

Major fire at Chandranagar, flames engulf five-storey building housing furniture and electronics showroom

Hyderabad: A major fire broke out at Anu Furniture and Electronics showroom located opposite Chandranagar Police Station on Thursday night, creating panic in the area. Geographic Reference

The blaze erupted at the store housed in a five-storey building, where a large quantity of furniture reportedly caught fire. As per information available, firefighters rushed to the spot with four fire engines and were working to bring the flames under control. Thick smoke and flames were seen billowing from the building as the fire spread through the furniture stocked inside.

Combined Districts Team to tour Sri Lanka

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) has approved the Sri Lanka tour of the Combined Districts Team, providing a valuable opportunity for young cricketers from across Telangana to gain international exposure and experience overseas playing conditions.

The decision was taken following the recommendations of the Single Member Committee headed by Justice Naveen Rao and was subsequently approved by the Apex Council of the association.

Will hit US bases in Gulf: Iran Supreme Leader vows revenge in his first remarks

Iran's new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei issued his first statement on Thursday after succeeding his father, Ali Khamenei, who was killed along with several family members in US-Israeli strikes at the outset of the ongoing West Asia war.

In a message broadcast on Iranian state television and read out by a news anchor, Khamenei vowed that Tehran would "avenge the blood of Iranians" killed during the conflict and warned that Iran would continue targeting US bases across the region.

"We are not enemies of the countries around us," the statement said, adding, "But the existence of US bases in some of these countries and their use to attack Iran is not benefiting the region and they must be closed."

He also warned that Iran would continue using the threat of blocking the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz as leverage against the US and Israel.

Linking the war to personal loss, Khamenei said members of his own family were among those killed in the strikes. "I lost my father and my wife. My sister lost her child and her husband," he said, adding that patience and faith would guide Iran through the crisis.

The statement demanded compensation for war damages, warning that Iran could seize or destroy foreign assets if reparations were denied.

The remarks echoed Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, who earlier said in talks with leaders of Russia and Pakistan that peace would require recognition of Iran's rights, reparations for war losses and firm international guarantees against future aggression.

Around the same time that Khamenei's statement was broadcast, US President Donald Trump commented on the escalating crisis, saying surging global oil prices could financially benefit Washington because the US was the world's largest oil producer.

However, Trump also reiterated that preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons remained a core US objective. "Of far greater interest and importance to me, as President, is stopping an evil empire, Iran, from having nuclear weapons and destroying the Middle East and, indeed, the world," he wrote on his Truth Social platform.

Khamenei's first message as Supreme Leader underscores Tehran's hardening stance as the conflict wid-



ens across West Asia, with Iran signalling that it is prepared for a prolonged confrontation while continuing to leverage both military retaliation and economic pressure, including the threat to disrupt global oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz.

Development Possible if Public Representatives Work Responsibly: Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao

Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Staff Reporter March 12, (Indian Chronicle): "State Agriculture, Marketing, and Handlooms & Textiles Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao said that development is possible only when public representatives work responsibly and sincerely. "On Thursday, the minister, along with District Collector Anudeep Durishetty, participated in a training program for newly elected sarpanches, municipal chairpersons, ward councillors, and other public representatives held at Bhakta Ramadasu Kalakshetram as part of the Praja Palana Pragathi Pranalika program. Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that women achieved a significant share of victories in local body elections. He noted that local bodies in villages and towns have powers comparable to those of the Prime Minister and Chief Minister in their respective domains, including the ability to review works related to various government departments. "Tummala said leaders who gain experience working in local self-governing institutions often rise to higher positions in politics. He urged the representatives to make the best use of the training provided under the 99-day Praja Palana devel-

opment plan and emphasized that public funds must be spent responsibly and transparently. He suggested that villages could generate income by protecting local ponds and promoting fish cultivation, which could produce revenue worth lakhs of rupees. He also pointed out that some village panchayats in India plant coconut trees along roadsides and earn income from them, encouraging local bodies to develop their own revenue sources. "The minister said that works taken up under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should benefit the public and be implemented with proper coordination between officials and public representatives. He stressed that proper records must be maintained regard-



ing tree plantation, expenditure, and survival rates. Tummala advised that saplings should not be planted near electric poles and warned against damaging newly laid roads by allowing heavy KG wheels or vehicles to pass over them. He said that instead of damaging roads and later seeking repair funds, village leaders should focus on protecting existing infrastructure. The minister also said he would continue working for infrastructure development in Khammam district whether he holds a position or not. He emphasized that public participation and responsible leadership are more important than money alone in achieving development. "He also addressed the increasing monkey menace in villages, attributing it to human actions such as deforestation. He said forests must be protected and roads expanded for long-term benefits, even though such efforts had cost him politically in the past. Tummala further stated that efforts are being made to construct a ring road for Khammam city and to bring a railway line to the Bhadrachalam Temple. He also announced that Godavari water will be supplied to five constituencies in the district by June. "The minister urged public representatives to resolve issues with farmers if canal works face resistance and assured that adequate compensation would be provided where land acquisition is required. He also stressed that government hospitals and schools in villages must remain clean and staff should report to duty on time. He added that the government plans to construct new Tahsildar offices and Panchayat buildings, and funds will be released in phases. He instructed officials and representatives to inspect facilities such as nature parks, dumping yards, and crematoriums in villages and carry out necessary repairs immediately. District Collector Anudeep Durishetty said the training covered various themes including cleanliness, sanitation, road safety, and health. He noted that under the state government's 99-day action plan, sanitation works are being actively carried out in government offices, villages, hospitals, anganwadi centres, and urban areas. "Among those present at the event were State Warehousing Corporation Chairman Rayala Nageswara Rao, Panchayat Raj Deputy Commissioner Vidyalaatha, ZP CEO Diksha Raina, DPO Rambabu, DRDO K. Sriram, CPO Srinivas, DM&HO Dr. Rambabu, BC Welfare Officer Jyothi, Tribal Welfare Officer Vijayalakshmi, and Edulapuram Municipal Chairperson Anita, along with MPDOs, officials from various departments, sarpanches, municipal chairpersons, ward councillors, and other public representatives.

Special master plan for IT sector development in place

Visakhapatnam: Setting the stage for a major expansion of the IT sector in Visakhapatnam Economic Region (VER), IT Secretary Katamaneni Bhaskar directed the officials of various departments to prepare a comprehensive master plan for the development of IT infrastructure in the region within the next 60 days. At a review meeting organised here on Thursday, the IT Secretary held detailed discussions with officials from multiple departments and representatives of Nippon Koei Consultancy Agency regarding the roadmap for strengthening the region's IT ecosystem.

He emphasised the need for coordinated efforts to transform Visakhapatnam into a major destination for technology investments.

Bhaskar instructed officials to focus on the development of world-class IT parks, data centres and Global Capability Centres (GCCs) to attract leading IT companies to the region. He also stressed the importance of expanding the existing IT clusters while exploring new opportunities for future development. Highlighting the importance of infrastructure in drawing global investments, he called for improvements in road connectivity, creation of high-quality commercial spaces, and development of entertainment and social infrastructure that would make the region more



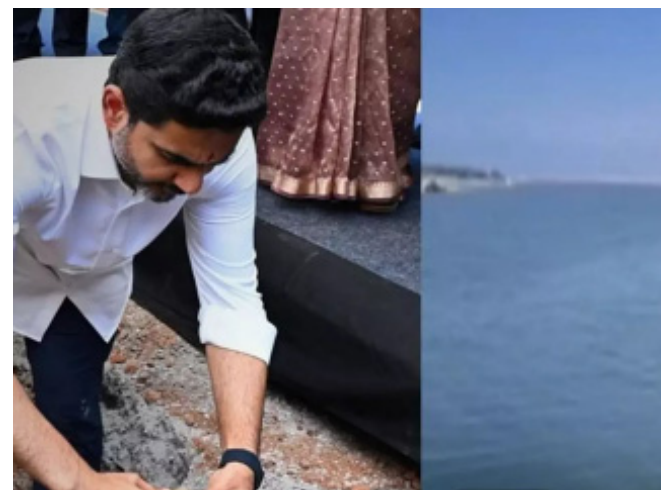
appealing to IT firms and professionals.

Further, the IT Secretary directed the representatives of Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority, Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation and Nippon Koei Consultancy Agency to work in close coordination and prepare a practical and actionable report outlining the development strategy. He expressed confidence that the proposed initiatives would not only strengthen the IT ecosystem in the region but also generate large-scale employment opportunities for youth.

Nara Lokesh lays foundation for Sagar Defence Shipyard in Nellore

Andhra Pradesh Minister Nara Lokesh laid the foundation stone for Sagar Defence Engineering Industry in Juvvaladinne. The project aims to develop an autonomous maritime shipyard, with an initial investment of Rs. 45 crore in the first phase, creating over 750 jobs.

Sagar Defence, a Mumbai-based firm specialising in unmanned marine surface vehicles, is already collaborating with India's Navy's IDEX and other security agencies. The new facility will focus on developing intelligence maritime systems, sensors, and command control technologies. The shipyard is expected to play a vital role in future naval operations, marking a significant milestone in India's defence sector.



Can't decide creamy layer for OBC quota solely on basis of parental income, says SC

New Delhi, March 12

Creamy layer status of candidates for availing reservation benefits under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category cannot be determined solely on the basis of parental income, without reference to the posts and status held by the parents in their organisations, the Supreme

Mahadevan said that mere determination of the status of a candidate as to whether he/she fell within the creamy layer or the non-creamy layer of the OBCs could not be decided solely on the basis of income.

While caste may be an indicator of historical disadvantage, it could not be treated as the sole determinant of backwardness, it said. "The exclusion of the creamy layer among the backward classes is not a matter of mere policy preference but a constitutional imperative intended to ensure that the benefits of reservation reach those who are socially and educationally backward in the true sense of the phrase.

"The principle seeks to prevent relatively advanced segments within the backward classes from siphoning off the advantages of affirmative action so that the objective and purpose of the constitutional scheme of affirmative action, of which reservation is a reflection, are adhered to," the Bench said.

Several civil services examination candidates, who claimed reservation under the OBC non-creamy layer category, had moved the Central Administrative Tribunal, which directed the Centre to reallocate the service of the applicants on the basis of their OBC status.

The Centre had issued office memorandum on September 8, 1993, specifying who shall be creamy layer among OBCs and the clarificatory letter issued in this regard on October 14, 2004.

While the office memorandum excluded income from salary and agricultural income from the income/wealth test for determination of creamy layer status, the letter dated October 14, 2004, directed inclusion of salary income of PSU and private sector employees, it noted.

"It is evident from a comprehensive reading of the 1993 office memorandum along with the clarificatory letter dated October 14,

2004, that income from salaries alone cannot be the sole criterion to decide whether a candidate falls within the creamy layer. The status as well as the category of post to which a candidate's parent or parents belong is essential. Mere determination of the status of a candidate as to whether he/she falls within the creamy or the non-creamy layer of the OBCs cannot be decided solely on the basis of the income," it said.



Court has ruled.

A Bench of Justice PS Narasimha and Justice R Mahadevan held that treating similarly placed employees of private entities and PSUs differently from government employees for deciding reservation would amount to hostile discrimination.

"Having regard to the peculiar facts of the present cases, the reasoning adopted by the High Court that treating similarly placed employees of private entities and PSUs differently from government employees and their wards, while deciding their entitlement to reservation, would amount to hostile discrimination, is certainly one that inspires the confidence of this court," the Bench said.

Dismissing the Centre's appeals, it upheld the decisions of the high courts of Delhi, Madras and Kerala, which dealt with the eligibility of candidates claiming OBC (non-creamy layer) benefit for civil services examinations.

The top court directed the Centre to consider the claims of respondent candidates Rohith Nathan, Ketan, Ison Shah I. and other intervenors in accordance with the principles laid down in this judgment, and to implement the same in six months.

Noting that supernumerary posts had already been assured by the DoPT, the top court said, "We find no difficulty in directing the appellants (Centre) to create such supernumerary posts, as required, to accommodate the candidates who satisfy the non-creamy layer criteria as clarified in the present judgment, subject to their otherwise fulfilling eligibility conditions."

Writing the judgment for the Bench, Justice

LOSS OF DOCUMENT

I. Potharam Srinivas, S/o. Potharam Bhupathi, aged about 61 years. Occupation: Government Employee, R/o. A-11, White Quarters, Opp. ACB Office, Adilabad, Telangana, hereby inform the general public that the original link documents of Sale Deeds bearing Document No. 1878/1989 and Document No. 1240/1989 have been lost on 01-03-2026 while proceeding from Kailashnagar to Ambedkar Chowk, Adilabad. A complaint regarding the loss has been lodged at Adilabad-1 Town Police Station through Meeseva.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

TCS layoff shocker has a lesson for all IT pros

Employees from almost all major IT companies in the country are in a state of shock worried about their future career prospects. Even investors are on tenterhooks following the bolt from the blue delivered by Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), inarguably the most profitable company in the entire Tata Group. The announcement made by the country's largest IT exporter that it is contemplating its biggest ever workforce shakeup by laying off around two per cent of its workforce is set to trigger a phase of uncertainty that could be as worse as the harrowing period when the Covid-19 jolt shook the entire world. In normal terms, two per cent may appear to be a modest figure but the enormity of the TCS decision can be gauged from the fact that once this process is completed by FY26, the company, which presently employs 613,069 professionals globally, would have shown the door to a staggering 12,261 employees in the middle and senior grades. The decision apparently comes in the backdrop of macro uncertainties and AI-led technology disruptions that are impacting business demand, one way or the other. However, the exit will not be in one go but in a phased manner.

TCS is such a big player on the global firmament that the tremors of this announcement are being felt, quite naturally so, in the stock market. As an immediate reaction, not only did its share prices tumble by around 1.7% to a day's low of Rs 3,081.20 on BSE but also had its bearing on those of other IT giants like Wipro, HCL Technologies and Infosys, who were down by almost two per cent apiece, while Nifty IT was down by over one per cent. On that count, even staffers from other IT firms may be concerned about their own survival if their employer's follow the TCS example and resort to a similar cost-cutting measure. This fear is not unfounded. During the torturous Covid crisis, many software professionals had to look for jobs beyond their areas of expertise. The decision has sparked huge debates as regards the reason for the layoff with many pointing out that this was largely influenced by its plans to foray into new markets, adopt fresh technologies and go whole hog into AI integration. Given that automation is gradually reshaping the IT job market. This theory was put to rest by the tech giant's CEO K Krithivasan, who refused to buy the argument that the job cuts were indicative of AI replacing human workers. In all fairness, one must see the logic behind the TCS move. He was firm that the transition was to suit the requirements of their myriad clients, in line with the precedent set by Microsoft years ago. Meanwhile, his clarification that it was professional mismatch that led to the layoff is quite a genuine reasoning.

Any employee who fails to upgrade himself to the latest in automation will be a liability, a white elephant, to the organisation. TCS has in fact trained over 5.50 lakh employees in basic AI skills and around one lakh in advanced AI to make them ready for the next tech wave. Those relying on time-tested, but fast eroding, methods cannot be accommodated in the AI era. IT professionals must align with the emerging technologies

Water supply in AmmaiPalli village is unusable Watermen pumping water at 4 am

This water is for the needs of the people or for newly constructed houses

Wanaparthi correspondent (Indian Chronicle) In AmmaiPalli village under Chinnambavi mandal, the watermen working in the village panchayat open the gate and release water at 3 am, 3:30 am, and 4 am. This water is released in the early morning when everyone is sleeping, resulting in the water being wasted without any use. This has been brought to the attention of the authorities several times in the past. However, there has been no change in the behavior of the village watermen. He releases water whenever he feels like it. No one would be able to use water at that time because everyone would be asleep. There is a debate going on among the people in the village about who is releasing water at this time, for the needs of the people of the village or for the needs of the houses that some people are building newly. In all the



villages in the mandal, water is released at a certain time in the morning and evening according to a decision. But on the contrary, in AmmaiPalli, the water men release water whenever they want, shut off water whenever they want, and abuse them if anyone asks. The water men work completely at their own will. On this matter, the mandal officers, MPDO, MPPO, We request the Gram Panchayat Secretary and the village public representatives to take special initiative in providing water to the people in the village so that the people can make good use of that water and allocate time for releasing water to the people on the streets. We also request them to take appropriate measures to prevent such incidents from happening again. Despite repeated requests in the past, the water men have not changed their practices. This matter has been brought to the attention of the Mandala authorities many times, but the authorities have not taken proper precautions in this matter. We request them to respond at any time and take special care in providing water to the people.

