the right feel when she wore those spikes as she felt she could not control her jump. So she decided to wear the torn spikes because she was more comfortable in them. If her spikes were good, she could have equalled the national record," Balwan told Pooja was happy that her first medal at a senior international competition was a gold. "My body was very well in sync and I would have cleared that 1.92m mark but missed it. Nevertheless, a personal best and gold medal is really good for me. In the last edition I did 1.75 (metres) but this time I improved, so this is a good medal for me at the age of 18," Pooja said post the final.

India's chief national coach Radhakrishnan Nair said he was pleasantly surprised that Pooja clinched the gold. The veteran coach said she has a bright future. "Of course, I was expecting that she would do 1.85-plus but it was not assured with the gold medal. It was an excellent performance by her, comparing her age. She is developing every year. She can be a very good high jumper," Nair said. Rice husks and hay-filled sacks Coach Balwan has given her the target of winning gold at next year's Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games. Even when she is travelling, thou-



sands of kilometres from her village, Pooja is on the phone with Balwan multiple times a day. Post the press conference on Friday, Pooja rang up her long-time coach.

Theirs is a partnership that goes back to when Pooja was into yogasana and gymnastics. Balwan didn't have a landing mat or any equipment to train high jumpers at his academy, named after his village — Patra Sports Academy, located at a school premises. "We used rice husks and hay to fill sacks. Those sacks formed the landing mat," Balwan said of the time when Pooja transitioned from yogasana and gymnastics to high jump. Pooja's father Hansraj Singh is a mason with a daily wage. He was open to the idea of enrolling his daughter at Balwan's academy. Pooja heard about the academy after she saw Balwan's trainees perform yogasana at a village function. "Her father brought her to my academy. I trained her in gymnastics and also yoga. Back then there were no high jumpers training at the academy," coach Balwan recalled. Balwan, a former 800 metres runner, however was impressed by Pooja's flexibility, explosive power and strength in her legs. He took a gamble and asked Pooja if she wanted to try high jump. "Her first jump was about 90 centimetres. I knew immediately that she had a natural ability in the high jump." Pooja spoke about the jugaad she and her coach resorted to in the early days. "I picked up high jump because my coach was confident. When I started there was no proper mat, but I broke the Under-16 record. I have gone through a lot to reach here." With Pooja's fortunes improving, the facilities at Patra's academy were also upgraded. A quality landing mat was gifted by former Asian Games and Commonwealth Games medal-winning discus thrower Seema Antil. "After Pooja qualified for the Asian Games, Seema called me and asked what I needed. When she knew the mat was old, she said that she would get a new one. In less than a month, Seema ensured we had a new mat. Pooja trained on that mat for the Asian Games. We are grateful to Seema," Balwan said. In Patra, there is a mini revolution in high jump following Pooja's success. "



## Taylor Swift regains control of her music, buys back first 6 albums



New York: Taylor Swift has regained control over her entire body of work. In a lengthy note posted to her official website on Friday, Swift announced: "All of the music I've ever made now belongs to me." The pop star said she purchased her catalog of recordings — originally released through Big Machine Records — from their most recent owner, the private equity firm Shamrock Capital. She did not disclose the amount. In recent years, Swift has been rerecording and releasing her first six albums in an attempt to regain control of her music. "I can't thank you enough for helping to reunite me with this art that I have dedicated my life to, but have never owned until now," Swift addressed fans in the post. "The best things that have ever been mine ... finally actually are."

"We are thrilled with this outcome and are so happy for Taylor," Shamrock Capital said in a statement. Swift's re-recordings were instigated by Hybe America CEO Scooter Braun's purchase and sale of her early catalog and represents Swift's effort to control her own songs and how

they're used. Previous "Taylor's Version" releases have been more than conventional re-recordings, arriving with new "from the vault" music, Easter eggs and visuals that deepen understanding of her work. "I am happy for her," Braun said on Friday. She has also released new music, including last year's "The Tortured Poets Department," announced during the 2024 Grammys and released during her record-breaking tour.

So far, there have been four re-recorded albums, beginning with "Fearless (Taylor's Version)" and "Red (Taylor's Version)" in 2021. All four have been massive commercial and cultural successes, each one debuting at No. 1 on the Billboard 200. Swift's last re-recording, "1989 (Taylor's Version)", arrived in October 2023, just four months after the release of "Speak Now (Taylor's Version)." That was the same year Swift claimed the record for the woman with the most No. 1 albums in history. Fans have theorised that "Reputation (Taylor's Version)" would be next: On May 19, "Look What You Made Me Do (Taylor's Version)" aired nearly in full during the opening scene of a season six episode of "The Handmaid's Tale". Prior to that, the song was teased in 2023's Prime Video limited-series thriller "Wilderness" and in Apple TV+'s "The Dynasty: New England Patriots" in 2024. Also in 2023, she contributed "Delicate (Taylor's Version)" to Prime Video's "The Summer I Turned Pretty." But according to the note shared Friday, Swift says she hasn't "even re-recorded a quarter of it." She did say, however, that she has completely re-recorded her self-titled debut album "and I really love how it sounds now." Swift writes that both her self-titled debut and "Reputation (Taylor's Version)" "can still have their moments to reemerge when the time is right." Representatives for Swift and HYBE did not immediately respond to request for comment.

