

## Medigadda Barrage rehabilitation: After two years of inaction, subsurface investigation to take off amid farmer protests

Hyderabad: More than two years after a couple of piers sank at the Medigadda barrage in October 2023, serving as a pretext for the Congress government to leave it non-functional depriving irrigation support for lakhs of acres, the Irrigation department is gearing up to take up a critical open foundation inspection of Block 7, a step critics say is long overdue and driven solely by mounting public and political pressure.

The barrage, a key component of the ambitious Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project, has remained idle for two years now, leaving farmers in the region to bear the brunt of severe water shortages. Successive cropping seasons have been lost while public anger has steadily risen, with farmers openly protesting the State government's prolonged neglect of the project. Hyderabad Local Event

Opposition Bharat Rashtra Samithi leaders have intensified their campaign on water rights and abandoned irrigation projects, organising agitations and threatening larger protests. The BRS is holding a key meeting of its State-level executive committee and Legislative party on December 21 to decide the future course of action against the neglect of the State irrigation projects.

Sources say the escalating unrest, combined with farmers' direct appeals to the government, has forced the Congress-led administration to act in order to demonstrate 'sincerity' ahead of potential political fallout. The Irrigation Department has now confirmed that work will soon begin on a comprehensive open foundation inspection of Block 7.

The exercise involves dewatering the barrage, construction of a cofferdam and directly exposing the foundation for visual and geotechnical examination, including new boreholes, geophysical surveys, and possible excavation to assess voids and erosion if any. The decision follows recommendations in the National Dam Safety Authority's (NDSA) final report released in April this year.

Medigadda operations unlikely before 2027

The investigation is expected to help ascertain if the sagging of the piers



owed to any kind of displacement in the rafts, sand piping, or any major cavity formation beneath the foundation. The NDSA explicitly called for detailed subsurface investigations of the raft and secant piles before any major restoration design could be finalised. Substantive rehabilitation efforts remained confined to announcements and studies for over two years.

An Expression of Interest (EoI) process for reputed design agencies was completed only in October this year

and the upcoming inspection is expected to feed data into final rehabilitation blueprints. Officials claim full restoration work could begin in early 2026, but they have cautioned that complete irrigation benefits from Medigadda are unlikely before 2027.

The services of independent experts have to be drafted to oversee the process to address the deficiencies suspected by the NDSA. Critics, including farmer organisations and opposition leaders, argue that the Congress

government's delayed response has needlessly prolonged the crisis.

"For two years, farmers have suffered while the project gathered dust. Only now, when protests are intensifying, the government is waking up," they said.

The upcoming inspection is being described by officials as a crucial step toward revival, but for the farmers who have waited through multiple dry seasons, it remains to be seen whether the long-promised rehabilitation will finally materialise.

## Two killed, one injured after speeding car crashes into roadside water vendor's shed

Hyderabad: Two persons were killed and one other was seriously injured after a speeding car ploughed into a roadside water vendor's shed at Durganagar, under the Mailardevpally police station limits on Wednesday morning.

The victims were identified as Deepak (25) and Prabhu Maharaj (60),

both natives of Madhya Pradesh. Deepak died on the spot due to severe injuries, while Prabhu Maharaj succumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment at the hospital.

The third victim, Sathunath (27), suffered serious injuries and is being treated at Osmania General Hospital.

According to the police, the inci-

dent occurred around 5 am., when an Innova car bearing registration number AP09 BP 9444, travelling from the Outer Ring Road towards Durganagar, was being driven in a rash and negligent manner. The vehicle lost control near Durganagar ground and crashed into a water vendor's shed, where the three victims were sleeping.



## Employment guarantee scheme must be free from political interferences

Revamping welfare schemes is a good idea, so changes in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, per se, are not objectionable. However, the way it is being done smacks of a desire to score political points. It begins with the name. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is proposed to be replaced with the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Grameen), or VB G RAM Priyanka Gandhi Vadra reacted with "Why are they removing Mahatma Gandhi's name? He is considered the biggest Indian leader.

Whenever such a name changes, a lot of expenditure happens in stationery and paper-work." More than that it makes the government a target for its detractors, which is increasingly coming under the influence of Gandhi haters. This does no good to the government under the Sangh Parivar, many of whose members have expressed admiration for Nathuram Godse. Enacted by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in 2005, the MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of work in villages.

The Act has a provision for an unemployment allowance. "MGNREGA is bottom-up, people-centred, demand-driven, self-selecting and rights-based programme. It provides a legal guarantee for wage employment by providing allowances and compensation both in cases of failure to provide work on demand and delays in payment of wages for work undertaken," an official document says. The new Bill proposes several changes. It raises the 100-day guarantee to 125.

Also, the scheme will no longer be demand-driven. Further, states will bear the financial burden partially. At present, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is entirely a Centrally-sponsored scheme—that is, the Centre provides 100 per cent of wages, while states take care of a small part of the expenses in hiring skilled labour and arranging materials. Under G Ram G, the Centre's contribution will be limited to 60 per cent, whereas most states will have to spend 40 per cent. For North-eastern and Himalayan states, this ratio will be 90:10.

The new legislation proposes that work under the revamped scheme will not be available during the peak agricultural season. The government will rely on biometrics and geo-tagging for transparency. Non-availability of work during the peak agricultural season will be vehemently protested by the Left and civil society organisations. Communist leaders are no longer as powerful or influential as they were when the MNREGA came into being but Left-leaning NGOs and public intellectuals are still a force to reckon with.