The tasty tuniki pandu is poised to be extinct soon in Adilabad

S. Harpal Singh, Adilabad, March 12 The arrival of spring season in Adilabad is accompanied with a cold reminder of the gradual loss of nature. The summer months used to be known for the abundance of wild flowers as well as wild fruits. Fruits like tuniki pandu or tendu fruit (Diospyros melanoxylon) will be extinct in the coming years in case the remaining trees are spared the axe. Umindful felling of trees to expand agriculture fields on the forest fringes has spelt doom for the species. The adivasis of Adilabad too have stood to lose as the fruit used to earn them precious supplemental income during the dry months. Local tribal women who used to bring the fruit to markets in Adilabad are not seen anymore. The tuniki fruit is generally identified with sapodilla or chiku or sapota as its pulp of both the trees have similar taste. It, however, is smaller than the sapota and has a yellow and rather hard covering. Until a couple of decades back the tendu tree was an important species which was part of the thick forests in Adilabad and Kumram Bheem Asifabad districts. Over this period, hundreds, if not thousands, of



trees vanished from the jungles thanks to illegal forest decimation.

The government is committed to the economic development of farmers ... Minister Damodar Rajanarsimha

Sanga Reddy, Indian chronicle correspondent March 12: With the aim of farmers achieving high yields at low cost and strengthening their finances, the government is providing modern agricultural machinery on subsidy through the Horticulture Mechanization Scheme, said State Medical and Health Minister Damodar Rajanarsimha. As part of the Public Administration - Progress Plan program, State Medical and Health Minister Damodar Rajanarsimha distributed mini tractors to farmers through the Horticulture Mechanization Scheme at the Collectorate Complex on Thursday. On this occasion, three SC and ST farmers were given 20 HP capacity mini tractors worth Rs. 4.9 lakh each with a 60 percent subsidy. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that mechanization is very necessary for the development of agriculture and horticulture sectors. He said that the government is implementing several welfare schemes to help small and marginal farmers achieve high yields at low cost. Farmers should use modern methods and machinery to reduce cultivation costs and increase productivity, he said. The minister said that the economic development of farmers is the main



goal of the government and the government will always stand by the farmers. Medical and Health Secretary Christina Z. Chongtu, District Collector P. Praveenya, District Horticulture Officer Someswara Rao, DRDO Jyoti and other district officials and concerned beneficiaries participated in the program.

Anti-drug awareness program in Ashwaraopet

Eagle Force leads rally with students—human chain



Ashwaraopet, March 12: The police conducted a wide awareness program to curb drug use in the city. As part of the Public Administration-Progress Plan program undertaken by the state government, an anti-drug awareness program was organized under the auspices of the Telangana Eagle Force, and students and youth were told about the ill effects of drugs. Speaking as the chief guest at the program, Eagle Force DSP Butchaiah said that the recent increase in drug use among the youth across the country is worrying. He warned that once a person gets addicted to drugs, it becomes very difficult to quit the habit and that drugs taken initially for entertainment or stress relief can later lead to a complete destruction of life. He explained that a person addicted to drugs first becomes distant from family members and friends and then faces severe mental and physical losses. He said that if such habits continue to grow, everything will

be affected, including studies, jobs, and family life, and eventually they will face financial difficulties and commit thefts and crimes. DSP Butchaiah explained to the students that drug use can cause a person to lose their judgment and commit reckless acts, sometimes leading to serious incidents like murders and suicides. Therefore, he advised the youth to be vigilant and stay away from bad habits. Speaking on the occasion, Sub-Inspector Yayati Raj said that some rich people and people from the film industry have started using drugs to relieve their stress, which has later become an epidemic and is spreading in the society. He expressed concern that this habit is not limited to cities only but is also breaking up families in villages. He said that parents and teachers also need to monitor the youth carefully to prevent them from becoming addicted to bad habits. He advised that appropriate steps should be taken to correct them as soon as changes in the behavior of the children are noticed. He called on everyone in the society to act responsibly and cooperate with the police to curb the spread of drugs. After the program, Eagle Force officers, Aswaraopet police, Excise and Revenue Department staff, local people, and students jointly organized an awareness rally in the town. Holding anti-drug placards, the rally was held while raising slogans like "Say no to drugs," "Youth is the future of the country," and "Stay away from drugs—live healthy." After the rally, students and officers formed a human chain at the Aswaraopet police station intersection and pledged to stay away from drugs. Everyone expressed their determination to work hard to make the society drug-free. Eagle Force DSP Butchaiah, Sub Inspector Yayati Raj, Excise Department staff, revenue officers, local people, students, and other officers participated in the program.

No War, Peace is the Way... Massive Peace Rally Held in Uppal Calling for Harmony Among Nations

Led by BRS Senior Leader Mekala Madhusudan Reddy

Senior citizens, leaders from various parties, and school students participate in the rally



KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 12 (Indian Chronicle): A large peace rally was organized in Uppal on Thursday under the leadership of BRS senior leader Mekala Madhusudan Reddy, calling for peace and opposing the ongoing war tensions between Israel, the United States, and Iran. Senior citizens of Uppal, school students, leaders from various political parties, and local residents participated in large numbers in the rally. The participants raised slogans stating that war is not the right solution between nations and that any issue should

be resolved through dialogue and diplomatic means. The rally began from the Gandhi Statue in Uppal, where participants expressed strong opposition to the ongoing conflicts around the world. Residents emphasized that wars cannot solve problems and that peaceful discussions, dialogue, and diplomatic efforts are the only way to resolve regional disputes. They expressed concern that ongoing wars could create serious problems for countries across the world, leading to loss of lives

and economic damage. They also pointed out that such conflicts might affect India's agricultural exports and the import of essential commodities, which could create difficulties for Indian citizens. The organizers stated that the rally was conducted to spread awareness about the need for peaceful solutions and to reduce regional tensions across the globe. Senior citizens including Challa Veerareddy, Mekala Venkat Reddy, Venkatayya Goud, Vakiti Bucchi Reddy, Bajaj Jagannath Goud, Veeresham, Anji Reddy, Shameerpet Yadi Reddy, Sudhakar Reddy, Narayana, Santosh, Sahakar, Jeevan Reddy, Poreddy Srinivas Reddy, Shameerpet Rakesh Reddy, Gopalakrishna, T. Krishnarao, Raghuramaiah, Shiva Prasad, Saptagiri Reddy, Mujakari Pawan, Upender, Tallapalli Srinivas Goud, TDP senior leaders Kandikunta Ashok Kumar Goud and Pabbathi Shekhar Reddy, along with BRS leaders Kalpana Reddy, Pooduri Jitender Reddy, Anya Balakrishna, Vemula Santosh Reddy, Salla Sudheer Reddy, Narsireddy, Chintala Narasimha Reddy, Bangla Srinivas Reddy, Panga Rajesh Reddy, Kaya Hanumanthu, Boothkuri Sai, Papi Reddy, Nagula Suresh, G. Santosh, Mudigonda Jagan, Raghavendra, Agiri Santosh, Mukku Praveen Reddy, Malles, school students, leaders from different parties, and many Uppal residents participated in the rally in large numbers.



lim religious elders and local leaders expressed their gratitude to the MLA. The program was attended by Masjid Committee President Hanif, Kabristan Committee President Abbu Bhai, committee members Altaf, Shafi, Ghouse, Hanif, Akhtar, Baba, Farid, BRS senior leaders Eddula Kondal Reddy, Kokonda Jagan, Jalli Mohan, Bannala Narayana Reddy, Masa Shekhar, Muddam Srinivas Yadav, Balakrishna Goud, Shyam, Balu, minority leaders, and a large number of minority women.



Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Distributes Ramadan Tohfa at Masjid-E-Noor-E-Madina in Chilkanagar

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 12 (Indian Chronicle): On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy distributed clothing gifts (Tohfa) to Muslim brothers and sisters at Masjid-E-Noor-E-Madina in Chilkanagar Division on Thursday. The distribution was carried out along with BRS Party State Leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj and State Minority Leader Badruddin. Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said that the festival of Ramadan symbolizes love, unity, and a spirit of service. He wished that all minorities in the constituency celebrate Ramadan with happiness and stated that it is everyone's responsibility to support those in need. On this occasion, several Mus-

Andhra brokers plundering fisheries resources with banned gillnets Illegal hunting continues with the help of brokers

“Wanaparthy District Correspondent Indian Chronicle” In the Krishna river basin area of Chinnambavi mandal in Wanaparthy district, dozens of illegal fishing nets have been found in the villages of Gadda Baswapur, Bekkem, Gudem, Peddamarur, Chinnamarur, Vellaturu, Ayyavaripalli, Kalur, Chellepadu and the outskirts of these villages. Andhra fishermen continue to hunt with. Brokers in various villages under Chinnambavi mandal are bringing Andhra fishermen and continuing to hunt with banned Alavi nets for commis-



sions. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are being exploited by agent smugglers who are poaching even small fish in broad daylight with banned gillnets. The Telangana state government has ambitiously improved the livelihood

of fishermen byIn the catchment areas, ponds, and ponds, in order to improve the livelihood of the fishermen by releasing fish fry and raising them, the fisheries department has decided to move towards development. While fish fry are being purchased for crores of rupees and raised in the rivers, not only fish larger than a kilogram, but also small, small, and egg-bearing fish fry are being caught with prohibited fishing nets, which can make the lives of the fishermen difficult. Local fishermen are expressing their grievances against the middlemen, traders, and local fishermen who are beating them in the stomach. Non-locals, in the eyes of some ruling party leaders, the local mandal revenue, police machinery and Fisheries Department officials to know about fisheries resources For the donations given by smugglers who are being robbed As if acting as if they didn't see it, hoping Locals say. Alavi nets Prohibited local authorities Catching egg fish with gill nets in broad daylight Caught in broad daylight, dried and piled up To other places by postal vehicles Why are the authorities moving

Mandal people are not taking action Expressing concern. Fisheries Department Officers, revenue officers, Police apparatus, locals Fishermen, various people within the mandal The people of the villages are expressing their grief openly.

Corporators have key role in urban development: Collector, Chitra Mishra urges elected representatives to work with officials and ensure effective civic governance.

Khaja Sikander Mohiuddin Staff Reporter, Indian Chronicle Karimnagar, Mar 12: District Collector Chitra Mishra has emphasised that corporators and councillors play a crucial role in the development of towns and cities and urged them to work collectively to place the district in the forefront of development.

She was addressing a training programme organised for newly elected municipal corporators and councillors at the Collectorate auditorium as part of the State government's Praja Palana–Pragati Pranalika initiative.

The training programme, conducted under the supervision of the district administration, focused on creating awareness among the elected representatives on governance, municipal laws and the functioning of various departments. Officials explained the implementation of several government schemes and services provided by different departments to the public through a PowerPoint presentation.

Ms. Mishra said that responsible leadership by corporators and ward members would significantly influence the pace of urban development. She advised them to coordinate with officials of different departments and prepare ward-level action plans to address public issues and take up development works.

She stressed the need to regularly monitor sanitation in their respective wards, address the concerns of municipal workers and ensure that the wards remain clean. Referring to the Prajavani grievance redressal programme, the Collector said it was introduced in municipalities to resolve public complaints promptly in the presence of officials concerned.

The Collector also said that as part of the 99-day Praja Palana Pragati Pranalika programme, the clearance of pending files and disposal of applications were progressing at a brisk pace. She urged corporators and councillors to actively participate in the programme and work with the primary objective of serving the people.

Karimnagar Municipal Corporation Mayor Kolagani Srinivas called upon the newly elected corporators and councillors to give top priority to public service and ensure corruption-free governance. He asked them to strengthen their understanding of municipal laws and frequently visit their divisions to monitor development works.

With summer approaching, he also urged them to create awareness among residents on avoiding wastage of drinking water and to promptly inform officials about pipeline leakages and repairs.



SUDA Chairman Komatireddy Narendra Reddy said corporators should regularly tour their divisions to identify local issues and coordinate with officials for their resolution.

Deputy Mayor Sunil Rao noted that 46 of the 66 corporators in the Karimnagar municipal corporation were newly elected and said the training programme would help them understand administrative procedures. He also stressed the importance of promoting plantation in the city and suggested displaying the status of public petitions on the municipal dashboard to enhance accountability.

Municipal Commissioner Praful Desai said awareness of municipal laws, governance systems and departmental functioning would enable corporators to serve the public more effectively and urged the newly elected representatives to make the best use of the training programme.

RDO Ramesh, Huzurabad Municipal Chairperson Rontala Suhasini, Vice-Chairperson Guduri Anjali, Jammikunta Municipal Chairman Prashanth Kumar, Vice-Chairman Mumtaz Ali Mohammed, Choppadandi Municipal Chairperson Vadluri Saritha, Vice-Chairperson Perumandla Manasa and municipal commissioners Syed Musab Ahmed, Manohar and Mohammed Ayaz were among those present.

Alpha Taekwondo Academy Inaugurated by Uppal Constituency Youth Congress President Akarapu Arun Patel



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 12 (Indian Chronicle):” The inauguration ceremony of the newly established “Alpha Taekwondo Academy” was held grandly at Sai Krishna Colony in Venkat Reddy Nagar Division. The academy was inaugurated by Uppal Constituency Youth Congress President Akarapu Arun Patel, who attended the event as the chief guest. “Speaking on the occasion, Arun Patel presented mementos (shields) to children and students who are excelling in sports and congratulated them for their achievements. He stated that in today's times, martial arts like Taekwondo are very important for children, especially for girls.” He expressed hope that the youth would excel in sports and bring recognition to the constituency. He also mentioned that Taekwondo is not just a sport but also helps in developing discipline and concentration. The event was attended by academy organizer Sai Krishna, local leaders, parents of students, and residents of the colony.



New bore motors installed in Chinnamarur Gram Panchayat limits Madduri Shankar, Sarpanch of Chinnamarur village

“Wanaparthy District Correspondent (Indian Chronicle)” In Chinnamarur Gram Panchayat area of Chinnambavi Mandal, the villagers are facing water problems due to the deterioration of the old bore motors installed in the past. The villagers brought this matter to the notice of the village sarpanch, and the village sarpanch Madduri Shankar installed new bore motors in their place. As per the needs of the villagers, the bore near Dasari Srinivasulu Kallam Doddi in BC Colony had deteriorated a few days ago. When the matter was brought to the notice of the village sarpanch Madduri Shankar, the village sarpanch immediately responded and installed a new bore motor. The people's desire immediate water for the needs of the people Accommodation has been provided. Village Sarpanch Maddur Shankar said that the village People should bring any problem to their attention. In coordination with the authorities immediately upon arrival Problem solving with the help of village people I will move forward towards becoming On this occasion, he said The people of the colony Instantly respond to demand and innovate Water supply by installing a borehole motor Colony for the established village sarpanch Special thanks to the residents and villagers Informed.



Siraj Hussain felicitates Ponnam Ashok Goud after Bar Council win.



Khaja Sikander Mohiuddin Staff Reporter, Indian Chronicle Karimnagar, Mar 12: Karimnagar District Congress Committee general secretary Siraj Hussain on Thursday met senior advocate and Congress State Legal Cell chairman Ponnam Ashok Goud at the High Court in Hyderabad following his election as a member of the Telangana State Bar Council.

On the occasion, Hussain felicitated Ashok Goud with a shawl and congratulated him on his victory. He said the election of Ashok Goud, who has vast experience as a senior advocate, to the Bar Council was commendable.

Hussain expressed confidence that Ashok Goud would play a key role in developing the Bar Council into a model institution and would continue to work for the resolution of issues faced by advocates.

He also said that Ashok Goud's leadership would help the Bar Council gain wider recognition at the national level in the coming years. [5:53 PM, 3/12/2026] +91 93907 69610: End

7th Ward Councilor Rewriting Past Glory Dandugula Venkatamma Bandala Venkataswamy

“Wanaparthy District Correspondent Indian Chronicle” In the 7th ward of Kolhapur Municipality, Councilor Dandugula Venkatamma Bandala Venkataswamy will undertake the construction and development work of the Rachchakatta in the ward at his own expense, as per the opinion of the people. Speaking on this occasion, Councilor Dandugula Venkatamma Bandala Venkataswamy assured the people that he would respond immediately to any problem brought to his attention by the people of the ward and move forward in coordination with the authorities to resolve their problem. The colony residents, speaking as per the promise given, will transform the Rachchakatta in a way that is useful to the people, as per the opinion of the people Very commendable. For the people. Working from the front, working for the development of the ward Leadership is truly exemplary People thought so. Councilor Dandugula Venkatamma Bandala Venkataswamy Speaking, the people of Ward 7 also expressed their Paying taxes on time and getting along They are contributing to the development of the ward. Such Keep up the good work, 7th Ward With a desire to develop further Special for ward members, public, voters Thank you Said on the occasion.



Uppal Congress Senior Leaders Offer Prayers at Tirupati



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 12 (Indian Chronicle):” Senior leaders of the Congress Party from the Uppal constituency visited Tirumala Venkateswara Temple and had the darshan of Lord Venkateswara. “Uppal constituency Congress senior leaders Janumpalli Venkateshwar Reddy, Gaddam Ravikumar, and Thavidaboyina Giribabu visited the temple along with Bobbala Venkat Reddy, chief advisor of the Pragathi Nagar Colony Welfare Association, Ramanthapur, and participated in the special Nijaroopa Darshanam of the deity.” On this occasion, they prayed to the Lord for the prosperity of Telangana under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and for the peace and well-being of the people of the Uppal constituency. “They also offered prayers seeking victory for the Congress Party in the upcoming Greater Hyderabad elections and expressed hope that the party flag would fly high.”