## ‘At 33, I was offered roles of 50 year old aunties’: Kusha Kapila says she isn’t ‘answerable to anyone’ commenting on her body

Kusha Kapila made headlines after a recent public appearance, when people on the internet couldn't stop commenting on her appearance. Her body transformation sparked discussions around her weight loss journey, diet and speculation about her possible use of Ozempic. Now, Kusha has shared a vlog discussing her weight loss journey and the buzz around it. She said she lost weight as she wanted to pursue acting. "I used to get roles of 50 year old aunties at 33," said Kusha. In a casual GRWM video, Kusha spoke in length about her weight loss journey. She said, "Sab janna chahte hai maine weight kaise ghataya, mai apko bataungi kyu maine weight ghataya (I know all of you want to know how I lost so much weight, but I would rather tell you why I lost so much weight)."

"I have watched so many body transformation Reels about me, sometimes I feel I am not even in my body anymore. I am constantly feeling that someone else is talking about my body more than I am so I thought I should talk about it myself," she said. Kusha revealed this is not the first time she has lost a significant amount of weight. Sharing pictures from her school and college days, Kusha recalled, "I first gained weight when I was 10. When I was in the 10th grade, my mom put me in a gym and I lost weight, eventually became the head girl of my school. I loved the attention and validation it brought me." However, Kusha's transformation was short-lived. "In college, I started to gain that weight all over again. I didn't really know what exactly is body image issues. Instead of working on my body, I started to work on my humour. This made me famous. My teachers also didn't care to focus on my academics, they just loved to hear me talk. At 22, I gained a lot of weight again and after my friend sent me a picture of me and told me, 'Kusha, what's up?' it changed me. In six months, I lost weight in the most unhealthy manner possible. I consumed less than 800 calories a day." She added, "By this time, body image issues were so rooted in me that I didn't even know why I lost the weight in the first place. Was it for health reasons or for my need for validation. I kept skipping my meals, and got fevers that stayed for 12 days. Doctors said it might be TB. I got abdominal TB because of eating less. My immunity was compromised. I started to lose more weight as a symptom of TB and weirdly, I was happy about it. This is how body issues play with your mind."

"As I was nearing 30, I made it all about my work and started to ignore my body. I did try and eat healthy and try different diets and workouts, but I was not very consistent. I needed balance. I realised this time work has become my validation, once again I was in the validation trap," she said.



"I kept losing and gaining weight until I moved to Mumbai. I felt extremely lonely here and somewhere I also got adult acne. I did annual body check up, it only had red marks all over it. When I saw doctors, all they had to say is: 'you will have to change your lifestyle.' This motivated me to lose weight." She said that another reason why she lost weight is that she wants better acting roles. "I had acting dreams and because I was in a bigger body, I was getting all aunty characters whose age was between 45-50. I didn't want to take up that role at 33. It made no sense to me. I was so lonely in Mumbai and there were so many speculations about my life that I took out all my bhadaas at the gym and worked out," she said. Kusha said, "Unlike at 13 and 23, this time I lost weight for myself. Some people even question me for losing weight saying, 'You were all about body positivity.' Body positivity doesn't mean that you cannot want to be healthy or work out. It is about being kinder to all body types." Without revealing her workout and diet regime, Kusha said, "Whatever I do with my body, I am not answerable to anyone but people are talking so much c\*\*\* that I had to speak about it." She concluded her video by saying, "There is no guarantee that I will not gain this weight again. I surely will do if I don't continue to go to the gym at least 3-4 days a week. I have been in and out of too many bodies to take these comparisons and transformation videos seriously." Previously, Kusha made headlines when she announced her divorce with Zorawar Ahluwalia in 2023.

## It was the best outdoor ever: Sharmila Tagore on Aranyer Din Ratri

Sharmila Tagore Sharmila Tagore says that Satyajit Ray continues to be relevant, as all his films are technically superior and deeply humane. You entered the world of films with Satyajit Ray's Apur Sansar (1959). How did working with him that early in your career shape your sensibilities as an artiste? Although I was very young, I used to read a lot of books. I was what in Bengali they say paaka — more grown up than your age. To work with Manik da was a learning because you see him, and the entire unit... they were all very well informed about their profession... art and photography. I was 13 but even then, that process of osmosis... just by being there you absorb so much.