## Flamingo Fest to light up Pulicat on Jan 10–11

Tirupati: Good news for bird lovers and tourists. The much-anticipated Flamingo Festival will be held at Pulicat Lake in the Sullurpet constituency of Tirupati district for two days on January 10 and 11, 2026, the district administration has announced.

District collector Dr S Venkateswar has directed officials to begin preparations immediately to ensure the smooth and successful conduct of the festival. A

# Govt orders vigilance probe into IDPL land encroachment

Hyderabad: The State Government has ordered a vigilance inquiry into the IDPL (Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Limited) lands in Survey Number 376 in Kukatpally, Hyderabad.

Following political accusations against each other by Telangana Jagruthi President K Kavitha and BRS MLA Madhavaram Krishna Rao on the alleged encroachment of lands worth Rs 4,000 crore, the government ordered the probe.

Kavitha made serious allegations that Krishna Rao had encroached upon the lands and committed numerous irregularities and acts of corruption. Responding to this, the Telangana government decided to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the allegations of encroachment of the valuable IDPL lands. The Telangana government has thus ordered an inquiry into the IDPL lands in Kukatpally, which are val-



ued at Rs 4,000 crore.

The BRS Kukatpally MLA Krishna Rao welcomed the probe. He said that the inquiry would bring out the facts of who committed the irregularities and encroachments on the IDPL lands.

## Telangana moves SC against AP's Polavaram–Nallamala link project

Hyderabad: In a fresh intensified water dispute between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the Telangana government filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the Polavaram-Nallamala Sagar Link Project (PNLP), formerly known as the Polavaram-Banakacherla Link Project (PBLP) on Tuesday.

The writ petition, filed under Article 32 of the Constitution, seeks a mandamus to restrain Andhra Pradesh from proceeding with the project, which aims to divert surplus floodwaters from the Godavari River to the Krishna and Gundlakamma basins.

The petition accuses Andhra Pradesh of unilaterally advancing the project in violation of the Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal (GWDT) Award of 1980, the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act (APRA) of 2014, and Central Water Commission (CWC) guidelines.

It specifically requests an interim stay on ongoing expansion works of the Polavaram project's Right Main Canal (RMC) and a recent e-procurement tender for preparing the Detailed Project Report (DPR), floated on November 21 and modified on November 24.

The PNLP, estimated at around Rs 58,000 crore, is designed to divert 2 TMC of water per day from the under-construction Polavaram dam on the Godavari.

The project comprises three segments: first, enhancing the capacity of the Polavaram RMC from 17,500 cusecs to over 35,000 cusecs or building a parallel canal to feed into the Krishna River; second, constructing the Bollapalli reservoir with a potential storage capacity of up to 400 TMC; and third, lifting water through tunnels in the Nallamala hill range to the Nallamala Sagar reservoir in Prakasam district. It will benefit the Rayalaseema and south coastal re-



gions in Andhra Pradesh.

Telangana contends that the project relies on "flood waters" not apportioned by the GWDT, which allocated dependable flows but left surplus waters undistributed.

The petition highlights that Andhra Pradesh has proceeded despite lacking in-principle clearance for the Pre-Feasibility Report (PFR), submitted to the CWC in May 2025 and still under scrutiny.

Key concerns raised include inter-state implications, potential submergence risks in Telangana due to Polavaram backwaters, and environmental violations.

The petition notes that the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change returned the proposal in June 2025, directing Andhra Pradesh to first resolve interstate issues with the CWC.

Objections have also come from Karnataka and Maharashtra, with the former claiming compensation for Krishna basin diversions and the latter seeking clarity on flood-based project guidelines.

Despite these, Andhra Pradesh formed a Special Purpose Vehicle, Jala Harathi Corporation, in April 2025 for execution and issued tenders for the DPR even as the PFR appraisal continues.

The CWC, in its letter on December 4, reportedly directed Andhra Pradesh not to proceed with DPR preparation without clearance, yet bids were received, and an award is imminent, according to the petition.



## Gig workers' union calls for end to porter drivers' woes

Hyderabad: The Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union (TGPWU) raised serious concerns over the deteriorating working conditions of Porter drivers. Despite repeated complaints, Porter management has failed to address critical issues, pushing drivers into severe financial distress, mental stress, and job insecurity. TGPWU has submitted a formal representation to the Commissioner of Labour and Additional Commissioner of Labour, Government of Telangana, demanding urgent intervention and accountability from Porter management. TGPWU has formally requested a meeting within the next seven days with Porter



management and concerned government officials to resolve these issues.

"Porter's growth and profits are built on the hard work of drivers. The current system is pushing drivers into debt and insecurity. This exploitation cannot continue," said Shaik Salauddin, Founder President, TGPWU. The union demands the resolution of key issues, including Fair and Transparent Pricing. TGPWU demands restoration of fair base fares and per-kilometre rates aligned with rising fuel, vehicle maintenance, and living costs; pricing policies must be transparent, with no sudden unilateral changes.

They also demand Mandatory Cancellation Charges for Drivers, as frequent customer cancellations waste drivers' time and fuel; cancellation charges must be credited directly to drivers without exceptions, and repeat offenders should face penalties. Furthermore, they demand an End to Arbitrary Account Blocking and Penalties, as drivers' accounts are being suspended without due process; a transparent grievance redress mechanism must be established, ensuring notice, evidence disclosure, and an opportunity for drivers to respond before any action is taken.

## War heroes honoured on Vijay Diwas at Veerula Sainik Smarak

Hyderabad: A solemn wreath-laying ceremony was held on Tuesday at Veerula Sainik Smarak in Hyderabad to commemorate Vijay Diwas, marking the historic victory of the Indian Armed Forces in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The ceremony paid heartfelt tribute to the brave soldiers who laid down their lives in the service of the nation, ensuring India's sovereignty and integrity.