Students also learn Culture District education officer Ramu

“Jagtlial Staff Reporter, March 13 (Indian Chronicle):” Education Officer Ramu of Jagtlial district said that along with education, students should also learn culture. Ramu, the District Education Officer, attended the farewell meeting of 10th-class students at PM Shree Zilla Parishad High School, Dharur Camp, as the chief guest. On this occasion, Ramu said that the 10th-class exams should be taken calmly and fearlessly without any pressure. He also advised students to come to school the next day after the exams and prepare for the next subject, and if they have any doubts, they should ask the teachers and clear them. During the program, the District Education Officer distributed hall tickets and exam pads to the students. The program was attended by school headmaster Yalla Amarnath Reddy, PRTUTS Jagtlial district branch president Boyini Pelli Anand Rao, teachers Basit, Sridevi, Srilatha, Gangayya, Shabana, Pawan, Prabhakar, Shekheel, Anuja, Praveen, and others.



MMC Commissioner Vinay Krishna Reddy Conducts Extensive Field Visit in Uppal-Habsiguda-Ramanthapur Areas

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 12 (Indian Chronicle):”As part of the 99-Day Action Plan – Praja Palana Pragati Programme being implemented by the state government, Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation (MMC) Commissioner T. Vinay Krishna Reddy conducted an extensive field inspection on Thursday in the Uppal, Habsiguda and Ramanthapur areas. “On the 7th day of the 99-day action plan, the Commissioner instructed officials to clear construction and demolition waste from various locations. “Focus on Greenery and Sanitation” During the visit, the Commissioner reviewed the progress of works related to urban development, greenery enhancement, sanitation management, and improvement of civic infrastructure. He also issued several instructions to concerned officials to accelerate ongoing development works. “Green Development at Habsiguda Circle” At Habsiguda Circle, the Commissioner held a field meeting with officials and directed them to speed up greenery development works on the central median. “He instructed the staff to undertake plantation, landscaping, and modernization of the median under a gang-work system to make the area more attractive and enhance the city’s aesthetic appeal. “Road Margin Development near Pista House, Uppal” The Commissioner, along with the UBD Director and other officials, inspected the footpaths and road margins near Pista House in Uppal. “During the inspection, he noticed that some vacant mud patches beside the footpath were being misused for public urination and dumping garbage. “To prevent such misuse, he directed officials to plant flowering plants and develop greenery in those areas so that the surroundings remain clean while also improving the city’s beauty. “Review of Ramanthapur Lake Development Works” The Commissioner also inspected the ongoing development works at Ramanthapur Lake along with officials from the UBD Wing and Engineering Department. Officials informed him that plantation activities have begun around the lake and that lakeside pavement works are currently in progress. Discussions were



also held on installing fountains and creating a dedicated parking facility for visitors to enhance the lake’s surroundings. “They further explained that a 350-meter running track is being developed along the lake bund. The Commissioner directed officials to complete the remaining works—including gazebo construction, signage installation, and entrance gates—at the earliest, while ensuring high quality standards. Inspection of Waterlogging Issue at Srinivasapuram, Ramanthapur” The Commissioner also conducted a field inspection at Srinivasapuram in Ramanthapur along with the Assistant Engineer regarding waterlogging issues during the rainy season. He observed that the area experiences severe water accumulation during heavy rains, causing inconvenience to residents. To resolve the issue, he instructed officials to construct box drains so that rainwater can flow easily into the drainage system, thereby preventing future flooding problems.

NCW Chairperson Attends Mahila Jan Sunwai at Malkajgiri Commissionerate



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 12, (Indian Chronicle):”The National Commission for Women (NCW) conducted a Mahila Jan Sunwai (public hearing) at the Office of the Commissioner of Police, Medchal-Malkajgiri Commissionerate on March 12, 2026, to address grievances related to crimes against women and to strengthen institutional response mechanisms. The programme was chaired by Vijaya Rahatkar, Chairperson of the National Commission for Women. The event was attended by Shivadhar Reddy, IPS, Director General of Police, Telangana; Charu Sinha, IPS, Director General, ACB Telangana; K. Avinash Mohanty, IPS, Commissioner of

Police, Malkajgiri; Manu Choudari, IAS, District Collector, Medchal-Malkajgiri; M. Srinivas, IPS, Additional Commissioner of Police (Crimes), Hyderabad; and Sudheer Babu, IPS, Commissioner of Police, Future City, along with other senior officials. During the hearing, 30 complaints from Medchal-Malkajgiri district and five walk-in complaints were taken up. The cases were mainly related to domestic violence, harassment, abandonment and cybercrime. The Chairperson reviewed the complaints and directed the concerned authorities to take prompt action and ensure proper redressal. The Mahila Jan Sunwai initiative is being organized by the NCW across the country from March 8 to March 13 as part of the International Women’s Day programme. The initiative aims to provide a direct platform for women to register grievances and seek institutional support. Discussions were also held on the rising trend of crimes against women, referring to NCRB 2023 data. Officials emphasized the need for timely investigation, improved coordination among agencies and stricter enforcement of laws such as the POSH Act and the Domestic Violence Act, along with measures to address cybercrimes against women. The Chairperson appreciated the efforts of the Malkajgiri Police Commissionerate and the district administration in addressing women’s grievances and reiterated the commitment to ensuring women’s safety, dignity and access to justice.

Addiction to Drugs Plunges the Future into Darkness SAY NO TO DRUGS... YES TO LIFE.

“Kukkadapu Naresh Kumar, Bhadradi Kothagudem Staff Reporter, March 12, Indian Chronicle: As part of the “Praja Palana – Pragathi Pranalika” (Public Governance – Progress Plan) initiatives, SP Rohit Raju participated in an awareness program organized for locals and students regarding “Drug Abuse and Its Consequences.” Under the aegis of the Lakshmidivipalli Police and the Hyderabad “Eagle Team,” an awareness program regarding drug abuse was organized at the SS Convention Function Hall on Chatakonda Road as part of the ongoing “Praja Palana – Pragathi Pranalika” initiatives. Over 700 students, local residents, and public representatives participated in this program. District Superintendent of Police (SP), Rohit Raju, attended as the chief guest. Earlier, Kothagudem DSP Adinarayana extended a warm welcome to the SP. Addressing the gathering—an event organized as part of the Telangana government’s prestigious “Praja Palana-Pragati Pranalika” (People’s Administration-Progress Plan) initiative—the SP stated that addiction to narcotics inevitably plunges anyone’s future into darkness. He specifically advised everyone, particularly students, to set goals right from their academic years and to study diligently in pursuit of achieving those objectives. He urged parents to remain vigilant and closely monitor their children’s daily activities. He noted that, given the current circumstances, the District Police Department is making exceptional efforts to curb the menace of cannabis (ganja). He highlighted that, between last year and the present, the district police have seized approximately 6,500 kilograms of illegally trafficked cannabis—marking one of the highest seizure volumes in the entire country. He further stated that criminal cases under the PD Act would be registered against offenders caught illegally transporting cannabis, and their assets would also be confiscated. Emphasizing that the future of the nation lies in the hands of the youth, he urged everyone to pursue their education earnestly and bring honor to their region and their parents. The students were sensitized to the issue through the screening of videos illustrating the disastrous consequences of drug abuse. Subsequently, all participants took a pledge against drug usage and its associated perils. Kothagudem DSP Adinarayana, Forest Divisional Officer Koteswara Rao, Excise Additional SP Karamchand, Mandal Education Officer Krishnaiyah, Eagle Team Inspector Ram Prasad, SB Inspector Srinivas, Chunchupalli CI



Venkateswarlu, Laxmidivipalli SI Ramana Reddy, and others participated in this program.

Free Mega Medical Camp Organized at Kogilvai by NRIVA, IMA Warangal and Red Cross



“Damera/Kogilvai, March 12 (Indian Chronicle):”A free mega medical health camp was organized on Thursday at the Government Primary School premises in Kogilvai village of Damera Mandal, Hanumakonda district under the joint aegis of NRIVA Vasavi Association, IMA Warangal, and Indian Red Cross Society Hanumakonda. “During the health camp, super-specialty doctors conducted medical

Telangana Education Commission recommendations should be withdrawn

“Tapas District President Boyinapalli Prasad Rao

“Jagtlal Correspondent, March 12 (Telugu Prabha): Tapas District President Boyinapalli Prasad Rao has urged the government to withdraw the irrelevant and unscientific recommendations of the Telangana Education Commission. “A round table meeting was held at the Geetha Grameena Library on the recommendations of the Telangana Education Commission, organized by Tapas Jagtlal District. “Speaking at the meeting, Prasad Rao said that the report submitted by the Telangana Student Commission should be discussed with teachers and the irrelevant and unscientific report should be scrapped. He demanded that the National Education Policy should be implemented based on the suggestions of teachers and intellectuals. “He demanded that the National Education Policy should be implemented in a way that promotes our country’s culture, traditions, and scientific and technical skills along with education. “The General Secretary said that the Telangana Education Commission’s report is likely to deprive poor students of education and has no scientific relevance to Telangana society. “State Secretary Bonagiri Devayya suggested that primary education should be in the mother tongue. “The meeting was attended by State officials



Sandelli Malhal Rao, Elegeti Rajendra Prasad, Gadda Maipal Reddy, District Financial Secretary Nagamalla Ramesh, Jayasimha Rao, Rajeshwar, Raghunandan, Sridhar, Ranjanikant, Jonnal Purnachander, Medishetti Ramesh, Tiegala Srinivas, CH Ramesh, Praveen Rao, Thirumal Reddy, Gampa Srinivas, Murthy, R Srinivas, Boyin Chandrasekhar, Narsing Rao, Katta Ramakrishna, Batti Kiran, Bhoga Mallesham, Raghupati Reddy, Thirumal Reddy, Jeevan Reddy, J Srinivas, Bharat Rao, Koluma Srinivas, Devarakonda Srinivas, Chukka Mallikarjun, Duva Ravinder, Ashok, Singam Mahesh, Prakash, and Nandu Naik.

Make the most of the National Lok Adalat being held across the Bhadradi Kothagudem district on March 28th. District Principal Judge Patil Vasanth

“Kukkadapu Naresh Kumar, Bhadradi Kothagudem Staff Reporter, March 12, Indian Chronicle: Acting on the directives of the Telangana State Legal Services Authority, District Principal Judge Patil Vasanth and M. Rajender, Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority, announced in a statement on Thursday that a National Lok Adalat will be conducted in all courts across Bhadradi Kothagudem district this month on March 28th (Saturday). Speaking on this occasion, they stated that the Lok Adalat presents an excellent opportunity for litigants to amicably resolve their pending cases. They informed that the following types of cases can be resolved: “Compoundable criminal cases” “Cheque bounce cases (NI Act cases)” “Bank recovery cases” “Motor Vehicle Accident Compensation cases (MVOP)” “Matrimonial disputes” “Property partition disputes, rental disputes, and other civil cases” “Drink and Drive” and E-challan cases” “Cybercrime cases” “Petty theft cases” “Telephone-related cases” “Maintenance cases” “Cases involving minor physical altercations...and others. They highlighted that litigants can obtain an immediate final verdict without the need to make repeated rounds of the courts for years. They emphasized that there are no “winners” or “losers” in this process, as decisions are reached solely based on the mutual consent of both parties. Furthermore, they noted that there is no provision to file an appeal against the decisions reached through this process. The District Principal Judge has urged litigants and respondents within the district to contact the respective courts—either directly or through their advocates—to have their cases included in the Lok Adalat list, and to avail themselves of this opportunity to minimize the effort and expense involved in making repeated rounds of the courts.



Saarathi Finance Takes Financial Awareness Drive to Telangana’s Tier-2 and Rural Markets



Telangana, 12th March 2026: Saarathi Finance successfully conducted a bike rally across two locations in Telangana – Miryalaguda and Sangareddy – as part of its ongoing initiative to strengthen customer outreach and promote financial awareness among MSMEs and small business owners in tier-2, tier-3 and rural markets. “The rally witnessed the participation of 20 riders from the Saarathi Finance team who travelled through key localities distributing informational leaflets and interacting with local entrepreneurs to generate awareness about Saarathi’s business loan offerings and financial solutions. “In Miryalaguda, the rally commenced from the Miryalaguda Branch and covered Eedulaguda, Housing

Board, Ramachandraguda and Ganesh Market, engaging with local traders and small business owners along the route. “Similarly, in Sangareddy, the rally started from the Sangareddy Branch and covered Pothireddypally Chowrasta, Kandhi, SRO & RTO Office areas, and Malkapur Chintal, where the team distributed leaflets and interacted with potential customers to educate them about access to formal credit and business financing options. “Speaking about the initiative, Harendra Babu, State Business Head – Telangana, Saarathi Finance, said: “We carried out this rally to reach our customers in tier-2, tier-3 and rural areas. Through this initiative, we covered several key local markets and interacted with local entrepreneurs to educate them about financing opportunities available through Saarathi Finance. We will continue to conduct such rallies regularly to strengthen customer engagement, promote financial awareness, and enhance our brand presence across the region. “The rally is part of Saarathi Finance’s broader strategy to increase grassroots engagement, generate quality leads, and build stronger relationships with small business communities across its operating states. “Through such on-ground initiatives, Saarathi Finance continues to reinforce its commitment to supporting MSMEs and enabling financial inclusion across emerging markets.

check-ups related to cardiology, chest diseases, dental, orthopedics, and eye care, along with BP, sugar, and blood tests. Medicines worth ₹1 lakh were distributed free of cost to the patients. “On this occasion, with the support of Dr. Diwakar Jandhyam, computer systems and printers worth ₹2 lakhs were donated to the Government Primary School and ZPHS school. A western toilet facility was also constructed and inaugurated for the convenience of the students. “Additionally, NRI members Mr. Pavan Ravva and Mrs. Dodda Premalatha donated RO water purification plants for the schools. “Speaking on the occasion, Red Cross Chairman Dr. Pesaru Vijaya Chander Reddy said that the health camp was organized with the aim of providing quality healthcare services to the people of Kogilvai village. He stated that more than 642 villagers underwent medical check-ups and received free medicines during the camp. “The program was attended by Village Sarpanch Vanitha Mahender, Deputy Sarpanch Prashanth, Jangili Nagaraju, Red Cross governing body member Pulluru Venugopal, NRI Vasavi Association President Bapanapalli Ramesh, President-Elect Tadakamalla Praveen, Secretary Mahesh Jemilla, Jandhyam Madhukar, Jandhyam Karunakar, Senior Physician Dr. Bandela Mohan Rao, Dr. K. Mallesham, IMA Warangal District Finance Secretary and TSMC Member Dr. V. Naresh, Pediatricians Dr. Ashok Reddy, Dr. Sheshu Madhav, Dr. Ashwini, ENT specialists Dr. Sudeep, Dr. Nikhil Kumar, KIMS Sunshine Hospital doctors Dr. Anand and Dr. Sakaram, Dental doctors Dr. Vikas and Dr. Snigdha, Gynecologists Dr. Siri, Dr. Shiva Bhargavi, Dr. SK Samarini, Medical Officer Dr. Radha Shruti Priya, Red Cross doctors Dr. J. Kishan Rao and Dr. Mohammad Tayyar Masood. “Red Cross staff members Gullepelli Shivakumar, Gangadhar, Upender, Jagadeeshwar, Kalpana, Ramesh, Poshalu, along with many villagers, also participated in the program.

Syrian government forces set to re-enter Sweida province after renewed Druze-Bedouin clashes



GNS News Agency, March 12

Renewed clashes broke out overnight between Druze armed groups and members of Bedouin clans in southern Syria, and government forces were preparing to deploy again to the area on Friday (July 18, 2025) after pulling out under a ceasefire agreement that halted several days of violence earlier this week, officials said. Government security forces agreed with some of the Druze factions that they would re-enter the area to impose stability and protect state institutions, according to two Syrian officials who spoke on Friday (July 18, 2025) on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

Syrian government forces had largely pulled out of the Druze-majority southern province of Sweida after days of clashes with militias linked to the Druze religious minority

that threatened to unravel the country's fragile post-war transition. The conflict drew airstrikes against Syrian forces by neighbouring Israel in defence of the Druze minority before most of the fighting was halted by a truce announced on Wednesday (July 16, 2025) that was mediated by the U.S., Turkey and Arab countries. Under that agreement, Druze factions and clerics would be left to maintain internal security in Sweida, Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa said Thursday. The clashes initially began between Druze militias and local Sunni Muslim Bedouin tribes Sunday before government forces intervened and took the Bedouins' side against the Druze.