What continues to make Ray's cinema relevant to present-day audience?

He continues to be contemporary. At Cannes, a re-stored 4k version of Aranyer Din Ratri (1970) was shown. That was special. Even his other films like Devi (1960) and the Apu trilogy... the mother-son relationship in Aparajito (1956)... the sixth, seventh and eighth generation reacts to it because the romance of Apur Sansar is unforgettable. The Music Room (1958), for instance, is about an aristocrat who would rather break than bend. All these films touch you deeply at a human level. From the dialogues to music, they are all technically quite superior and once it is restored, it is as good as new. It speaks to today's generation also. Mahanagar (1963) in English is called The Mighty City; Seemabaddha (1971) is Company Limited. All these films can be understood today.

I cannot tell you how hot it was. It was April-May. There was no electricity. We put up a generator at night or when-



ever we wanted because my room had a cooler. That helped. The boys — Soumitra, Samit Bhanja, Rabi Ghosh, Shubendu — stayed in a shed with a tin roof. They called themselves Robi pora/ bhaja (burnt/ fried), but we were all happy because the work was so good. We worked early in the morning from 5.30 to 9, and then from 3 to 6. The rest of the time we just chatted. We visited the Santhals, danced with them. We could hear the elephants in the forest. It was the best outdoor ever. May 2 was Satyajit Ray's birthday and we celebrated. Simi got a cake from Kolkata.

## The Beatles and their disruptive trip to India: The ‘Transcendental Meditation’ that changed the Abbey Road musicians forever



By any standard, The Beatles will remain one of the biggest, most prolific, controversial, and iconic bands of all time. Remember the pretentious guy from 10th grade who always carried around a small leather diary with him, the old widower uncle on your block growing up, or the inspiring English professor from your American Literature class in college who made you feel like opening up a dead poet's society of your own. They all listened to the Beatles because the band, like a few other phenomena in the world, wasn't just famous or sought after because of their product; it was because of what they represented and how they made you feel when you associated with their identity, for better or for worse. For example, the Cali Cartel exported and controlled just as much cocaine in their heyday, if not more, as the Medellin Cartel did. But you ask a layman who Rodriguez Orejuela was. It's likely they won't be able to give you the right answer. But ask them about Pablo Escobar, and they will recite for you their favourite dialogues from the Narcos series on Netflix (by the way, they made a season about the Cali guys too; no one cared).

Yes, a drug lord who killed thousands of people during his reign is somewhat of an unsuitable person to be compared with the Abbey Road quartet, but Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, George Harrison and John Lennon, together, had a drug-like hold on their listeners. A drug that would make them keep coming back, a drug that made you cool just by association, and let's be honest, The Beatles weren't pumping out album after album, surviving on Earl Grey tea and English muffins. The boys got together in 1962, after the trio of McCartney, Harrison and Lennon finally found the right drummer in Starr. Soon after their first hit, 'Love Me Do', manager Brian Epstein played all the right moves, and through his grooming and moulding process, out came the biggest rock group in the world. They would go on to make 12 studio albums in the short span of 8 years, due to the power of Earl Grey tea and Scouse, of course.

The amount of music they were putting out was almost too much, and say what you will, the guys knew their stuff. Apart from being amazing musicians, Lennon and McCartney were incredible writers, artists who were more susceptible to inspiration and ideas for a bridge than Joseph B. Strauss (he wasn't a musician, just the guy who built the Golden Gate Bridge). Harrison and Starr were expert executioners of their writers' vision, and together they worked hard day and night to earn their place in the Mount Rushmore of music, if not at the peak of Everest. But that kind of schedule, along with the "calm and sober" lifestyle of a rock star, can be taxing on the body, and soon the street outside Abbey Road Studios became too long a course to chart, and they were exhausted. It was getting difficult keeping up appearances while trying to manage your career, wives, extramarital affairs and dentists serving you coffee laced with LSD, which, considering the 60s, was probably part of the dental plan for musicians. The Beatles needed a break, and Harrison's wife, Pattie Boyd, the woman who was described as the modern-day Helen of Troy by LA magazine, suggested 'Transcendental Meditation' to the group. This was a revelation, and without any delay, the Beatles travelled to Rishikesh to meet the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

The Beatles had previously met the Maharishi during a lecture in London and a 10-day workshop in Wales (with Mick Jagger by the way), a trip they had to cut short because Epstein suddenly passed away. They were then invited to join him at his main ashram, where the Beatles would end up writing close to 50 songs, with many of them ending up on their next project, 'The White Album'. Even though the Beatles had sold millions of records all over the world and had probably witnessed every comfort known to man, they were taken aback when they reached the Ashram. 14 acres of land consisting of six long bungalows, each con-

taining five or six double rooms, and the rooms were equipped with four-poster beds and an electric fire system. Along with all that, there was a post office, a lecture theatre and a swimming pool. All four of them were now determined to make the most of this trip, and Harrison and Lennon were the most affected by the teachings.