The event was attended by distinguished dignitaries, including Jishnu Dev Verma, Governor of Telangana, Bhatti Vikramarka, Deputy Chief Minister of Telangana, and Major General Ajay Misra, General Officer Commanding (GOC) Telangana & Andhra Sub Area (TASA). They were joined by officials from the Ministry of Defence, veterans, and families of the martyrs, all of whom gathered to honour the supreme sacrifices of the armed forces.

In his address, Governor Jishnu Dev Verma praised the courage and selflessness of the soldiers who fought valiantly in the 1971 war. He said their sacrifices remain etched in the nation's collective memory and continue to inspire future generations. Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka emphasised the importance of remembering and honouring the contributions of the armed forces, noting that their dedication and patriotism form the backbone of India's unity and strength.



Major General Ajay Misra reaffirmed the Indian Army's unwavering commitment to safeguarding national security and unity. He highlighted that Vijay Diwas is not only a day of remembrance but also a reaffirmation of the Army's pledge to protect the nation against all threats.

The ceremony included floral tributes, moments of silence, and interactions with veterans and families of the Bravehearts. The presence of families underscored the deep emotional connection between the armed forces and the citizens they protect. The commemoration served as a reminder of the valour displayed during the 1971 war, which led to the liberation of Bangladesh and stands as one of the most decisive victories in India's military history.

## Three held for Tolichowki murder, one still at large

Hyderabad: The Tolichowki police have detected a murder case and apprehended three accused persons, including two women, for the murder of a 23-year-old man in Tolichowki.

Police arrested Shaik Bilal (25), an auto driver, and his wife Sana Begum (23), who works as a maid, alongside Ruhi Begum (23). Mohd Naveed (22), an auto driver, is currently absconding. The accused persons were arrested for the murder of Mohammed Irfan, who was also an auto driver.

According to police, following the complaint from the deceased's father, Mohammed Maulana, police registered a case and investigated. In a complaint received on 15 December, Maulana stated that on 14 December, Bilal along with his family members came

to his house and alleged that his son, Adnan, had spread rumours about Bilal's wife.

G Chandra Mohan DCP, South West zone, said that Bilal, his brother-in-law Naveed, his wife Sana Begum, and his cousin sister Ruhi then went to an auto stand at Marwa Dental Hospital and inquired about Adnan.

Suspecting their intention, Irfan along with his two friends followed them and had arguments. Following the confrontation, Bilal stabbed Irfan on the chest with a knife. Soon after, Irfan's friends shifted him to Olive Hospital, where a duty doctor examined him and declared him dead.

On Tuesday, the accused persons Bilal, Sana, and Ruhi were arrested at Afsar Khan Colony, Golconda, Hyderabad, and were subsequently produced before the Honourable Court.



## Lawyers protest after unhygienic food found at HC canteen

Hyderabad: The HC Advocates' Association canteen came under serious scrutiny following repeated complaints of unhygienic food, triggering strong protest and outrage among lawyers on Tuesday.

The issue escalated after advocates reportedly found cockroaches and other objects, including safety pins and stapler pins, in the food served at the canteen, raising grave concerns over food safety and health risks.

According to advocates, the quality of food at the canteen had been sub-standard for some time, but the frequent

discovery of contaminants led to an immediate and spontaneous reaction from the legal fraternity. Following the latest incident, lawyers informed the HC Bar Association, seeking urgent intervention.

Acting swiftly, members of the Bar Association's executive committee visited the canteen during the lunch hour. Many advocates accompanied the inspection team, which included association president Anumula Jagan, secretaries Khaja Vizarrath Ali and Indrasena Reddy and senior advocate Chikkudu Prabhakar, Mohd. Habeeb Ali Khan,

Mohd Azhar and P Shankar. The team inspected the kitchen and food preparation amid mounting anger among advocates present.

Speaking after the inspection, Jagan confirmed that the complaints were found to be genuine. He stated that the association had received information that prepared food items contained cockroaches and other extraneous objects; the inspection was carried out immediately after advocates raised the issue.

The association formally brought the issue to the notice of contractor

Venkat Rao and issued a stern warning. The contractor was directed to take immediate and comprehensive steps to ensure strict hygienic conditions within two days. The association said failure to comply with the directive would result in termination of the canteen contract and allotment of the facility to new contractors.

The association reiterated it would not compromise on the health and safety of advocates. It assured members of strict action to ensure hygienic food standards at the canteen.



## Domestic help theft cases cracked; gold, silver worth Rs 31 lakh seized

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad city police have detected two theft cases and arrested three accused and recovered stolen gold and silver ornaments worth approximately Rs 31 lakh from their possession.

In the first case under Karkhana Police Station, police arrested Uragadda Madhavi (35), who works as a maid and her husband Uragadda Krishnaiah (40), a driver, both residents of Lakkapalli Village, Narayanpet district.

According to police, the complainant Gajawada



Sridhar, a jewellery businessman, of Bowenpally, reported that gold ornaments and gold biscuits were missing from his house over a period of time. Based on suspicion, the maid servant working in his house and her husband were examined.

During the investigation, it was revealed that they had committed repeated thefts of gold ornaments and gold biscuits and melted a portion of the stolen gold to prepare ornaments for their personal use.

On December 15, both accused were arrested. They confessed to the offence and led the police to the recovery of stolen gold ornaments and melted gold pieces weighing a total of 24.2 tolas, said S Rashmi Perumal, DCP North Zone.

Both the accused were arrested and produced before the court and remanded to judicial custody.