The fighting killed hundreds of people over four days, with allegations that government-affiliated fighters executed Druze civilians and looted and burned homes. Israel intervened, launching dozens of airstrikes on convoys of government fighters and striking the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters in central Damascus in a major escalation of its involvement. The Druze form a substantial community in Israel, where they are seen as a loyal minority and often serve in the Israeli military. After the ceasefire and withdrawal of government forces, clashes once again flared between the Druze and Bedouin groups in parts of Sweida province. State media reported Druze militias carried out revenge attacks against Bedouin communities, leading to a wave of displacement. The Druze religious sect began as a 10th-century offshoot of Ismailism, a branch of Shiite Islam. More than half of the roughly 1 million Druze worldwide live in Syria. Most of the other Druze live in Lebanon and Israel, including in the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Mideast War and annexed in 1981.

Syria's Sweida violence leads UN rights chief to urge accountability

GNS News Agency, March 12

The Head of the United Nations Human Rights Office called on Friday (July 18, 2025) for Syria's interim authorities to ensure accountability and justice for killings and rights violations in the southern city of Sweida. Syria's government sent troops this week to the predominantly Druze city to quell fighting between Bedouins and Druze, but the violence grew until a ceasefire was declared.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said it had received credible reports of widespread rights violations during the fighting. These included reports of summary executions, kidnappings and destruction of private property by security forces and individuals linked to Syria's interim authorities, as well as other armed elements including Druze and Bedouins. "This bloodshed and the violence must stop, and the protection of all people must be the utmost priority, in line with international human rights law," OHCHR High Commissioner Volker Turk said in a statement.

At least 13 people were unlawfully killed in one recorded incident on July 15 when affiliates of the interim authorities opened fire at a family gathering, the OHCHR said. Six men



were summarily executed near their homes the same day. "My Office has received accounts of distressed Syrians who are living in fear for their lives and those of their loved ones," Mr. Turk said. Israel carried out airstrikes on Damascus on Wednesday and also hit government forces in the south, demanding they withdraw and saying it aimed to protect Syrian Druze - part of a small but influential minority with followers in Lebanon and Israel. Turk shared his concern following reports of civilian casualties following Israeli airstrikes on Sweida, Daraa in the southwest, and on the centre of Damascus.

North Korea slams Japan for labelling Pyongyang 'urgent threat' in defence paper



GNS News Agency, March 12

North Korea on Friday lambasted Japan for describing it as an "urgent threat" in this year's defence white paper, calling it "a war scenario" for aggression and accusing Tokyo of trying to cover up its own moves to become a "military giant." The Institute for Japan Studies under North Korea's foreign ministry issued the criticism in a press statement carried by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) three days after Japan released this year's defence white paper.

The paper labelled North Korea, along with Russia and China, as a "grave and urgent threat" to Japan, expressing "serious concerns" over the possibility of North Korea receiving nuclear and missile technologies from Russia in return for military cooperation. The North Korean statement accused Japan of being obsessed with its ambitions for reinvasion and preoccupied with securing preemptive strike

capacities, citing its development of domestically produced long-range missiles and the purchase of similar weapons from abroad in recent years. The statement also labeled the white paper as "a war scenario for realizing its ambition for reinvasion," warning that Japan's moves to turn itself into a military giant seriously threaten regional peace and security and can never be tolerated, Yonhap news agency reported. "This is nothing but shameless sophism to cover up the threatening entity of Japan which is escalating the regional situation in a gradual way and justify its reckless moves to turn itself into a military giant, leaving the whole area of the archipelago as a military outpost and logistic base for realising the US hegemony-oriented strategy in the Indo-Pacific," the statement noted.

It said Japan is now "working hard to build the capability for carrying out war of aggression such as the capability for long-range strike and trans-domain operation," adding that this is not "merely a temporary countermeasure, but a military policy (re)orientation" away from its earlier stance as a "peace state." "The present development clearly proves once again that the efforts of (North Korea) to bolster up its nuclear war deterrence serve as an indispensable contribution to strongly suppressing the provocations of the US and its allies," the statement also noted. In a separate commentary, the KCNA also took a swipe at Japan's joint project with the United Kingdom and Italy to develop next-generation fighter jets, calling it an attempt to restore Japan's "war alliance." "Japan's military modernisation plot is rooted in an attempt to revive its past imperialism by restoring its 'war alliance,'" the KCNA said, claiming the joint fighter jet project paves the way for launching a war of aggression.

US designation of TRF's 'timely and important' step: India

GNS News Agency, March 12

New Delhi: India on Friday welcomed the US designating The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, a global terrorist outfit, over the Pahalgam attack, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar describing it as a "strong affirmation" of India-US counter-terror cooperation. New Delhi said the designation of TRF is a "timely and important" step and asserted that it has consistently emphasised the need for global cooperation in the fight against terrorism. India's reaction came hours after the US State Department announced adding the TRF as a "designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT)" and cited its claim taking responsibility for the April 22 Pahalgam attack that killed 26 civilians. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said India remains committed to a "policy of zero tolerance" towards terrorism and will continue to work closely with its international partners to ensure that terrorist organisations and their proxies are held accountable. In a social media post, Jaishankar specially complimented US Secretary of State Marco Rubio for designating the LeT proxy. "Appreciate @SecRubio and @StateDept for designating TRF? a Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) proxy? as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). It claimed responsibility for the

April 22 Pahalgam attack," he said. The MEA said India welcomes the decision of the US State Department to designate TRF as an FTO and SDGT. The TRF, a "proxy" of the Pakistan-based terrorist organisation LeT, has been involved in numerous terror-related activities, including the heinous attack on civilians in Pahalgam for which it twice claimed responsibility, it said. "India has consistently emphasised the need for global cooperation in the fight against terrorism and the dismantling of terror infrastructure," the MEA said in a statement. It said the designation of TRF is a "timely and important step reflecting the deep cooperation between India and the United States on counter-terrorism." "India remains committed to a policy of zero tolerance towards terrorism and will continue to work closely with its international partners to ensure that terrorist organisations and their proxies are held accountable," the statement added. The US State Department also noted that TRF claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam attack. "This was the deadliest attack on civilians in India since the 2008 Mumbai attacks conducted by LeT," it said. TRF has also claimed responsibility for several attacks against Indian security forces, including most recently in 2024. "The State Department said its actions demonstrate the Trump Administration's commitment to 'protecting our national security interests, countering terrorism, and enforcing President Trump's call for justice for the Pahalgam attack'."

Trump threatens to sue WSJ, Murdoch over story on alleged 2003 letter to Epstein



GNS News Agency, March 12

U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to sue The Wall Street Journal and owner Rupert Murdoch Thursday (July 17, 2025) over a story about an alleged off-colour letter he wrote to Jeffrey Epstein, amid lingering political fallout over his administration's handling of the late financier's sex trafficking case. The article in the Journal says the letter featuring a sketch of a naked woman and Mr. Trump's signature was part of a collection of notes for Epstein's 50th birthday in 2003. The newspaper says it reviewed the letter but did not print an image. "I told Rupert Murdoch it was a scam, that he shouldn't print this Fake Story," Mr. Trump wrote on his Truth Social network.

"But he did, and now I'm going to sue his a** off, and that of his third rate newspaper." In an earlier post, Mr. Trump said Wall Street Journal editor-in-chief Emma Tucker "was told directly by (White House press secretary) Karoline Leavitt, and by President Trump, that the letter was a FAKE". The Republican President called the story "false, malicious, and defamatory". "President Trump will be suing The Wall Street Journal, NewsCorp, and Mr. (Rupert) Murdoch, shortly. The Press has to learn to be truthful, and not rely on sources that probably don't even exist," the post added. Mr. Trump was already facing a firestorm over his past relationship with Epstein, and claims that his administration is covering up lurid details of Epstein's crimes to protect rich and powerful figures. Epstein died by suicide in a New York prison in 2019 — during Trump's first term — after being charged with federal sex trafficking in a scheme where he allegedly groomed young and underage women for sexual abuse by his wealthy contacts. He was previously required to register as a sex offender in Florida after pleading guilty to two felony prostitution-related charges. On Thursday, Mr. Trump asked Attorney General Pam Bondi to release transcripts of grand jury testimony in the Epstein case, "subject to court approval." "Another wonderful

secret! The alleged letter — which Mr. Trump denies writing — is raunchy, as were others in the collection, the Journal reported. It contains several lines of typewritten text, contained in an outline of a naked woman drawn with a marker. "The future president's signature is a squiggly 'Donald' below her waist, mimicking pubic hair," the Journal reported. "The letter concludes: 'Happy Birthday — and may every day be another wonderful secret.'"

Mr. Trump denied writing the letter or drawing the figure, telling the Journal: "This is not me. This is a fake thing." "I don't draw pictures of women," he said. "It's not my language. It's not my words." Mr. Murdoch, who controls the NewsCorp global media company, was in Mr. Trump's suite Sunday at MetLife Stadium outside New York City for the FIFA Club World Cup final. The media mogul also owns conservative Americans' preferred TV news channel, Fox News, which scored the first TV interview with Mr. Trump upon his return to the White House in January. The President has regularly praised Fox and its presenters over the years — and even hired some to his administration. The Trump-supporting far-right has long latched onto the Epstein scandal, claiming the existence of a still-secret client list and that he was murdered in his cell as part of a cover-up. Trump supporters expected the Republican to answer their questions on his return to office in January but now find themselves being told the conspiracy theories are false. The Justice Department and FBI said in a memo made public this month that there is no evidence that Epstein kept a "client list" or was blackmailing powerful people. They also dismissed the claim that Epstein was murdered in jail, confirming his suicide, and said they would not be releasing any more information on the probe.

That could change if grand jury testimony or evidence are released. On Thursday, US media reported that a federal prosecutor who handled Epstein's case, who is the daughter of a prominent Trump critic, was abruptly fired. Maureen Comey, whose father is former FBI director James Comey, was dismissed Wednesday from her position as an assistant US attorney in Manhattan, the reports said. Comey also prosecuted Ghislaine Maxwell, the only former Epstein associate who has been criminally charged in connection with his activities. Maxwell is the person who compiled the leather-bound book of letters for Epstein in 2003, The Journal reported. "The WSJ should be ashamed for publishing it. Where is this letter? Would you be shocked to learn they never showed it to us before publishing it?" Vice President JD Vance wrote on X. Meanwhile, Democratic lawmaker Pat Ryan wrote: "I think we now know EXACTLY why Donald Trump refuses to release the Epstein files."

EU targets Russia's energy revenue, shadow fleet with new sanctions over Ukraine war



GNS News Agency, March 12

The European Union approved on Friday (July 18, 2025) a new raft of sanctions against Russia over its war on Ukraine, including a lower oil price cap, a ban on transactions with Nord Stream gas pipelines, and the targeting of more shadow fleet ships, the EU foreign policy chief said. "The message is clear: Europe will not back down in its support for Ukraine. The EU will keep raising the pressure until Russia ends its war," Kaja Kallas said in a statement. Ms. Kallas said the measures amount to "one of its strongest sanctions packages against Russia to date" linked to the war, now in its fourth year. It comes as European countries start to buy U.S. weapons for Ukraine to help the country better defend itself. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the new measures, describing them as a "timely and necessary" step amid intensified Russian attacks.

"All infrastructure of Russia's war must be blocked," Mr. Zelenskyy said, adding that Ukraine will synchronise its sanctions with the EU and introduce its own additional measures soon. The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, had proposed to lower the oil price cap from \$60 to \$45, which is lower than the market price to target Russia's vast energy revenues. The 27 member countries decided to set the price per barrel at just under \$48. The EU had hoped to get major international powers in the Group of

Seven countries involved in the price cap to broaden the impact, but conflict in the Middle East pushed up oil prices and the Trump administration could not be brought onboard. In 2023, Ukraine's Western allies limited sales of Russian oil to \$60 per barrel but the price cap was largely symbolic as most of Moscow's crude — its main moneymaker — cost less than that. Still, the cap was there in case oil prices rose. Oil income is the linchpin of Russia's economy, allowing President Vladimir Putin to pour money into the armed forces without worsening inflation for everyday people and avoiding a currency collapse. A new import ban was also imposed in an attempt to close a loophole allowing Russia to indirectly export crude oil via a number of non-EU countries. The EU also targeted the Nord Stream pipelines between Russia and Germany to prevent Putin from generating any revenue from them in future, notably by discouraging would-be investors. Russian energy giant Rosneft's refinery in India was hit as well. The pipelines were built to carry Russian natural gas to Germany but are not in operation. They were targeted by sabotage in 2022, but the source of the underwater explosions has remained a major international mystery. On top of that, the new EU sanctions targeted Russia's banking sector, with the aim of limiting the Kremlin's ability to raise funds or carry out financial transactions. Two Chinese banks were added to the list. The EU has slapped several rounds of sanctions on Russia since Mr. Putin ordered his troops into Ukraine in February 24, 2022. More than 2,400 officials and "entities" — often government agencies, banks, companies or organisations — have been hit with asset freezes and travel bans. But each round of sanctions is getting harder to agree, as measures targeting Russia bite the economies of the 27 member nations. Slovakia held up the latest package over concerns about proposals to stop Russian gas supplies, which it relies on. The last raft of EU sanctions, imposed on May 20, targeted almost 200 ships in Russia's sanction-busting shadow fleet of tankers. On Friday, 105 more ships were blocked from European ports, locks and from ship-to-ship transfers, bringing the total number of vessels now sanctioned to more than 400.

Stephen Colbert's 'Late Show' cancelled by CBS, ends May 2026

GNS News Agency, March 12

New York: CBS is cancelling "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert" next May, shuttering a decades-old TV institution in a changing media landscape and removing from air one of President Donald Trump's most prominent and persistent late-night critics. Thursday's announcement followed Colbert's criticism on Monday of a settlement between Trump and Paramount Global, parent company of CBS, over a "60 Minutes" story. Colbert told his audience at New York's Ed Sullivan Theatre that he had learned Wednesday night that after a decade on air, "next year will be our last season. ... It's the end of 'The Late Show' on CBS. I'm not being replaced. This is all just going away." The audience responded with boos and groans. "Yeah, I share your feelings," the 61-year-old comic said.

Three top Paramount and CBS executives praised Colbert's show as "a staple of the nation's zeitgeist" in a statement that said the cancellation "is purely a financial decision against a challenging backdrop in late night. It is not related in any way to the show's performance, content or other matters happening at Paramount." In his Monday monologue, Colbert said he was "offended" by the US\$ 16 million settlement reached by Paramount, whose pending sale to Skydance Media needs the Trump administration's approval. He said the technical name in legal circles for the deal was "big fat bribe." "I don't know if anything — anything — will repair my trust in this company," Colbert said. "But, just taking a stab at it, I'd say US\$ 16 million would help." Trump had sued Paramount Global over how "60 Min-

utes" edited its interview last fall with Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris. Critics say the company settled primarily to clear a hurdle to the Skydance sale. Colbert took over "The Late Show" in 2015 after becoming a big name in comedy and news satire working with Jon Stewart on "The Daily Show" and hosting "The Colbert Report", which riffed on right-wing talk shows. The most recent ratings from Nielsen show Colbert gaining viewers so far this year and winning his timeslot among broadcasters, with about 2.417 million viewers across 41 new episodes. On Tuesday, Colbert's "Late Show" landed its sixth nomination for a Primetime Emmy Award for outstanding talk show. It won a Peabody Award in 2021. David Letterman began hosting "The Late Show" in 1993. When Colbert took over, he deepened its engagement with politics. Alongside musicians and movie stars, Colbert often welcomes politicians to his couch. Democratic Senator Adam Schiff of California was a guest on Thursday night. Schiff said on X that "if Paramount and CBS ended the 'Late Show' for political reasons, the public deserves to know. And deserves better." Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts released a similar statement. Colbert's counterpart on ABC, Jimmy Kimmel, posted on Instagram "Love you Stephen" and directed an expletive at CBS. Actor and producer Jamie Lee Curtis noted in an interview in Los Angeles that the cancellation came as the House passed a bill approving Trump's request to cut funding to public broadcasters NPR and PBS. "They're trying to silence people, but that won't work. Won't work."