After the band met the Maharishi in Wales, they had decided to give up drugs, just like Jimi Hendrix switched to the tambourine after playing the 'Star-Spangled Banner'. Even after this supposed break from drugs, Lennon admitted that he was hallucinating during his time at the Ashram, and his claims were backed by his wife, Cynthia Lennon, who said in Bob Spitz's book The Beatles that Harrison and Lennon had completely accepted the teachings of the Maharishi. However, Starr and McCartney weren't having that much of a jolly time and left soon after a couple of weeks. The band tripped for days, just on meditation apparently, and wrote an entire album while denying a Lord of The Rings movie (story for another time). But as half of the group departed, the other two maybe went too deep.

Boyd, who introduced Harrison to the entire scheme, admitted later on that the teachings had gotten a hold of him, and so had alcohol and drugs. Lennon who was apparently already thinking about bringing his then muse Yoko Ono on the trip along with his wife, asked for separate rooms for him and his wife after just a few days in Rishikesh. Their relationship would never get back to normal, ultimately leading to a divorce. Through the Ashram and his muse, Lennon had shed the skin of the young and innocent Scouser, and the man that emerged wanted to change the world, and his own life with it. He had already been drifting towards politics and activism before Rishikesh, many fans and members of the band accused his relationship with Ono to be one of the reason, they broke up. Lennon admitted later on that the moment he saw Ono was the moment he knew his days with the old gang were over.

Soon Lennon and Harrison also left upon discovering the Maharishi's involvement in sexual assault cases, even though it was never proved. But even though the boys were all back in good old England, the distance had already been created. During this very week in 1968, the Beatles started recording 'The White Album' at the Abbey Road Studios, and to the average Joe, it was just another great project. Songs filled to the brim with mystique of the East, songs that brought out a different side of the Beatles, a broken side of the Beatles. The strum of the guitar still blended perfectly with the thrum of the drums, the tempo still intact, and the different voices and harmonies still so seamlessly brought together that they sounded one. But the trip, like perceived by many, wasn't a breather; it was a moment of realisation for all four men that they didn't need to be the greatest band in the world anymore. It was enough, all that they had done, and if the sun had set on the Beatles on the day they released the White Album, it would be alright.

They did end up working on another album, but personal turmoils, failing relationships and four broken minds were enough to stop this madness. Seeds of discontent had been sown long before the trip and maybe whatever they experienced in India, just exacerbated the whole situation. All four of the Beatles left their wives following that trip, with McCartney's marriage lasting the longest. The group went their separate ways, and the band was legally disbanded in 1974. Even though they were gone in such a short time, everyone listened to the Beatles. They were probably the first band to be famous enough to be recognised by all, even if many never listened to a single thing they put out. It wasn't about what they sang; it was always about who they were and what they represented, and maybe the pretentious guy from your school whom we talked about earlier isn't all too bad, because no matter who they were and what they did, the Beatles were cool; it's that simple.

## Sooraj Pancholi calls his Bollywood colleagues ‘cowards’, says Jackie Shroff and Suniel Shetty’s generation had actual unity

Actor Sooraj Pancholi, who recently made his Bollywood comeback with the period actioner Kesari Veer, opened up in a candid interview with Siddharth Kannan about a pressing concern he has observed within the industry — the fading unity among today's generation of actors. Recalling a recent gesture of support he received, Sooraj mentioned Tiger Shroff, who turned up at the premiere of Kesari Veer after just a phone call. "I hope I make friends like this. Because these are the friends (possible) because our fathers were friends. His father, my father, Dutt sir and all of those people, that kind of pack. Because right now it's fading away from the industry. There are very few people who will be actually there for you," Sooraj reflected. When asked why the current generation of actors appears more detached, especially when compared to the older generation who routinely showed up for one another, Sooraj didn't hold back. "Everyone is scared to get into each other's prob-

lems. Before, everyone showed up for each other, whether it was an accident or a fight, or some controversy happened, everyone was in it together. There was a protest against the media long back and everyone was there. If you do it now, it won't happen. No one wants to affect anybody, nobody wants to take any pangaas, everyone is playing it very cowardly. Everyone is being a coward now. That's what it is," he said bluntly. Sooraj went on to name some of the stalwarts from the past who represented that spirit of solidarity: Jackie Shroff, his father Aditya Pancholi, Sanjay Dutt, Suniel Shetty, Vindu Dara Singh, and Ranjeet. "There is Mithun sir, of course he is a senior, and the biggest example of all this is Dharam sir, who is of course very old now, but at his time, I have heard he has even fought for his people. But now it's not there. At least not in the actors," he noted. Offering an observation about the performative nature of support in today's times, Sooraj added, "