In another case under Bollaram Police Station, police arrested Jajala Sindhu Chinnari of Kowdpally, Medak, Telangana. According to Bollaram police, on December 13, the complainant Yellu Sujatha reported that gold and silver ornaments kept in her almirah were missing.

She had employed a maid servant Sindhu Jah in July 2025. Upon checking her valuables before travelling, she noticed that, valuable gold ornaments and silver articles were missing from her house.

Based on the complaint, a case was registered U/s 306 BNS, and during the course of investigation, the accused was examined, and the stolen ornaments were recovered.

One gold necklace weighing 5.1 tolas, another gold melted piece weighing two tolas and silver articles weighing 61 tolas were seized from the accused, said the DCP. The Hyderabad City Police urge all citizens to remain vigilant by thoroughly verifying the background of domestic servants before employment, ensuring that valuables are kept securely locked at all times, and promptly reporting any suspicious activities to Dial-100 to help prevent thefts and ensure public safety.

## DEO inspects KSR ZP high school for girls

DEO L Chandrakala taking a Physical Science lesson to Class 10 students during her surprise visit to KSR Zilla Parishad High School Plus for Girls at Patamata Lanka in Vijayawada on Tuesday

Vijayawada: NTR District Education Officer (DEO) L Chandrakala paid surprise visit to the Komma Seetharamaiah (KSR) Zilla Parishad High School Plus for Girls at Patamata Lanka here on Tuesday. During the inspection, she reviewed the implementation of the 100-day action plan aimed at improving the performance of Class 10 students in the upcoming SSC Public Examinations.

The DEO directly went to classrooms of Class-X and took physical science lesson. Along with physical science



teachers Rajya Lakshmi and Vidyullatha, she actively engaged the students by explaining concepts and conducting interactive teaching.

Addressing the teaching staff, Chandrakala stressed the

need for concerted efforts to achieve 100% results in SSC examinations. She said the State government was extending all necessary support to government schools by providing uniforms, shoes, textbooks and improved infrastructure. She reiterated

that the 100-day action plan for Class 10 students was a priority task assigned to all districts. In-charge Headmaster Muralikrishna Reddy and other teachers were present.

## City gears up to host national badminton championship

Vijayawada: With Vijayawada set to host the 87th Senior National Badminton Championship from December 22 to 28, preparations have gathered momentum at the Chennupati Ramakotaiah Municipal Corporation (CHRM) Indoor Stadium in Patamata.



In this connection, Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) Chairman Animini Ravi Naidu, Vice Chairman and Managing Director S Bharani, and Andhra Pradesh Badminton Association (APBA) Secretary Dr P Ankamma Chowdary, along with Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) engineering officials, inspected the stadium on Tuesday.

The seven-day championship has been allotted

by the Badminton Association of India (BAI) to the AP Badminton Association after a gap of a decade. The tournament will be conducted at the CHRM Indoor Stadium, which is being renovated

by the VMC at a cost exceeding Rs 1 crore to meet national-level standards.

Several top shuttlers, including Olympic medallist PV Sindhu, international stars Kidambi Srikanth and Lakshya Sen, along with other prominent players, are expected to participate, adding further prestige to the event. As Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan are likely to attend the championship, officials were instructed to en-

sure flawless arrangements. Speaking on the occasion, Ravi Naidu highlighted the efforts of Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni and Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rammohana Rao in strengthening sports infrastructure. SAAP Director Santosh, Krishna District Badminton Association Secretary MSN Prasad, VMC engineering officials, and others were present.



# 100-day action plan to boost Class-X results stressed

Vijayawada: NTR district collector Dr G Lakshmisha directed education officials to implement the 100-day action plan in a systematic and result-oriented manner to ensure Class X students achieve excellent results and place the district among the top performers in the state.

Reviewing the implementation of the 100-day action plan, the Collector held a meeting with education department officials at the Collectorate here on Tuesday. Mandal Education Officers (MEOs) participated in the meeting virtually. Dr Lakshmisha instructed officials to pay special attention to the academic progress of Class X students studying in 187 government-managed schools across the district.

He said that special classes should be organised to strengthen self-belief and guide students steadily towards



academic improvement. Highlighting the need for constant academic supervision, he said District and Mandal Academic Forums should closely monitor progress and support students in achieving good scores in the Class X examinations. Interactive sessions should be held to identify learning

obstacles and address them promptly.

Dr Lakshmisha further announced that a special officer would be assigned to each school to visit regularly and provide guidance. He noted that the state government is providing all necessary resources to ensure a

bright future for students and urged officials to make optimum use of these facilities.

DEO L Chandrakala, Samagra Shiksha Assistant Project Coordinator M Rajani Kumari, AP SDWREIS DCVO A Muralikrishna, MEOs, and others were present.

# Enough urea stocks in NTR dist: DAO

Vijayawada: The NTR district administration has ensured adequate availability of urea fertiliser for the Rabi season 2025-26, covering the needs of all crops, according to District Agriculture Officer DMF Vijaya Kumari. It has been decided to distribute a total of 33,353 Metric Tons (MTs) of urea in the district during the season, she said.

On Tuesday, DAO Vijaya Kumari informed the district collector Dr G Lakshmisha regarding the availability of urea stock and usage of several fertilizers during the Rabi season.

She said that as on October 1, the district had an opening stock of 2,390 metric tonnes of urea. From October 1 to December 31, the total requirement was estimated at 17,368 MTs, while 19,758 MTs had already been made available to farmers, indicating sufficient supply, she said. Between October 1 and December 16, farmers in the district utilised 13,525 MTs of urea, she added.