How mother-daughter duped Punjab families of lakhs, held proxy engagements, promised life in Canada



GNS News Agency, March 12

Till July 10, Jasdeep Singh, 27, of Faizgarh village in Punjab's Khanna city, was within touching distance of his Canada dream, all thanks to his scheduled 'engagement' to a framed photograph of Canada resident Harpreet Kaur, 24, aka Harry, at a hotel in Doraha, around 20 km from Khanna. Before the magna (engagement) could take place, Khanna Police raided the hotel following a tip-off by Rajwinder Singh, 28, a Bathinda resident and Harpreet's 'fiancé' since July 2024. Rajwinder, a resident of Bathinda's Dullewala village, says an accidental WhatsApp voice note helped him blow the lid off the alleged racket. "Harpreet's mother mistakenly sent me a voice note actually meant for her. In the voice note, she discussed the money they had to take from the Faizgarh family. She also told Harpreet to keep fooling and reassuring me regarding our wedding. That's when I decided to dig about Faizgarh family and got to know she was getting engaged to their son next," says Rajwinder, who has studied till Class 10. Harry meets 7: How mother-daughter duped Punjab families of lakhs, held proxy engagements, promised life in Canada Bathinda resident Rajwinder Singh got "engaged" to Harpreet by proxy at a dhaba in Moga in July 2024. He tipped-off the police regarding her July 10 engagement. While the July 10 raid came as a shock for Jasdeep and his family, it was an eye-opener for Khanna Police too: Seven men from across Punjab — all of whom allegedly got engaged to her over the past two years by proxy, either over video calls "from Canada" or to her framed photograph — have accused the mother-daughter of taking lakhs of rupees from them under various pretexts in lieu of taking them to Canada after their marriage to Harpreet. While Khanna Police have arrested Harpreet's mother Sukhdarshan Kaur, her brother Manpreet Singh and their accomplice Ashok Kumar for allegedly duping men from Bathinda, Moga, Shahkot, Raikot, Barnala and Dharamkot seeking brides settled in Canada, a Look-Out Circular is expected to be issued soon against Harpreet, who went to Canada on a student visa and is currently there on a work permit. The police said the accused would target their victims either via matrimonial ads in newspapers or nicholas (local matchmakers). Sukhdarshan, a resident of Ludhiana's Jagraon, is a widow, said police. Harry meets 7: How mother-daughter duped Punjab families of lakhs, held proxy engagements, promised life in Canada Rupinder, a resident of Langewal village in Jalandhar's Shahkot, during his "engagement" by proxy to Harpreet. (Express Photo) Explaining the modus operandi, Inspector Akash Dutt, Station House Officer (SHO), Doraha Police Station, says, "Sukhdarshan, the mother, would fix Harpreet's marriage to men who wanted to settle in Canada but could not due to various limitations. She would then make Harpreet speak to those men and their families via video calls. She would then hold proxy engagement ceremonies of her daughter and reach fiancés' homes with a box of laddoos. Claiming to be very poor and having incurred huge debts to send Harpreet abroad, Sukhdarshan would soon start asking these families to compensate her for helping settle their sons in Canada. Since she readily agreed to bank transfers, the families didn't suspect much." In the case of at least one family, police said, Sukhdarshan allegedly gave them a written agreement as guarantee of marriage. Police say the duped families never approached the police since Harpreet would keep talking to some of her fiancés for months. While Harpreet kept putting off the wedding ceremony, her mother would keep promising to return the money to the families concerned. Sukhdarshan Kaur with her daughter Harpreet aka Harry Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Harjeet Singh, the investigating officer in the case, says Harpreet too would play her part in the fraud. "Harpreet would initially take calls from her fiancés and talk to them over video calls. In some cases, she too would demand money for medicines, pending rent, college fee, etc. Her mother too would ask these families for money to pay for Harpreet's return ticket to India but she would never come. If the fiancés refused to give them more money, Harpreet would stop taking their calls," says the ASI. ASI Singh says that Sukhdarshan would promise a wedding within 2-3 months of these proxy engagements. According to Inspector Dutt, transactions worth at least Rs 1.60 crore in bank accounts belonging to the mother-

son duo over the past two years are under the scanner. Harry meets 7: How mother-daughter duped Punjab families of lakhs, held proxy engagements, promised life in Canada Pavittar Singh, a resident of Faizgarh village in Khanna, whose son Jasdeep Singh was scheduled to get "engaged" to Harpreet Kaur on July 10 by proxy. The ceremony was raided by the police following a tip-off. Pavittar Singh, whose son Jasdeep was set to get 'engaged' on July 10, says, "Jasdeep wanted to settle in Canada and Harpreet had a Canada work permit. They had spoken on video calls before the engagement. Her mother demanded Rs 18 lakh to repay the debts she said she had incurred to send Harpreet to Canada. We had already given her Rs 1 lakh and spent Rs 40,000 on Harpreet's trousseau. Another Rs 6 lakh was to be paid after the engagement, but the police raid saved us." Rajwinder, who tipped-off the police regarding Harpreet's July 10 engagement, alleges that his family was duped of Rs 18.50 lakh by the accused. "We responded to their matrimonial ad. They told us she lives in Surrey (in Canada)," he claims. Though Harpreet's mother held their 'engagement' at a dhaba in Moga in July 2024, Rajwinder claims his family footed the bill of Rs 4,600. "Sukhdarshan had promised that Harpreet would come to India in September for the wedding but she didn't. Soon, the mother-daughter started demanding money on various pretexts, so we sold off our land, our only source of livelihood. We gave Rs 6.50 lakh for Harpreet's overdue tuition, Rs 2.50 lakh for her airfare to India and Rs 1 lakh for her personal expenses, rent, etc. When we refused to give more money, Harpreet stopped taking my calls," he says. Looking distraught as he waited to record his statement at Doraha Police Station, Gaganpreet Singh, 29, of Littar village in Ludhiana's Raikot, was accompanied by his parents and a paternal uncle. Gaganpreet, who got "engaged" to Harpreet in February, says his family had paid Sukhdarshan Rs 8.50 lakh of the Rs 25 lakh she had demanded.

Harry meets 7: How mother-daughter duped Punjab families of lakhs, held proxy engagements, promised life in Canada Gaganpreet Singh, a resident of Littar village in Ludhiana's Raikot, got "engaged" by proxy to Harpreet in February. Gaganpreet, who has studied till Class 9, says, "I took a loan of Rs 6 lakh from my Canada-based sister. For the rest, I sold off our buffaloes and took another loan from my uncle." His mother Manjit Kaur says the wedding was scheduled for May. "My Canada-based daughter asked Harpreet to meet her, but they only spoke over video calls," she says. Manjit adds, "We gave Sukhdarshan Rs 8.50 lakh till the engagement. After that, she asked for Rs 2 lakh more. When I told her that we won't be able to pay up till the wedding, she started dilly-dallying. Ultimately, we told her to call off the wedding, but she never repaid us." Most victims The Indian Express spoke to reported a similar modus operandi. Swaran Singh, 49, a resident of Kishanpura Kalan in Moga district's Dharamkot whose son Kamaljeet got "engaged" to Harpreet in January 2024, says Sukhdarshan wanted them to pay her Rs 12.50 lakh. Harry meets 7: How mother-daughter duped Punjab families of lakhs, held proxy engagements, promised life in Canada Gaganpreet Singh, a resident of Littar village in Ludhiana's Raikot who got "engaged" to Harpreet in February, with his mother Manjit Kaur at Doraha Police Station. (Express photo by Gurmeet Singh) "Till their engagement, we had given her Rs 5.45 lakh. Once, Harpreet asked Kamaljeet for Rs 2.30 lakh to pay her overdue college fees. We paid that too, but she disappeared," he says. Her "fiancé" Kamaljeet says they spoke over the phone for nearly nine months. "She would only initiate the call when she needed money — for tuition or medicines. After I confronted her one day, asking her for details on her degree completion, job, etc., she stopped taking my calls," he says. Daya Singh, a resident of Langewal village of Jalandhar's Shahkot whose son Rupinder, 24, a graduate, was "engaged" to Harpreet, says Sukhdarshan wanted them to pay her 17 lakh, "of which we paid Rs 5.50 lakh till their engagement". Harry meets 7: How mother-daughter duped Punjab families of lakhs, held proxy engagements, promised life in Canada Kamaljeet Singh, a resident of Kishanpura Kalan in Moga district's Dharamkot, during his "engagement" by proxy to Harpreet in January 2024. (Express Photo) He says, "Harpreet and Rupinder spoke on the phone for 6-7 months. After their engagement, Sukhdarshan wanted more money to pay her college fee, but we refused. Harpreet stopped speaking to Rupinder after that." Gora Singh, a resident of Vairoke village in Moga district, says Sukhdarshan duped him of Rs 6 lakh despite signing a "written wedding agreement" on May 25, 2023. The "agreement", a copy of which is now with the police, reportedly states, "I am engaging my daughter to Gora Singh after taking Rs 6 lakh and they will pay the rest Rs 9 lakh after the marriage." Joginder Pal Singh Sekhon, a former teacher from Powat village of Machhiwara, says his son Shudh Singh, 30, a Dubai-based driver

Indigenous diving support vessel Nistar commissioned at Vishakapatnam

Visakhapatnam: India's first indigenously built Diving Support Vessel, Nistar, was commissioned here on Friday, marking a major maritime achievement. Nistar was originally built on March 29, 1971, playing a crucial role during the Indo-Pakistan war, identifying Pakistan's sunken submarine Gazi outside Visakhapatnam harbour and Eastern operations. Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi said that the new Nistar will carry forward its legacy with advanced saturation dive systems and capability to rescue deep submergence rescue vessels, including submarines. "Old ships never die, they always return in upgraded form," said Tripathi, during the commissioning ceremony. Nistar is both technologically and operationally significant, enhancing India's and regional partners' submarine rescue capabilities, with India set to emerge as a preferred partner in submarine rescue globally, said the



CNS.

Tripathi said that only a few navies worldwide have such capabilities, and fewer nations develop them indigenously, with Nistar boosting India's maritime-based industry. Participating in the event, Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth said the Indian Navy has a history of glorious victories and

noted that Nistar will enhance India's global identity, proving that the Indian Navy stands as an equal among world powers. He highlighted that the Nistar that was decommissioned in 1989 was weighing 800 tonnes, is now revived with a weight of 10,500 tonnes, and is 120 meters long, reflecting Viksit Bharat's (Developed India)

technological transformation. "India shifted from importer to exporter", exporting defence goods worth Rs 23,622 crores and targeting Rs 50,000 crores, achieved through the efforts of 120 MSME sector personnel, said Seth. Further, Seth reiterated that India is poised to become the third-largest economy after surpassing Germany.

How a scrap dealer is honouring the legacy of Robert Bristow, the architect of modern Cochin port



GNS News Agency, March 12

The warm scent of teak wood and Fevicol greets visitors at a boatyard on the banks of the Vembanad Lake. Beneath a teal tarpaulin, two men work diligently on a weathered wooden boat, predominantly brown with patches of flaking polish. Surrounded by scaffolding and wooden supports, the vessel wears a modest sign at its bow: ML Vasco. But this is no ordinary restoration, and ML Vasco is no ordinary boat. More than 105 years old, it is the boat that once ferried British harbour engineer Sir Robert Bristow — widely acknowledged as the architect of the modern port in Kochi — after he arrived in the city in 1920. Seethi Sajar, a scrap dealer based in Thoppumpady, secured it in an auction held by the Cochin Port Trust in 2010 for Rs 2 lakh, only to realise its historical significance later. "It was only after a Port Trust official told me that this was the boat used by Robert Bristow that I knew of the value of my possession. It was then that I decided I would not dismantle the boat but keep it for future generations to witness and understand his contributions." Boat cabin Seethi Sajar secured the boat in an auction held by the Cochin Port Trust in 2010. (Narayanan S/Indian Express) Bristow arrived in Kochi in April 1920 at the age of 39, under the direction of the then Governor of Madras, Lord Willingdon. Waiting for him at the waterfront was ML Vasco, which would become his constant companion during his mission to modernise the Cochin Port. Though the port had been a major trading hub even before Bristow's arrival, its expansion was hampered by the lack of a safe inner harbour for ships. "The Cochin Port was a natural port, attracting Portuguese, Arabs, Jews, Dutch, and British at different periods. Over the centuries, shipping technology underwent significant changes. Sailing ships gave way to steamships. However, huge ships could not come close to the Cochin Port due to a natural sandbar, and cargo loading and unloading were being done using small boats," says Bony Thomas, nodal officer of Cochin Heritage Zone Conservation Society. In 1926, Bristow brought a dredger, named 'Lord Willingdon', from Scotland to remove the sand and silt that prevented the entry of large ships at the port. Two years later, on May 26, 1928, a steamship, SS Padma, entered the inner harbour of the modernised Cochin Port, officially opening it to the world. This event is commemorated annually as the Cochin Port Day.

But Bristow didn't stop here. He used the mud and materials dredged from the sea during the modernisation of the port to create Willingdon Island, the largest artificial island in India. He filled the area around Vedoruthy Island, a pre-existing small natural island, to carve out Willingdon Island in a sprawling area of 775 acres. He owned the first building on the new island. "He later connected this human-

made island to the mainland of Ernakulam through the Vedoruthy bridge. He also connected the island and the mainland area of Thoppumpady through the Old Harbour Bridge, which was called the London Bridge of Kochi. It was an architectural marvel as its middle portion could be lifted to allow ships to pass through," says Thomas. In his book Cochin Saga, Bristow wrote how he marvelled at the scope of the Cochin Port when he touched down in 1920 and took the first trip on Vasco. "It seemed all the blue lagoons of the southern seas had come to rest in the wide bosom of Mother India at Cochin, for each side there stretched an interminable vista fading only into the sky itself." Over the next two decades, he transformed Kochi's landscape as the "interminable vista" evolved into a bustling port city, complete with wharfs, cranes, roads, and bridges. He oversaw the extension of the rail line from the old railway station in Ernakulam to Willingdon Island and the establishment of Harbour Terminus railway station on the island in 1932, mainly for freight movement. I live on a large island made from the bottom of the sea. It is called Willingdon Island, after the present Viceroy of India. From the upper floor of my house, I look down on the finest harbour in the East. "Bristow also played a key role in building a civilian airstrip on Willingdon Island in 1936, which later proved to be a crucial aircraft repair yard for the British during World War II. In 1953, the facility was commissioned as INS Garuda, the oldest operating air station of the Indian Navy. Apart from his engineering laurels, Bristow, along with his wife, Gertrude, is credited with founding the inter-racial Lotus Club in Kochi. "The Cochin Club in Fort Kochi allowed only fully British people. Gertrude had Belgian Jewish ancestry, making her ineligible. The couple opened Lotus Club to people from all races and backgrounds, almost like a statement to the British Raj," says Stephen Robert, a Kochi-based heritage activist.

ML Vasco is unlike any modern vessel. Twenty-six feet long, six feet wide, and seven feet tall, with a two-cylinder diesel engine, it can accommodate 10 to 12 people. Built entirely from wood and copper, and without the use of iron, it has not rusted even after all these years. For its restoration, Sajar sought craftsmen skilled in repairing wooden boats. His search eventually led him to Jaison and Janappan from Mulvakukad in Kochi. The two men are as enthusiastic as Sajar about the restoration efforts. "We had heard about Bristow sayippu (a loosely used colloquial term in Malayalam for people of Caucasian descent) and it is a great privilege for us to now work on his boat," says Jaison, adding that the instruction from Sajar has been to stay true to the original design. The boat has two cabins separated by a central deck. A wooden ladder connects the central deck to the front cabin, which features two large oval windows on each side. The two men plan to install glass panes in these windows. The rear cabin has rectangular wooden panels and serves as the main seating area. The windows in the back cabin are rectangular and much smaller compared to those in the front cabin. They have reattached the loose steering wheel and plan to replace the engine cover. What lies ahead for them is the not-so-easy task of lifting the boat and replacing the missing wooden planks on the bottom. Sajar estimates the cost for the restoration work, which began over four months ago, to be around Rs 10 lakh. For now, ML Vasco remains at a rented yard in Karuvellipady. But Sajar has bigger plans: once restored, the boat will be mounted on trolleys and transported to a three-acre plot nearby, which he bought recently.

Health warnings for samosa, jalebi? Here is what the govt's circular says, and why

The Union Health Secretary, Puniya Salila Srivastava, recently wrote to all ministries and government departments, urging them to display information on sugar and fat content in everyday foods in their offices and other public institutions. It also proposed doing so in schools and offices at large. However, some media reports claimed that "warning labels" will be issued for snacks such as samosas and jalebis, raising questions of why Indian snacks were selectively chosen. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also said, "Some media have reported that apparently samosas/jalebis cannot be consumed from now on, based on instructions from the Health Ministry. We are not interfering in every matter. We shall not implement this." Here is what to know.