Further, she said the estimated requirement for the next 15 days from December 16 is 3,631 MTs. However, a healthy stock of 6,026 MTs of urea is currently available at Primary Cooperative Societies (PACS), Rythu Seva Kendras (RSKs), MARKFED godowns, retail and wholesale outlets, and company warehouses, she explained.



The officer clarified that there is no fertiliser shortage in the district, as domestic fertiliser plants are operating and imports are satisfactory. She also highlighted the availability of technologically advanced Nano Urea and Nano DAP, promoted by both Central and State governments as effective alternatives to conventional fertilisers.

Farmers were advised to purchase fertilisers only at the printed MRP and insist on receipts. Strict action, including licence cancellation under the Fertilizer Control Order 1985, would be taken against errant dealers indulging in malpractice.

# Eluru district police launch 'Project restore'

Eluru: District police launched 'Project restore,' a citizen-centric policing initiative aimed at returning property recovered from criminals to its rightful owners in a timely, respectful, and transparent manner.

As part of the initiative, they recovered property worth Rs 2,93,60,000 benefiting 729 victims across the district. The recovered assets included 1020 grams of gold ornaments, Rs 1,32,00,000 in cash, 30 two-wheelers, two four-wheelers, 647 mobile phones, and other valuables, all of which had been recovered during the course of criminal investigations.

While recovery of stolen property is an integral part of policing, Eluru police emphasised that justice is truly complete only when recovered property reaches the hands of the victim. 'Project restore' has been conceptualised to bridge this final gap in the criminal justice process by reducing delays, procedural hardship, and repeated visits by victims to police stations and courts.

A key objective of the initiative is to restore public faith in policing by demonstrating empathy, accountability, and proactive service delivery. Under 'Project restore', police personnel proactively contacted victims, completed necessary verification, and ensured lawful handover of recovered property, often at or near the victim's place of residence.

By conducting the initiative simultaneously across the district on a single day, Eluru police also sought to create large-scale public awareness regarding common crime patterns, local modus operandi of offenders, and practical precautions citizens can adopt to protect themselves from theft, fraud, and cheating. Such visible, collective action not only reassures victims but also instils confidence among residents of the entire neighbourhood, reinforcing a sense of safety and trust in local policing.

Importantly, 'Project restore' is expected to encourage greater civic responsibility and co-operation with the criminal justice system. By experiencing responsive and humane policing, victims and citizens are more likely to come forward, assist investigations, and actively participate in court proceedings by giving evidence without hesitation, thereby contributing to improved conviction rates and effective incarceration of offenders.

The initiative further provided police personnel an opportunity to gain a human perspective on the real impact of crime, as officers directly interacted with victims and understood the social, emotional, and economic value of the restored property. Superintendent of Police Kishore Kommi has announced that 'Project restore' will be institutionalised as a regular activity, with periodic drives to ensure that recovered property is returned to rightful owners at the earliest possible stage, in strict accordance with law. Through 'Project restore', Eluru police reiterates its commitment to citizen-first policing, grounded in the principle that policing does not end with detection or recovery.



# Who gains if TikTok is banned in the US? Explained

In April, the Biden administration passed a law - Protecting Americans From Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act - that forces TikTok's Chinese parent ByteDance to divest ownership of the app in 9-12 months, or see it banned in the U.S. If that divestment does not happen, there is a chance that users in the U.S. could lose access to TikTok, similar to how Indian users lost the service four years ago. TikTok and ByteDance sued the U.S. government in response, claiming that the law violates Americans' right to free speech and that Congress is singling out one platform, "with one set of rules for one named platform, and another set of rules for everyone else," according to the companies' legal petition dated May 7.

But, if TikTok is booted out of the U.S., which platforms stand to gain from the ban?

TikTok was banned in India in June 2020 after deadly clashes between Chinese and Indian soldiers near a contested border region. However, rival tech platforms didn't waste any time in trying to fill up the void. In September, YouTube introduced an early beta of YouTube Shorts in India. While the exact India-centric data points are not available, the average daily views of YouTube Shorts grew by over 120% in India year-on-year (as of July 2023), while the average daily logged-in viewers of YouTube Shorts grew by over 30% year-on-year in India (as of July 2023), the company shared with The Hindu. Meanwhile, Meta announced in July 2020 that Instagram Reels would be coming to India. The social media giant has periodically hailed India's community of content creators and brands earning their revenue through Reels. However, Meta declined to provide India-related statistics showing the adoption of Reels in India.

What effect does TikTok have on American politics?

TikTok is used by around 170 million Americans, who reach out to a global audience of more than 1 billion. But for years, the viral video app has been under the microscope due to fears of its entanglement with China's regime. In 2023, FBI Director Christopher Wray told the U.S. Senate that TikTok was in China's control and that it "screams out with national security concerns." Apart from this, U.S. politicians believe TikTok could be used to influence the way Americans think about larger geopolitical conflicts and issues. For example, since Hamas's October 7 rampage and Israel's retaliatory bombing of Palestinians, TikTok has faced accusations of promoting pro-Palestinian viewpoints and hashtags. The accusations were so strong that the company shared statistics and published a statement on November 13 last year, stressing its neutrality and pointing out similar occurrences across other social media platforms. TikTok put out a statement defending itself against accusations of promoting pro-Palestinian viewpoints.

How does AI make TikTok tick?