The June 21 letter said, "We are proposing display of Sugar and Oil Boards as an initiative to promote healthier dietary habits in various settings. These boards serve as visual behavioural nudges..." "These boards are to serve as visual reminders to prompt people to eat healthier, in line with the government's recent focus on combating the rising incidence of obesity in India. They will not be the same as warning labels, like the ones seen on tobacco packaging and mandated by law. The letter included some sample templates, having not just Indian snacks but also burgers, cakes, chocolates, and soft drinks. Designed by the apex food regulator, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), one such board said that a person should consume only around 27 to 30 grams of fat in a day. It depicted snacks such as samosa, kachori, and vadapav, along with their fat content. For reference, one samosa (100 g) yields 362 kilocalories (kcal) with 28 g of fat, while a burger has 590 kcal with 20.5 g of fat. Similarly, the sugar boards said that adults should not consume more than 25 g of sugar per day and children not more than 20 g. They showed the sugar content in soft drinks, chocolates, gulab jamun, and flavoured juices. One gulab jamun (62 g) releases 203 kcal and 32 g of sugar. Some of the boards contained simple graphics on the spoonfuls of sugar that one can consume — five teaspoons — along with the actual quantity in various food items. It also had the option of providing details about the foods available in the canteen on the day. The boards further contain nuggets of information such as "jaggery, honey, date syrup, maple syrup, brown sugar, caramel, molasses are equally bad," or "sugar can be disguised as sucralose, mannitol, erythritol, xylitol, sorbitol".

Why is this being done?

With obesity on the rise — along with associated increases in lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases, and some cancers — the government has been undertaking several activities to improve food habits. Earlier this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to adopt an active, healthy lifestyle and reduce oil consumption by 10%. In the past, studies have cited the consumption of calorie-dense foods high in sugar, salt, and fat as a major cause of rising obesity in India. The entry of multinational food and beverage companies is also a factor. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) recently directed its affiliated schools to establish sugar boards to monitor and reduce sugar intake in children. The board noted a significant increase in type 2 diabetes among

children over the past decade. It added that sugar constitutes 13% of the daily calorie intake of children between the ages of 4 and 10 years and 15% for those between the ages of 11 and 18 years, much higher than the recommended 5%.

How big is the obesity problem in India?

The Union Health Secretary's letter, quoting The Lancet medical journal's Global Burden of Disease study, says that the number of obese and overweight adults in India is projected to increase from around 18 crores in 2021 to 44.9 crores by 2050. This will make India the country with the second-highest global burden. Another representative study from India estimated that 25.4 crore people, or 28.6% of the population, live with generalised obesity. Importantly, almost 39.5% of the population (around 35.1 crore people) live with abdominal obesity. The accumulation of fats in the abdominal region makes people more prone to the ill effects of obesity even at a lower Body Mass Index (BMI). This is because the abdominal fat is stored not under the skin but around organs such as the liver and intestines, impacting their functioning. Visceral fat is linked to a higher risk of diseases like diabetes, hypertension, heart attack, and stroke.

Are all fats bad in food? How much is too much?

Fats are not inherently bad — in fact, some categories of fats are needed for the body to function properly. The Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) National Nutrition Guideline suggests that people should try to get as much of their daily requirement of fats from seeds, nuts, pulses, and beans as possible. It suggests that one should not consume more than 4 to 10 teaspoons of oil a day, and the number should be on the lower side for those having sedentary lifestyles. People should consume a mix of two or three different oils, ideally ones that are high in MUFAs (Monounsaturated Fatty Acids) and PUFAs (Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids), such as sunflower, safflower or soybean oil. Using the same oil repeatedly, a common practice in shops selling fried snacks and fast food chains, can be harmful. This is because when heated at high temperatures for frying, the good fatty acids in the oil break down to form harmful compounds that increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases and cancers.

What are ultra-processed foods and trans fats?

Ultra-processed foods are high in fats, sugars, and salts, and the term generally includes industrially produced foods that contain ingredients not available in home kitchens. Their regular consumption is linked to high levels of obesity. Additionally, it reduces the share of healthy foods in people's diets, which have essential micronutrients, fibres, and vitamins. Ultra-processed foods can also be highly addictive and contribute to high caloric intake. Trans fats — or trans fatty acids — are produced during the hydrogenation of vegetable oils, which is done to improve the food's shelf life and flavour, and can be found in fast foods, potato chips, and cookies. At times, trans fats are considered worse than the bad cholesterol or LDL because they are known to both increase bad cholesterol and decrease the good cholesterol. Trans fats are known to increase the risk of diabetes, breast cancer, colon cancer, preeclampsia (high blood pressure during pregnancy), and nervous system disorders.

Atre, Pu La and now Kamra: A look at how satirists found themselves in political crosshairs in Maharashtra



The Shiv Sena's ongoing campaign against comedian Kunal Kamra for his political satire, where he allegedly referred to party chief and Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as "gaddar (traitor)", has brought to light the delicate and uncomfortable relationship between the state's politics and humour. However, Kamra is not the first humorist to clash with politicians in a state where interplay between politics and humour has long been an integral part of the conversation. Humorists in Maharashtra have frequently played a key role in both critiquing and reflecting on the political environment, often at the risk of facing backlash for their remarks.

One of the most prominent figures who drew political ire was Pralhad Keshav Atre (Acharya Atre), a journalist, politician, and humorist, whose sharp wit and satire led him into several run-ins with Maharashtra's politicians, including Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray. Atre, through his writings in his newspaper "Maratha" and public speeches, often used humour to lampoon various political leaders. One of his most memorable satirical pieces targeted then President V V Giri, who had fourteen children. Maratha published a piece with a family photograph of Giri and his children, titled "Giri yanchi kamgiri". The humour arose from the dual meaning of the word "kaam", which could imply both "work" and "sexual desire", while "giri" referred to the President's surname and his performance (number of children).

Atre's wit was also evident during the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement in the late 1950s. When the popular slogan "Mumbaicha samyukta Maharashtra zalach pahije (Mumbai must become part of united Maharashtra)" came under criticism from then Chief Minister Yashwantrao Chavan. In response, Atre said: "Remove the 'Ch' from your surname and see what remains—"vhan", which means

footwear!" This became a staple example of Atre's satirical brilliance.

Atre's most significant verbal duels were with Bal Thackeray, whose rise to prominence in the state's politics in the 1960s was met with Atre's vocal criticism. Atre used satire to criticise the Shiv Sena's regionalist and nativist stance, which he believed to be divisive. He was particularly critical of the party's anti-migrant rhetoric and its aggressive political tactics. Through his columns and public speeches, Atre's humour challenged the party's approach to Marathi pride, highlighting the polarising effect of their politics. This conflict with Thackeray, a satirical cartoonist himself, led to Atre being depicted as a pig in the Shiv Sena's mouthpiece Marmik, with the Shiv Sena founder even referring to Atre as "Wori cha dukkar" (The pig of Wori). Atre's sharp criticism also provoked violent reactions from Sena activists, culminating in an assault on him. Despite their tumultuous relationship, after the Sena came to power, the Shiv Sena honoured Atre by erecting a full-size statue of him at Wori.

Another notable satirist who faced the ire of Maharashtra's political class was Purushottam Laxman Deshpande (Pu La Deshpande). Deshpande, known for his iconic contributions to Marathi literature and humor, found himself at odds with the Shiv Sena when he openly criticised political violence. In 1995, while accepting the Maharashtra Bhushan Award, Deshpande took a jibe at the growing "goondaism" in the state's politics, condemning political parties that used hooliganism to gain power. Thackeray responded sharply, remarking that awarding him had been "their folly." Thackeray hit back with his own wordplay, commenting on how "old bridges are falling, but new ones must come up", a dig at Deshpande's name "Pu La" (which resembles the Marathi word for "bridge"). However, the duo later buried their differences. A clash also occurred in 2003 over the satirical show "Ghadle Bighadle (Done Undone)", which aired a skit that mocked NCP leader and then state Home Minister Chhagan Bhujbal. The skit, which parodied Bhujbal with a character named "ArmStrong" (a play on Bhujbal's name), angered the NCP, leading to Bhujbal's supporters vandalising the channel's office. Bhujbal eventually resigned from the Cabinet in wake of the controversy. The latest episode in Maharashtra's long history of political clashes derived from humorous comments involves Kamra and his outspoken remarks against Shinde. While many past conflicts between humorists and politicians have been resolved with reconciliations, the Kamra incident continues to simmer in Maharashtra.

After Nalanda, another Bihar university now set to rise from the ruins

A decade after Nalanda University came up in the foothills of Rajgir, work is on to revive another ancient centre of learning in Bihar — Vikramshila. While the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has, since December last year, been developing the site of the ancient Vikramshila university to attract more tourists, the Bihar government recently identified 202.14 acres at Antichak village in Bhagalpur district for the Central university.

Though the Centre had approved the project in 2015 and sanctioned ₹500 crore, with the state government unable to identify a suitable land for the project, there had been little progress until now. Speaking in Bhagalpur on February 24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "At its peak, Vikramshila University was a centre of knowledge for the world. We have already fused ancient Nalanda university's glory with the new Nalanda University. After Nalanda, it is the turn of Vikramshila as we are opening a Central university." On a weekend morning, workers at the site of the ruins of the ancient Vikramshila Mahavihar weeded out vegetation and carefully brushed off the soil to expose the underlying features. As part of the conservation and preservation process, the entire site has been divided into grids. Rising above the ruins, glistening in the sun, is a cruciform brick stupa, the centerpiece of the Vikramshila site. All around the stupa are the cells — 208 of them, 52 on each side — where student-monks of one of the most splendid universities of its times practised Tantrayana, the last of the three great vehicles of Indian Buddhism after Hinayana and Mahayana. Tantrayana, which incorporated tantric practices and rituals, is what the scholars at Vikramshila excelled in. Founded by Pala king Dharmapala of the Pala dynasty in the late 8th to early 9th century AD, Vikramshila Mahavihar existed and flourished at the time of Nalanda. "While Nalanda university flourished from the Gupta Period (320-550 AD) to the 12th Century, Vikramshila thrived during the Pala Period (8th to 12th century). While Nalanda got more international fame for teaching varied disciplines, Vikramshila was the only university that specialised in tantric and occult studies. In fact, during Dharmapala's reign, Vikramshila reigned supreme and is known to have controlled Nalanda's affairs as well," said ASI Superintendent Archaeologist. (While Nalanda is the older of the two universities, at one point, the two centres of learning, who had a common patron in King Dharmapala, exchanged knowledge and even teachers, who were called Acharyas. At its peak, subjects such as theology, philosophy, grammar, metaphysics and logic were taught at Vikramshila. But the most important branch of learning were the tantras because Vikramshila flourished in the days of tantricism, when occult sciences and magic were subjects of study both in Buddhism as well as Hinduism. The university produced several eminent scholars, among them, Atisa Dipankara,



who played a key role in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. The institution prospered for about four centuries before fading out along with Nalanda around the 13th century — a decline that experts attribute to a combination of factors, from the rising of Hinduism and the decline of Buddhism to the invasion of Bakhshiyar Khalji.

The ruins — from the stupa to the remains of the cells and a vast library — bear witness to this rise and fall of Vikramshila. It was in the library, the ruins of which are at the south-west of the site, that teachers and students are known to have engaged in copying and translating manuscripts. According to ASI's Sujit Nayan, the rectangular structure, now partially exposed, had a cooling system, as part of which water from the adjoining reservoir would be channelled into the building. "The cooling system was perhaps meant for preserving delicate manuscripts," he said. Nayan said they are trying to preserve and conserve the site by maintaining the original form of the excavated structure. The initial excavation at Antichak was conducted by Patna University (1960-69), following which the ASI took over. A museum at the site displays several antiquities found during the excavation — from a carved limestone sculpture that depicts the eight major events of Buddha's life to sculptures of Buddhist and Hindu deities such as Avalokiteshvara, Loknath, Ganesh, Surya, Vishnu, etc. Less than 3 km away, at Antichak village, the idea of a new university is taking shape. The Bihar government has approved ₹7.99 crore for land acquisition at Antichak village. Bhagalpur District Magistrate Nawal Kishore Choudhary said "The district administration has identified 202.14 acres, three km from the ancient Vikramshila site. Of that, 27 acres belong to the state government but are occupied by some families." Bihar Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary said: "Project Vikramshila has started. The land acquisition process will be completed soon. Construction and repair of NH-80 (connecting Vikramshila to Bhagalpur, 50 km away) is on. The time is not far when the new Nalanda and Vikramshila universities will collaborate — just the way they did in ancient times."

Karimnagar's Satavahana University gets engineering, law colleges

Karimnagar: The State government has sanctioned an engineering college and a law college to Satavahana University. Government orders regarding this were issued on Monday. Both the colleges will be operated from the academic year 2025-26. While the university college of engineering will be established at Husnabad, the university college of law will be on the Satavahana university premises. The Engineering college will have four B.Tech programmes including Computer Science and Engineering, CSE (Artificial Intelligence) Information Technology, Electronics and Communications Engineering. The college will be started with an intake of 60 students in each programme. Rs 44.12 crore was sanctioned for the construction of the college and other expenditure. Meanwhile, the three years LLB course will be



started with two sections with an intake of 60 students each and LLM (intellectual property law) with one section with an intake of 20 students. Rs 22.96 crore was sanctioned for the development of the law college.

From celebration to tragedy: all in a day's work



There was victory in the air in Bengaluru on June 4. After a 17-year-long wait, the city's favourite franchise, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), had clinched the trophy in the Indian Premier League (IPL) the previous night. The team was landing in Bengaluru from Ahmedabad, and a victory parade was being planned. For a city reporter, this meant a long day. At around 10 a.m., the reporting team got on a conference call to plan the stories. We discussed how the city had not slept after the victory, how fans from the city had travelled to Ahmedabad to watch the final match, and how people on the Internet had created a thousand different memes and reels. We also discussed threadbare how we would cover the proposed victory parade. We anticipated that the Central Business District (CBD), where our office is located, would be choked with vehicles from the afternoon as the victory parade was scheduled to begin after 3 p.m.

While loyal newspaper readers may be willing to wait for more than a day to read about the celebrations that unfolded that night in Bengaluru, online readers move on to other websites if the stories they are looking for are not uploaded on time. So, before leaving for office that morning, I filed some stories on the fan frenzy, describing how firecrackers had kept the skies aglow the previous night, people had danced madly on the streets, and bike rallies had kept everyone awake. My plan was simple: get to office early,

file the special stories for the day, and keep the evening free as a great deal of coordination was necessary for covering such a mammoth event. An army of interns was stationed at multiple points at the city to watch the parade pass by. By around 1 p.m., fans clad in RCB colours begin to gather in CBD. I noted it down to draw a timeline later in the day. By 3 p.m., I finished filing three stories on the celebrations for online.

But shortly, the unexpected happened. As lakhs of fans gathered around the M. Chinnaswamy stadium and Vidhana Soudha, we first got the news that a woman had lost consciousness. Then, more bad news trickled in: a person had died due to a "stampede-like situation". My colleague immediately checked with her hospital sources and found that at least four people had died. Within an hour, seeing the raucous crowd, we knew that the numbers would climb into double-digits. It did not take too long for us to find out that 11 people had died, and most of them very young. The mood quickly shifted in the newsroom, just as it did in the rest of the city. We decided that the stories of celebrations would no longer be reported for the print edition. I frantically called the interns one after another to make sure they were safe, and asked them to come back to office. All the reporters in the newsroom breathed a sigh of relief when the last intern made it back to the office. Then it was the turn of senior reporters to fan out. One went to the stadium, another to the hospital near the stadium, and yet another to the mortuary at the government hospital. After gathering inputs from multiple sources, colleagues, and eyewitnesses, I wrote a detailed story on how the celebrations quickly turned into a tragedy. I ended up drawing a timeline, but it was not the one I had planned earlier. There were steady developments. Reporters kept filing stories — about the chaos, the mismanagement, the panic, and the grief — without a break. They filed enough stories to fill nearly all the city pages. At around 11 p.m., I was finally done with work. When I made my way back home, the air was heavy with mourning. The city, which had been alive with celebrations just 24 hours ago, had fallen completely silent.

Why is the Parker Solar Probe trying to 'touch' the sun?

Among the various places humans have aspired to visit in the solar system, the sun remains the most foreboding. On December 24, 2024, NASA's Parker Solar Probe arrived within 6.1 million km from the star's surface. This is a short distance to be from the sun: no spacecraft has ever made such a close approach. Even the Parker Solar Probe took seven years to get here. The probe made another approach to the sun on March 22 and will do so again on June 19 this year. Sunlight is the main source of energy for earthlife. The sun's core produces this energy using nuclear fusion. The star also has strong, dynamic magnetic fields crisscrossing its surface, and sudden changes in the way they're arranged give rise to intense explosions called solar flares. Numerous electrons, protons, and heavy nuclei are spit out of the solar corona — the uppermost layer of the sun's atmosphere — at about 900 km/s.

These particles carry an enormous amount of energy and sometimes rush towards the earth at tremendous speed in an event called a coronal mass ejection. Their effects on the earth constitute a solar storm, including electric grid failures, loss of telecommunication channels, and damage to the ozone layer. They can also damage instruments onboard satellites. To understand the dynamics of the corona over time and their effects on the solar system at large, scientists need to observe the sun closely. This is also why the Indian Space Research Organisation launched and is currently operating the Aditya-L1 probe, stationed at about 150 million km from the star. Around six decades ago, a scientist named Eugene Parker predicted the existence of the solar wind: a stream of charged particles flowing out from the sun in all directions. NASA named the Parker Solar Probe in his honour. The probe was launched on board a Delta IV rocket from Cape Canaveral in Florida in August 2018. Once in space, the probe's maximum speed was an astounding 692,000 km/hr. To protect against the sun's intense heat, the probe has an 8-foot-wide, 4.5-inch thick carbon-carbon composite material shield that can withstand up to 1,370°C while weighing only 73 kg. This shield was built by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory. It consists of a carbon composite foam sandwiched between two carbon plates. Its sun-facing side is coated with white ceramic paint to reflect as much sunlight as possible instead of absorbing it. Just a few metres behind the shield, in its shadow, the ambient temperature drops

to 29°C, allowing the probe's scientific instruments to operate without special provisions to maintain the temperature. The probe also has two sets of solar power arrays: one in the shield's shadow that supplies power to the instruments and the other on the sun-facing side, which uses a special fluid pump to cool itself while powering the probe during its close approaches. Touching the sun

Curiously, the first obstacle to the mission's success wasn't the sun's heat but its gravity. Since the probe flew through space at a very high speed, it had to decelerate significantly as it got close to the sun. If it didn't, the sun's gravity would have encouraged it to dive right into the star. This is why Parker's first mission profile had the probe fly towards Jupiter and swing around the gas giant to achieve an optimal speed to fly towards the sun. This idea fell out of favour because of the large travel distance. The probe's final mission profile was more direct: to use the combined gravitational forces of the earth and Venus to slowly spiral closer to the sun's surface, in the process spending more than 2,000 hours flying through the corona and 24 times along the solar equator. The probe has four scientific instruments: FIELDS, Integrated Science Investigation of the Sun (ISoIS), Wide-Field Imager (WISPR), and Solar Wind Electrons Alphas and Protons (SWEAP). FIELDS measures the electric and magnetic fields of the sun's atmosphere; ISoIS observes the energetic particles that cause solar storms while SWEAP records their properties; and WISPR takes pictures as it passes through the corona. A "sun-touching" event occurred in April 2021 when Parker moved closer to the sun than its Alfvén surface — the height beyond which the solar wind can't affect the star's surface — as ascertained by the FIELDS and SWEAP instruments. A fifth instrument, called a Faraday cup, lies outside the shadow of the heat shield and measures the density of ions and electrons in the solar wind. It is made of a molybdenum alloy with a melting point of 2,349°C Blowin' in the (solar) wind Parker data has already revealed many new details about the sun. The solar system is ceaselessly coated in dust particles created when space rocks weather and scientists believed the dust ought to be everywhere. Yet Parker revealed dust-free pockets near the sun. The probe also detected magnetic switchbacks: parts of the solar wind where the magnetic field (created by the collective of charged particles) abruptly bent back on itself.

What the IAEA's non-compliance resolution means for Iran, and the world

On June 12, 19 the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) voted in favour of declaring "that Iran is in breach of its obligations under its 1974 Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement". Just a day later, Israel mounted what it called "preliminary strikes" against nuclear facilities in Iran and declared a state of emergency at home. Three Board members — China, Russia, and Venezuela — voted against the resolution while 11 abstained. The Board represents 35 states in all. The Board also expressed "grave concern" over Iran's inability to explain traces of uranium found at the country's Lavan-Shian, Varamin, and Turqzabad sites. Resolution welcomed the IAEA is the U.N. nuclear watchdog tasked with promoting the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and to discourage military applications, including in nuclear weapons. This is the first time the Board has formally established non-compliance, which is required before it can escalate the matter with the U.N. Security Council. A previous resolution had only "urged" Iran's cooperation.

Other Gulf states have welcomed the resolution. Israel, in addition to launching its strikes in the early hours of June 13, repeated its stance that it won't "allow" Iran to enrich uranium to 90%, which is required to produce nuclear weapons. Tehran reacted by denouncing the resolution as "political" and announcing plans for a new deep-underground enrichment complex, upgrades to centrifuges at its Fordow enrichment facility, and other "proportional measures". Following Israeli strikes, Tehran also said it had placed its air defence system on alert. Israeli military officials also claimed that Iran had mobilised a small fleet of drones. Invoking Article XII.C The Board of Governors approves safety standards, sets the IAEA's budget, and appoints the director general with the approval of the body's General Conference. If and when IAEA inspectors report "non-compliance," the Board can also call on the state to

remedy the breach, curtail technical aid to the offending country, demand the return of supplied nuclear equipment or materials, and report the matter to all IAEA members. These powers are specified under Article XII.C of its 1957 statute. Thus far, this Article has been invoked only six times: against Iraq (1991), Romania (1992), North Korea (1993), Iran (2006), Libya (2004), and Syria (2011). At present the IAEA has around \$1.5 million's worth of projects in Iran, including in the form of radiopharmaceuticals, water desalination projects, and non-destructive nuclear tests. Iran now has a "reasonable" amount of time within which to respond to the Board's questions. If it doesn't do so, the Board has the discretion to escalate its concerns up to the U.N. Security Council. Not able to verify under the 1974 Agreement, Iran is required to provide the IAEA with an inventory of nuclear materials and detailed data of any facility where nuclear material is present. It also had to notify the IAEA before new facilities are built or modified, allow routine, ad hoc and special inspections, and maintain on-site devices that allow the IAEA to surveil the movement of nuclear material, especially for weapon use. In its latest resolution, the Board also found, "consistent with Article 19 of Iran's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, ... that the Agency is not able to verify that there has been no diversion of nuclear material required to be safeguarded under the Agreement to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices." If the past is any indication, the Board is likely to vote on a follow-up report during another meeting in September 2025. Once the Security Council receives the Board's report, it may issue a presidential statement, adopt a resolution demanding compliance, or restore or expand sanctions against Iran. The timing of the Board's resolution is notable: only four months before the U.N.'s relief from sanctions under the 2015 nuclear deal expires on October 18. After this date, the sanctions are expected to snap back.

India warns against 'double standards' over Russian oil



India has cautioned against "double standards", even as U.S. lawmakers consider a Bill that would impose 500% duties on India and other countries buying Russian oil. The Ministry of External Affairs' comments come after indications that U.S. President Donald Trump is backing the Russian Sanctions Act, introduced by a closely-allied Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, and even threatened secondary tariffs of 100% on countries that continue trade on sanctioned Russian products. On Wednesday (July 16, 2025), NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, who met with Mr. Trump and members of the U.S. Congress, also issued a threat, in particular to China, India and Brazil, who are among the top buyers of Russian crude oil, oil products, and coal. Mr. Rutte said "Beijing and Delhi" should push Russian President Vladimir Putin towards ending the war in Ukraine, or face tariffs.

Responding to questions on the issue on Thursday, the MEA said it was following the developments "closely". "Securing the energy needs of our people is understandably an overriding priority for us. In this endeavour, we are guided by what is there on offer in the markets, as also by the prevailing global circumstances," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "We would particularly caution against any double standards on the matter," he added, in a possible reference to the fact that European Union members continue to procure oil, LNG and pipeline gas from Russia despite the sanctions, and are also major buyers of processed products that go through Indian refineries, including Gujarat's Nayara Energies, which has minority control by Russia's ROSNEFT. However, while Russia sells about half its oil exports to China, and about 38% to India (as of February 2025), it exports only about 6% to EU countries. At an indus-

try event in Delhi on Thursday, Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri said that India would "deal" with sanctions when they are passed, pointing out that India has diversified its supply sources, buying oil from about 40 countries now, as opposed to 27 in the past. However, despite requests from Tehran, India has not so far reversed a decision taken under pressure from the first Trump administration in 2017, to stop all oil imports from Iran.

The latest comments from the government come as lawmakers in the U.S. prepare to go forward with the Russian Sanctions Act, 2025 that has been introduced in the House and Senate, with 87 and 84 co-sponsors respectively, cutting across party lines. Section 17 of the Act proposes to impose 500% ad valorem duties on countries that buy, sell or transfer "oil, uranium, natural gas, petroleum products, or petrochemical products that originated in the Russian Federation". In Washington on July 2, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had confirmed that India's "concerns" about the Bill and "interests in energy security" had been conveyed to Mr. Graham who, along with Democrat Senator Richard Blumenthal, is sponsoring the Bill. Mr. Graham has said that he believes Mr. Trump supports the law which would give him the power to waive the duties for a period of six months. However, the Republican lawmaker has urged the U.S. President to impose the sanctions earlier than the 50-day deadline proposed at present.

The proposed sanctions further complicate ties between New Delhi and Washington, who are currently putting the last touches on a "mini" trade deal that officials say will be completed "soon". Amidst intense negotiations over tariffs, as well as market access to India, particularly in the areas of agriculture, dairy and genetically modified produce, New Delhi has also been coordinating with the U.S. government about the deportation of Indians illegally resident in the U.S.

On Thursday, Mr. Jaiswal said that 1,563 Indian nationals have been deported in the first six months of Mr. Trump's second tenure, from January 20 to July 15 this year. According to ICE statistics, 1,529 immigration violators were deported in all of 2024, and far less than in the three preceding years. After protests in India over the first few batches of deportees being handcuffed and shackled on board military flights in February this year, the U.S. agreed to send Indians back by commercially chartered flights, including as recently as last week.

Janaki V Vs State of Kerala review: Suresh Gopi-Anupama Parameswaran film is insensitive and pointless

Nothing enlivens courtroom dramas than fiery arguments, which open new pathways into our understanding of a case. In Janaki V Vs State of Kerala, celebrated advocate David Abel Donovan (Suresh Gopi)'s arguments are full of fire. Still, a significant portion of them are so irrelevant that they would fit more in a loud television debate than in a courtroom. He is the kind of person who would talk about cheese when he is supposed to argue about chalk. So, it is no wonder that he would go on a long diatribe against the State's developmental projects when he is arguing in court in a case related to sexual assault, or that he would ask a rape victim whether she watches porn and how often. The opening credit sequences of the film hint at this behaviour with news clippings of his various press statements on a host of issues, all of which reveal a lawyer who is more active outside the court than inside. Janaki V Vs State of Kerala, which arrives in theatres with an extra 'V' thanks to the dictates of the censors, is caught between the need to tell a sensitive story and projecting the superhero aura of the actor playing the advocate. Debutant director Praveen Narayanan, who has also written the film, struggles on both counts.

Janaki (Anupama Parameswaran), an IT professional in Bengaluru, becomes the victim of rape in her hometown when she is on vacation. In the courtroom exchanges that follow, the chain of events falls under intense scrutiny. Right from the early sequences, the filmmaker makes it clear that subtlety is not something he would strive. Everything comes with loud visual and audio cues, leaving no doubts in the minds of the audience. The writing, as well as the filmmaking, harks back to the 1990s. The thinly veiled references to contemporary issues become a convenient writing option.



However, when the film proclaims its pet original ideas, one wishes that it had stayed with the borrowed ones. One of these ideas, which forms the core of the film, regarding the paternity of a child born out of rape, is probably one of the most outlandish ideas heard in cinema in recent years. It, in a way, trivialises a serious issue, by turning it into an outright political weapon. Many of the arguments irrelevant to the case uttered by the advocate are also political, fitting in with the real-life persona of the actor.

For a courtroom drama, there is hardly any scene that makes an impact.

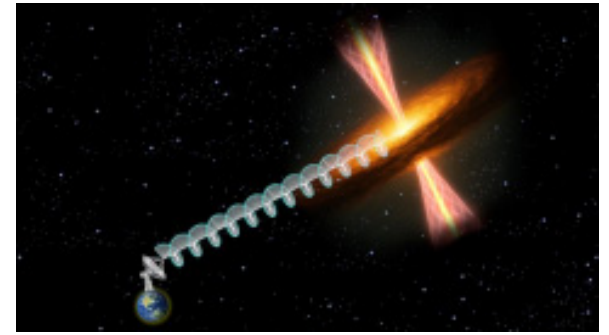
As if to excite the audience lulled by the sluggish drama, there is an unnecessary jump scare sequence, which seems inspired from a B-grade horror movie. Songs further drag down the narrative. With its insensitive take on an important issue, Janaki V Vs State of Kerala becomes a film as pointless as the letter 'V', which was added to Janaki's name to satisfy the whims of the censors.

IIST team discovers radio emission with circular polarisation near a massive young protostar

An international team led by astronomers from the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST) here has discovered radio emission with a special property known as circular polarisation near a massive young protostar that is still forming about 4,500 light years from earth. [Protostar refers to the earliest known stage of a star when it is still accumulating gas and dust material from its surroundings.] The discovery linked to IRAS 18162-2048, a massive protostar in the Milky Way galaxy, opens an exciting window into scientists' understanding of how massive stars form, astronomers at the IIST said on Thursday.

Circular polarisation occurs when electric and magnetic field vectors of electromagnetic waves—in this case radio waves—rotate in a circle about the direction in which the waves travel through space. This emission offers the first direct clue to the strength of magnetic fields in the immediate neighbourhood of a protostar, they said. The findings have been published in The Astrophysical Journal Letters under the title 'First Detection of Circular Polarization in Radio Continuum Toward a Massive Protostar.' In the early stage, the protostar can also eject high-velocity material in opposite directions, known as a bipolar jet. 'Massive protostars' evolve to have mass more than 8 to 10 times that of the Sun.

According to the astronomers, IRAS 18162-2048 powers one of the largest and brightest known protostellar jets in the Milky Way, the HH80-81 jet. It is believed that the magnetic field and rotation in the protostellar system are responsible for the ejection of the jet. While a magnetic field has been imaged from the jet earlier, this is the first time that hints of it have been detected directly from this massive protostar, according to the IIST. Strong magnetic fields have been observed earlier in low-mass protostars that go on to form stars like the Sun. But measuring such fields around massive protostars has remained elusive, until now. Much harder to study "Massive protostars are much harder to study. The circular polarisation we are looking for is very faint and sporadic, making such measurements very challenging," Amal George Cheriyan from the IIST, lead author of the pa-



Discovery linked to IRAS 18162-2048, a massive protostar in the Milky Way, expands scientists' understanding of how massive stars form, say a research team from Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram

per, said in a statement. The radio observations were carried out using the National Radio Astronomy Observatory's (NRAO) Karl G. Jansky Very Large Array (VLA) in the U.S. "This is the first inference of the magnetic field strength using circular polarisation in radio waves from a massive protostar," said Sarita Vig of the IIST who conceptualised the work.

Remarkable result "The detection of circular polarisation is an exceptionally rare and challenging feat even in active galactic nuclei (AGNs), where conditions are extreme, but better investigated," Nirupam Roy from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, said. Samir Mandal of the IIST noted that observing the phenomenon in the environment of a massive protostar, which lies buried in dense gas and dust, is even more difficult, making this result remarkable. The new data has allowed researchers to infer that the magnetic field near the protostar is roughly 100 times stronger than the Earth's magnetic field. They also support a long-standing theory that powerful jets from stars and black holes are driven by the same magnetic engine.

A military expedition to the Gangetic plains that inspired a Chola capital



The stone edifice of Gangaikonda Cholivaram, the Shiva temple more famously known as the Brihadisvara Temple, dominates the skyline of the Gangaikonda Cholapuram, a nondescript village in Udayarpalayam taluk of Ariyalur district. It is hard to believe that the place was a throbbing capital of the Imperial Cholas for about 250 years. The city, its temple, and its massive lake called Chola Ganga remain the embodiment of the signal achievements of Rajendra Chola I (regal years 1012-1044 CE). Rajendra Chola I is famed for his exploits, but his military expedition to the Gangetic plains about a thousand years ago remains one of the most celebrated in the history of the Chola dynasty. The Tiruvallangadu, Esalam, and Karanthai Copper Plates, several inscriptions, and literary works celebrate his victory and the construction of the Brihadisvara Temple, listed as one of the three great living Chola temples by UNESCO. Rajendra himself celebrated the victory by assuming the title 'Gangaikonda Cholan'. He also built Gangaikonda Cholapuram, along with the Gangaikonda Cholivaram — the jewel in his crown that rivals the Rajarajeswaram (also known as Brihadisvara Temple) built by his father in Thanjavur — and the Chola Ganga, excavated as a jalasthambam, a liquid pillar of victory.