According to TikTok and ByteDance's legal filing on May 7, a large part of the



app's success is thanks to its video recommendation engine and the source code powering it. This was developed by China-based ByteDance engineers and then customised for use in different markets, explained TikTok in its filing. Sanket Shah, co-founder and CEO at Invideo AI, told The Hindu that AI played a crucial role in shaping a user's experience on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. "Through sophisticated algorithms analysing user interactions, content attributes, and demographic data, these platforms deliver tailored content experiences, fostering increased user engagement and prolonged platform usage," said Shah. The rise of Generative AI technology could take social media algorithms and targeted advertising to entirely new heights. "Generative AI introduces a new dimension, empowering users with personalized content creation capabilities and tackling issues such as content overload and algorithmic biases. This convergence of AI technologies not only enhances the social media experience but also drives significant revenue growth within the social media advertising market. These platforms share a common goal for AI: keeping users engaged on their platform," explained Shah. TikTok rivals have not missed out on these technologies either. In April, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg pointed to the integration of AI across the social media company's platforms, including Reels. One significant result of this was a rise in user engagement that was powered by shorter videos. "On Instagram, Reels and video continue to drive engagement, with Reels alone now making up 50% of the time that's spent within the app," he said. Zuckerberg further noted in the call that Gen AI image expansion tools had been earlier rolled out across Facebook and Instagram Reels, with small busi-

nesses adopting them.

YouTube Shorts uses AI in its algorithm as well, measuring metrics such as clicks, watch-time, survey responses, sharing, likes, and dislikes. The systems learn from over 80 billion signals every day to match videos and users, YouTube told The company also said that Gen AI-powered features were coming to Shorts, in order to encourage more creators. These include AI-generated image or video backgrounds based on text prompts, and the ability to edit/remix existing videos by typing in ideas. Meanwhile, during the Google I/O developers' conference in May, the YouTube-parent announced Veo - its "most capable video generation model yet." "We'll also bring some of Veo's capabilities to YouTube Shorts and other products in the future," noted Google in a blog post.

Will ByteDance give up on TikTok?

For now, the answer seems to be a firm no. "The 'qualified divestiture' demanded by the Act to allow TikTok to continue operating in the United States is simply not possible: not commercially, not technologically, not legally," said TikTok and ByteDance in their legal filing. Numerous legal proceedings and extensions could also delay the 2025 divestment deadline. Like TikTok, both YouTube-parent Google and Instagram-parent Meta have attracted the U.S. government's ire due to their approach to user privacy and their potentially addictive video offerings. But because they are American companies, founders and top executives face far fewer questions about their national loyalties and their citizenship status.

## Instagram faces major global outage, including India

New Delhi: Meta-owned Instagram on Saturday suffered a major outage globally, including in India, as thousands of users were unable to load Reels and access other options.

As per website outage tracking website Downdetector, over 6,500 users reported issues with accessing the platform in India at the peak of an outage at around 12.02 p.m. About 58 per cent reported problems with the feed, 32 per cent with the app, and 10 per cent with server connection. Users from Delhi, Jaipur, Lucknow, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata,

Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, and others faced issues with the app. Users took to X to vent their frustration as they were unable to log in to the app, load Reels, and others. "Everyone going towards Twitter to check if Instagram is down," a user wrote.

"I thought my Instagram got hacked cuz there's no way my fyp looks like this. It's all brain rot usually #instagramdown," another user said.

One more user stated, "Me going to Twitter to check if it's only my Instagram that's down, or we all are suffering #instagramdown".

# Read an excerpt from Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*

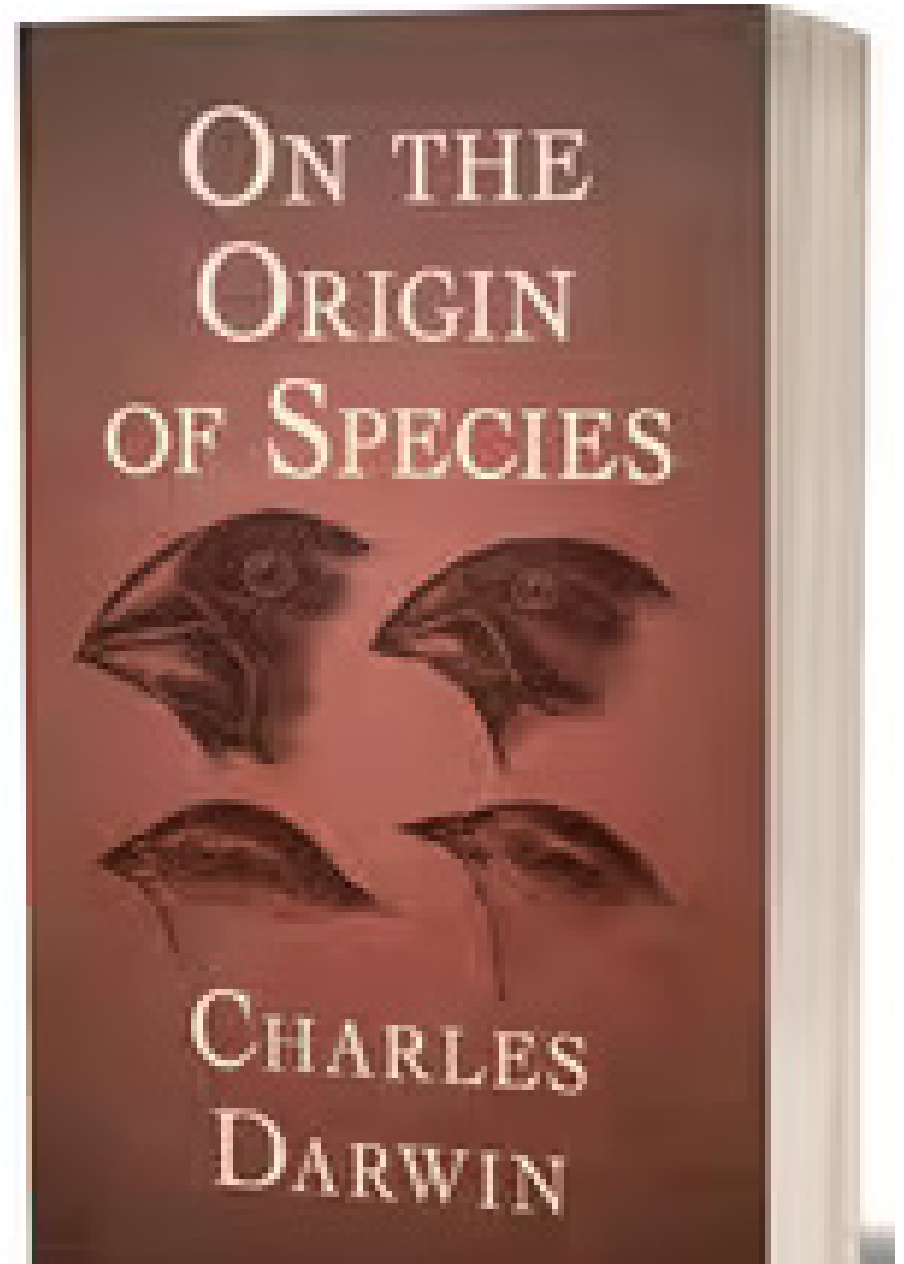
That many and grave objections may be advanced against the theory of descent with modification through natural selection, I do not deny. I have endeavoured to give to them their full force. Nothing at first can appear more difficult to believe than that the more complex organs and instincts should have been perfected, not by means superior to, though analogous with, human reason, but by the accumulation of innumerable slight variations, each good for the individual possessor. Nevertheless, this difficulty, though appearing to our imagination insuperably great, cannot be considered real if we admit the following propositions, namely,—that gradations in the perfection of any organ or instinct, which we may consider, either do now exist or could have existed, each good of its kind,—that all organs and instincts are, in ever so slight a degree, variable,—and, lastly, that there is a struggle for existence leading to the preservation of each profitable deviation of structure or instinct. The truth of these propositions cannot, I think, be disputed...When we can feel assured that all the individuals of the same species, and all the closely allied species of most genera, have within a not very remote period descended from one parent, and have migrated from some one birthplace; and when we better know the many means of migration, then, by the light which geology now throws, and will continue to throw, on former changes of climate and of the level of the land, we shall surely be enabled to trace in an admirable manner the former migrations of the inhabitants of the whole world. Even at present, by comparing the differences of the inhabitants of the sea on the opposite sides of a continent, and the nature of the various inhabitants of that continent in relation to their apparent means of immigration, some light can be thrown on ancient geography.

The noble science of Geology loses glory from the extreme imperfection of the record. The crust of the earth with its embedded remains must not be looked at as a well-filled museum, but as a poor collection made at hazard and at rare intervals. The accumulation of each great fossiliferous formation will be recognised as having depended on an unusual concurrence of circumstances, and the blank intervals between the successive stages as having been of vast duration. But we shall be able to gauge with some security the duration of these intervals by a comparison of the preceding and succeeding organic forms. We must be cautious in attempting to correlate as strictly contemporaneous two formations, which include few identical species, by the general succession of their forms of life. As species are produced and exterminated by slowly acting and still existing causes, and not by miraculous acts of creation and by catastrophes; and as the most important of all causes of organic change is one which is almost independent of altered and perhaps suddenly altered physical conditions, namely, the mu-

tual relation of organism to organism,—the improvement of one being entailing the improvement or the extermination of others; it follows, that the amount of organic change in the fossils of consecutive formations probably serves as a fair measure of the lapse of actual time. A number of species, however, keeping in a body might remain for a long period unchanged, whilst within this same period, several of these species, by migrating into new countries and coming into competition with foreign associates, might become modified; so that we must not overrate the accuracy of organic change as a measure of time. During early periods of the earth's history, when the forms of life were probably fewer and simpler, the rate of change was probably slower; and at the first dawn of life, when very few forms of the simplest structure existed, the rate of change may have been slow in an extreme degree. The whole history of the world, as at present known, although of a length quite incomprehensible by us, will hereafter be recognised as a mere fragment of time, compared with the ages which have elapsed since the first creature, the progenitor of innumerable extinct and living descendants, was created.

In the distant future I see open fields for far more important researches. Psychology will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.

Authors of the highest eminence seem to be fully satisfied with the view that each species has been independently created. To my mind it accords better with what we know of the laws impressed on matter by the Creator, that the production and extinction of the past and present inhabitants of the world should have been due to secondary causes, like those determining the birth and death of the individual. When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Silurian system was deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled. Judging from the past, we may safely infer that not one living species will transmit its unaltered likeness to a distant futurity. And of the species now living very few will transmit progeny of any kind to a far distant futurity; for the manner in which all organic beings are grouped, shows that the greater number of species of each genus, and all the species of many genera, have left no descendants, but have become utterly extinct. We can so far take a prophetic glance into futurity as to foretell that it will be the common and widely-spread species, belonging to the larger and dominant groups, which will ultimately prevail and procreate new and dominant species. As all the living forms of life are the lineal descendants of those which lived long before the Silurian epoch, we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once



His seminal work, published in 1859, changed the course of science and society. An excerpt from the concluding chapter, on the “grandeur in this view of life”.

been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection. It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.

These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; Inherit-

ance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the external conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.



# What was the world's first 'animal tag'? How did it prove birds don't hibernate?

What changed this prevailing theory was the world's first tracker: a spear that struck a white stork, did little damage, and stayed there. That wooden missile, let loose in the 1820s, would alter science in a range of ways.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BCE) believed that robins and redstarts in Greece were perhaps the same species, miraculously transforming into each other as seasons changed. Robins in winter would become redstarts in summer, he theorised (although robins did migrate to Europe at the beginning of summer, coinciding with when redstarts started flying in from Africa, this was of course an inaccurate guess on his part).

He also assumed that certain birds, such as swallows, possibly hibernated, perhaps at the bottom of ponds, in colder months. What changed this prevailing theory was the world's first tracker: a spear

that struck a white stork, did little damage, and stayed there. That wooden missile, let loose in the 1820s, would alter science in a range of ways. The iron-tipped spear made of African wood was instantly identifiable when the bird returned to Germany. It earned the bird the name pfeilstorch, or "arrow stork" in German. Commonly spotted in summers in Germany, it headed to Central Africa when winter set in, as did all its feathered friends, experts began to realise, as they began research into bird migrations. The pfeilstorch was eventually preserved and is on display at University of Rostock in Germany, the tell-tale arrow still embedded in its neck.



## Meet teachers from fictional schools who are top of their class



Think of the titular *Bad Teacher* (Cameron Diaz), in the raunchy 2011 comedy, who works incredibly hard to get her class scores up, so she can win a special bonus and get breast implants. Well, that's fiction. In the real world, almost everyone has had at least one memorable teacher who changed them for the better. It is an experience so universal that it has inspired advertisements (among the most evocative of these, a Raymond ad, featuring a gift of fabric in a large box, left in a vintage car, on a teacher's last day). It's an experience that has inspired poems, songs (plenty, from Abba to Bollywood, through the years), and of course films and series. Every child wants a Miss Honey, the natural-born guardian who protects the neglected little Matilda with the red bow in her hair. Harry Potter's Hogwarts is a veritable feast of remarkable faculty. Further back, there's *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1939; based on the 1934 novel by James Hilton),

in which the titular character sees his students through World War 1.

One such character is Paul Hunham in *The Holdovers* (2023; now streaming in India). Among its five Oscar nominations was one for Best Actor, for Paul Giamatti. He lost to Cillian Murphy (*Oppenheimer*), but that's only what Hunham would have expected. The film is an evocative look at loss, regret, fear (that dreadfully entwined kind, of success and failure). It's a moving tale about the different ways in which a torch may be lit, and passed. And how, no matter how old one is, it will eventually be time to leave the safety of campus. Here, then, is a look at teachers in recent films who may have failed some of life's tests, but whose lessons are perhaps more memorable for it. Fall guy: Hunham is, let's be honest, a bit of a loser. He is both mopey and strict, he seems out of date. He tosses obscure facts from ancient history into conversation. He's a bit of a laughing stock

among students and faculty at Barton Academy in New England. But perhaps that's because this is a world in which ethics seem like an absurd way to make a choice. Enter Angus Tully, an overgrown, angry problem child with nowhere to go during the Christmas holiday. Hunham is tasked with keeping an eye on him. They spend the two weeks in the company of cafeteria manager Mary Lamb (played by Da'Vine Joy Randolph, who did win her Oscar, for Best Supporting Actress). Bit by bit, in quiet conversations, revelations seep out about shattered dreams, lost loves, the pain of living in a world that moves on, unseeing and indifferent. There is the sharp ache, all around, of unfulfilled promise. And then suddenly, a chance for a fresh start. As with all things, it isn't a stroke of luck for Hunham, but it is one that he can extend to someone else.

Will he still do the right thing, if he has nothing to gain? Of course he will. What if he has everything to lose? As it turns out, the answer is still yes. By heart: In *The Whale* (2022), Brendan Fraser plays Charlie, a talented, reclusive and severely obese English teacher on a self-destructive mission, driven by unprocessed grief and guilt. He holds classes online, keeping himself largely hidden. He offers valuable lessons on harmony and clarity of thought, while battling to find these himself.

He manages to reach out to his estranged teenage daughter, not as the father who left and has now returned, but as a professional recognising her talent for the written word, a talent he did little to exploit in himself. It's a dark but compelling tale: Sometimes the greatest gift a teacher can give, is lessons in what not to

do. Say the word: Based in real life, the German film *Mr Bachmann and his Class* (2021) is about a school teacher whose class of 12- and 14-year-olds in Stadthallendorf in central Germany is now a rainbow of mixed cultures.

Dieter Bachmann, who teaches music, math and languages and is well-loved, must find ways to show the youngsters from Germany and from Turkey, Bulgaria and Russia how to navigate each other's identities. Added challenges come from sexist bullying, homophobia and violence between students; he must navigate these in a way that will neither condone nor alienate the young offender. That's a focus in this film because Herr Bachmann basically turns his classroom into a kind of living room where — and I think this is extremely important — the kids feel at home. It's a place of trust, of safety, where they are seen and where they can show who they are as individuals, as people.

That's what the film is about," director Maria Speth said in an interview with *Hollywood Reporter* in 2021. The 217-minute documentary earned Speth the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. Soul train: A pre-fame Ryan Gosling (he would make it big five years later, in *Crazy, Stupid, Love*) plays Dan Dunne, a Brooklyn middle-school history teacher, in the 2006 film *Half Nelson*. He is engaging and innovative in class, sparks dialogue and debate.

By night, he battles a cocaine addiction. Can a student who has recently begun peddling drugs for the local dealer help him out? The rest of his students don't see the teacher struggle; few students ever do. The classroom, then, becomes a place where he must be his best self.