Water from the Ganga During the expedition to the Gangetic plains, Rajendra Chola I defeated several kings and chieftains, including the Kalinga ruler and the Pala ruler Mahipala of Bengal. According to the Tiruvallangadu Copper Plates, the vanquished kings were made to carry the Ganga water on their heads to Gangaikonda Cholapuram. The water was poured into the Chola Ganga, now known as Ponneri. Rajendra Chola I also brought several beautiful Chalukya and Kalinga sculptures as war trophies. But why did Rajendra Chola I shift his capital from Thanjavur? Many historians believe that one of the reasons could be that he wanted a bigger well-planned city to accommodate his huge army and serve his mercantile interests better. R. Nagasamy, the first Director of the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, however, holds an interesting view. Rajendra Chola I, he says, probably had a "sentimental attachment" to the place which inspired him to attain phenomenal success, though it was unheard of even as a village when he came to the throne. "Thanjavur had been the Chola capital ever since it had been captured from the Muttaraiya chieftains by Vijayalaya... Thanjavur served the interests of

the Cholas well... Yet, within a few years of the erection of the great temple [Rajarajeswaram] and within a few years of his [Raja Raja I] passing, his son, Rajendra, shifted his capital to Gangaikonda Cholapuram. Was this because Gangaikonda Cholapuram served strategic purpose better than Thanjavur (but Thanjavur had better claims with its fortifications and natural river barriers)! No answer is possible except for a suggestion that it was probably here that Rajendra resolved to despatch a military expedition to the Gangetic plain," says Nagasamy in his book, Gangaikondacholapuram, published by the department in 1970. Gangaikonda Cholapuram remained the capital from 1025 CE till the fall of the Chola dynasty till 1279 CE. "As the capital of the Cholas from about 1025 AD for the about 250 years, the city controlled the affairs of entire south India, from the Tungabhadra in the north to Ceylon in the south," says Nagasamy. It was the second largest and important city in the 11th-12th Centuries and the centre of political, commercial and cultural activities, like Madurai in Pandyanadu and Karur in Chera Nadu, says Natana Kasinathan, another former Director of the Department of Archaeology. Yet, there is no inscription of Rajendra Chola I in the Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple, a spectacular gallery of Chola art and architecture. It is from an inscription of his son Vira Rajendra that it is known that his father had built the temple. Details about the palace and other parts of the city are found in the epigraphs of Rajendra's successors, says Kasinathan in his book, The Metropolis of Medieval Cholas. The inscription of Vira Rajendra, the third son of Rajendra, refers to the palace at Gangaikonda Cholapuram as Chola-Keralan Thirumaaligai, evidently named after one of the titles of Rajendra I. Gangaikonda Cholapuram had been a bustling city with a fort, palaces, and well-planned streets. "In an inscription dated in the 49th year of Kulottunga (1119 AD,) a reference is made to Gangaikondachola maaligai at this place. It is likely that there were more than one royal building, each having its own name. Besides, the names of the palace and fort walls, the names of a few roads and streets are preserved in the epigraphs," says Kasinathan. The city is celebrated in Tamil literature too. An elaborate description of the citadel comes from Muvar Ula of Ottakuttar. Rajaraja Cholan Ula gives an account of almost all the important places of the city. The city is referred to as Gangapuri in Kalingattuparani, composed by Jayankondar. Though there have been attempts to excavate and showcase the past glory of the city in the recent times, the fortunes of Gangaikonda Cholapuram seems to have come a full circle. "This capital of the most powerful empire in Asia at one time is now desolate, only the temple survives. To those who know of the brilliant history of the Chola empire, it is a tragedy," writes Nagasamy. As he explains, the Pandyas, who put an end to the Chola empire in the 13th Century, avenging their defeats, "should have razed the city to the ground". One thousand years have passed since the sacred Ganga water was brought to this city, and the millennium deserves to be commemorated as a fitting tribute to the emperor who founded the city, says R. Komagan, chairman, Gangaikonda Cholapuram Development Council Trust.

A tectonic shift in thinking to build seismic resilience

The tremors that were felt in Delhi on July 10, 2025, at 9.04 a.m. with a magnitude of 4.4 on the Richter Scale — as reported by the National Center for Seismology (NCS) — are a wake-up call for India's seismic vulnerability. The epicentre, which was located approximately 20 kilometres southwest of the city at a shallow depth of five kilometres, did not cause significant damage but exposed the fragility of the capital's infrastructure, where over 80% of buildings, especially those pre-dating the year 2000, fail to comply with seismic codes. The July event follows a series of earthquakes across Asia since March 2025, including the devastating quake in Myanmar and Thailand (magnitude 7.7), tremors in Tibet and Greece, and recurring seismic activity along the India-Myanmar border. As India sits on one of the world's most tectonically active plates, the urgency to build seismic resilience has never been greater. The danger of unpreparedness

India's seismic risk is rooted in the northward drift of the Indian Plate, colliding with the Eurasian Plate at 4 centimetres to 5 cm a year, shaping the Himalayas, which is a region overdue for a "Great Himalayan Earthquake" of magnitude 8 or higher, potentially impacting over 300 million people across northern India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Delhi, which lies in Seismic Zone IV (high risk), with a peak ground acceleration (PGA) factor of 0.24g, lies perilously close to this tectonic frontier. The tremors felt in July, though moderate, highlighted the risk to the city's estimated 33.5 million residents and over 5,000 high-rises, many built without adhering to the Bureau of Indian Standards' IS 1893:2016 Code, which mandates ductile detailing and shear walls. Historical events such as the Bhuj earthquake of 2001 (7.7 magnitude, 20,000-plus deaths) and the Nepal quake of 2015 (7.8 magnitude) underscore the catastrophic potential of unpreparedness. Beyond Delhi, India's seismic zones, which range from Zone II to V, span a vast vulnerable area. The northeast, including Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram in Zone V (very high risk, PGA 0.36g+), has felt the ripple effects of seismic activity in Myanmar, notably the 7.7 magnitude Mandalay quake on March 28, 2025, and a 5.2 magnitude event on May 17, 2025. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, also in Seismic Zone V, remain prone to tsunamis following subduction zone activity, as seen in 2004. The 5.7 magnitude Tibetan quake on May 12, 2025, caused tremors in Sikkim, reinforcing the restlessness in the Himalayan belt. Even distant events, such as the quake of magnitude of 6.2 in Greece on May 22, 2025, reflect a global pattern of tectonic unrest, though their direct impact on India is minimal. Greater danger with urbanisation

Delhi's rapid urbanisation exacerbates the risk it faces. Older structures in East Delhi, built on liquefaction-prone soils, and poorly designed high-rises pose a threat during strong quake shaking. The NCS's real-time monitoring using the IndiaQuake app offers early warnings, but enforcement and public awareness lag behind. Compare this to Bangkok, where updated seismic codes since 2007 mitigated damage despite a flat-slab collapse in 2025, or Myanmar, where unenforced codes worsened the quake toll in 2025. India must bridge this enforcement gap to protect its cities.

The global seismic context heightens the urgency. The Greece earthquake, though 5,000 km away, is part of a series of tremors since March, including those in Indonesia, the Chile-Argentina border, and Ecuador on May 3, 2025. While these do not directly trigger Indian quakes, they signal a dynamic earth, pointing to the need for preparedness.



With earthquake activity intensifying regionally and globally, the Government of India must lead a national dialogue to enforce seismic codes rigorously

The Himalayan seismic gap, where strain has built since the quake in Kangra (1905) and the 'Gorkha quake' (Nepal, 2015), are a ticking clock, with a major event potentially devastating Delhi and beyond. To counter this, India must enforce seismic codes rigorously. In Delhi, retrofitting older buildings with steel jacketing and mandating deep pile foundations in vulnerable areas can enhance stability. Guwahati, in Zone V, needs strict IS 1893:2016 compliance, avoiding Brahmaputra floodplain construction to prevent liquefaction, and adopting base isolation for critical infrastructure. Bhuj requires expanded retrofitting and community disaster response teams. The Delhi Development Authority should accelerate compliance checks, while the NCS expands early warning systems to rural Zone V areas. The international lessons are instructive. Bangkok's use of high-strength concrete (30MPa-40 MPa) and ductile detailing offers a model, though its lower seismic risk (0.1g-0.2g) differs from India's Zone V challenges. The damage seen in Myanmar due to unreinforced masonry is a warning about neglect — a risk India must avoid. Tailored solutions — accounting for the Northeast's soft soils and Kutch's sandy basins — require annual retrofitting investments of ₹50,000 crore, as estimated by experts. With seismic activity intensifying regionally and globally, India cannot afford delay. The Government of India must lead with stringent enforcement, public education, and resilient infrastructure investment. Citizens should educate themselves about the need for emergency kits, safe building practices, and evacuation plans. The Bhuj disaster, where unpreparedness amplified casualties, remains a haunting lesson. As tremors punctuate India's seismic landscape, building resilience is a technical and moral duty in order to protect lives and livelihoods. There needs to be a national dialogue urging action before the next major quake strikes. Delhi's tremor echoes this urgency, demanding a transformation from vulnerability to strength. Balasubramanian Govindasamy is a retired Chief Engineer and former Deputy Adviser, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India. He has been a central government team member to mitigate the drinking water problem in the wake of natural calamities across India

Should political leaders retire at 75?



The suggestion of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat last week that leaders should step aside at the age of 75 triggered a debate. Opposition leaders saw Mr. Bhagwat's comment as a nudge from the RSS to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is turning 75 in September, to step down. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has maintained a studied silence on the issue. Should political leaders retire at 75? Manisha Priyam and Rahul Verma discuss the issue in a conversation moderated by Sobhana K. Nair. Edited excerpts:

Is politics across the globe and especially in India geared in such a way that politicians reach their peak only in old age?

Manisha Priyam: Do people prefer younger leaders? Yes. But why don't they get younger leaders? This depends on several imponderables such as who controls the party machinery, who controls the party purse strings, and whether such leaders can garner resources. We have often seen that those who reach the top hold on to their position. For instance, Lalu Prasad gained popularity at a young age. At the age of 42, he became Chief Minister of Bihar in 1990. He held on to the president's position at the Rashtriya Janata Dal. In Uttar Pradesh, Akhilesh Yadav had to fight his father Mulayam Singh Yadav for the leadership position in the Samajwadi Party. Regarding Mr. Bhagwat's suggestion: this is not the first time that such a remark is coming from the RSS. This (unsaid rule) was used effectively in 2014 to allow Prime Minister Narendra Modi to (push out some older leaders and) nominate his own people at the top levels. But come September, I don't see Mr. Modi stepping down. Today, the RSS requires the BJP machinery much more than the BJP requires the RSS. Mr. Bhagwat does not control the levers of power in India; they clearly remain with Mr. Modi. Rahul Verma: As per one research study, less than 10% of all elected representatives globally are below the age of 35. Once you come to India, this problem actually accentuates. From the first Lok Sabha in 1952 to the current Lok Sabha in 2024, the average age of our parliamentarians has actually gone up. The number of MPs who are below the age of 40 has declined over time and the number of MPs who are above the age of 60 has increased. The problem is not that we don't have newer faces coming into politics; the problem is, as Professor Priyam said, that the older generation of leaders does not easily cede space to younger ones. Also, perhaps, a political party itself is unwilling to bid farewell to an established leader fearing that it will destabilise the existing structure. At the same time, I am not sure that voters would actually prefer younger politicians. It might be alright to have a 30-35-year-old MP or MLA, but I think voters would prefer older candidates for the post of Chief Minister or Prime Minister. As far as Mr. Bhagwat's comment is concerned, I concur with Professor Priyam that we are unlikely to see any change (regarding Prime Minister Modi's position).

Is there any evidence which shows that nations led by younger leaders perform better?

Manisha Priyam: We have a large number of nations where there is no form of democracy, let alone change of political leadership. These include China and Russia. And we see various forms of either party authoritarianism or one-man rule in these countries. In parallel, we also have the example of the U.K. where there have been several Prime Ministers taking office in their 40s, from Tony Blair to David Cameron. The British example tells us that when people want political change, that political change also comes by way of political leadership change. And I think we need to under-

stand that link better. As for India, we are now the world's youngest nation. Our political leadership needs to reflect this aspect of our democracy. A political democracy survives by reincarnating legitimacy and renegotiating its social compact with people. On the question of age and political leadership, it must turn towards seeking younger people as political leaders. And these younger leaders should not come from established political families alone. Rahul Verma: As per the available performance analysis of Indian parliamentarians, we know that younger leaders may not necessarily be better parliamentarians. Data shows that MPs above 60 years of age have 80% attendance in Parliament, while those below 40 have 73-74% average attendance. The older MPs ask far more questions in Parliament. At the same time, I would add the caveat that age is not the only criteria; the health and mental faculty of a leader is equally important. Unfortunately, we have no empirical evidence to point at a direct correlation between a nation's economic health and the age of its leadership. Some studies have pointed out that the governance models of younger leaders may vary drastically from that of an older leadership. There can be material differences in the decisions taken by a younger or an older leader. Younger leaders are much more likely to invest their budget in economic activities of job creation and infrastructure development, while their budgets for social welfare measures, especially health-related schemes, may be low. Younger leaders do govern differently, but one can't say if it is necessarily better.

Should there be a concrete law or regulatory mechanism to retire political leaders or to ensure that a leader who is facing mental or physical challenges steps down?

Manisha Priyam: There has been a lot of speculation around Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's health, especially after some of his television appearances. Even in the election season, his political statements were few and far between. Under the provisions of the Constitution, it would be perfectly legitimate for the Governor to seek a health report of the Chief Minister. People have a right to know if the health of the Chief Minister has been severely compromised. But in Mr. Kumar's case, it is unlikely that such a step will be taken. I do feel this is a mockery of democratic processes. And it is not only Bihar; we have seen numerous examples in the past from various States. In Tamil Nadu, the truth about former Chief Minister Jayalalitha's health was concealed from the voters. The unfortunate reality is that in such cases, the people have to wait until the elections to force the change. Though we never had a similar situation at the Centre, considering that the Prime Minister is always under the public glare, should we have a hard cut-off date for retirement? I am not sure. But we must have a transparent mechanism by way of which the electorate is kept informed about their leader's health. Here though, the greater responsibility is of the political parties. We could have a term limit for the Prime Minister and for Chief Ministers, though. Rahul Verma: Yes, it is desirable to have politicians who are in the best of health and are able to make sound decisions. But how do we achieve this end? Every solution to address this issue comes with its own set of problems. Prescribing a retirement age will also require creating structures that enable career progression in politics faster. That can't be done if we have fixed the minimum age to contest elections at 25 years. Over 8,000 candidates contested the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Less than 100 competitive candidates were below the age of 30. So just bringing in laws won't change any of this. Even term limits are not exactly an effective solution. Look at the U.S. It has a term limit, yet we saw Joe Biden leading the country at 81 while struggling with cognitive issues. He was succeeded by Donald Trump, who is 79 years old. But as Professor Priyam says, there is a conversation across the globe about how the citizens are perhaps entitled to have access to health bulletins of their leaders. Though, again, this isn't exactly an elegant solution. What if the country is on the verge of a war or some kind of economic crisis? An adverse health bulletin of the leader would only add to panic in such a situation. It doesn't even have to be a catastrophic problem; even the markets could react badly if the medical bulletin of the leader is not good. So while it is desirable that no person should remain in office if they aren't mentally or physically fit, it cannot be regulated through legislation or any formal system.

For every child free for adoption, 13 parents wait in line : Data

For years now, the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) — the country's nodal adoption agency — has struggled to effectively manage adoptions. While a significant number of parents are willing to adopt, only a limited number of children are legally cleared for adoption. This imbalance has not gone unnoticed. In 2022, a Parliamentary panel called this imbalance a "paradoxical situation," and in 2023, the Supreme Court "expressed displeasure" over the time-consuming adoption process. Latest data obtained through a Right To Information application filed by The Hindu show that the asymmetry continues even in 2025, and the gap has widened further. In 2021, 26,734 prospective parents registered in the CARA portal, and 2,430 children were legally free for adoption. In other words, there were 11 prospective parents for every child free for adoption in 2021.

As of mid-July 2025, the number of prospective parents has grown to 36,381 — an increase of about 9,600 from 2021 — while the number of children legally free for adoption has increased to 2,652 — only 222 more than in 2021. Currently, there are 13 prospective parents for every child free for adoption as shown in the chart below. The rise in the number of prospective parents could be one reason behind the growing gap. "The number of people opting for adoption has substantially increased. Issues such as infertility are no longer the only reasons why parents consider adoption," said Gayatri Abraham, the founder of Padme, a comprehensive adoption resource platform for Indian parents. Still, in a country where an estimated 3.1 crore children were orphans according to the 2020 World Orphan Report, the fact that only a couple of thousands were identified as free for adoption is difficult to justify. Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and West Bengal accounted for over 50% of prospective parents in 2025, as shown in the chart below. The average delay for prospective parents to get an adoption referral has increased from one year in 2017 to three years by 2022, to about 3.5 years currently. If CARA does not act soon, the delay will increase further in the coming years and "force parents to adopt a child illegally", as warned by the Parliamentary Committee. The Juvenile Justice Act (2021) lists out a time-bound procedure for a child in Child Care Institutions (CCI) to be declared legally free for adoption. Yet, the status of its implementation remains questionable. "There are so many stakeholders on the ground. Nobody is held accountable for not implementing", says Smriti Gupta, co-founder of Where Are India's Children, a Child Welfare and Action Foundation. She said that implementation could be a huge challenge due to resource limitations, lack of training, and a gap in linkages between adoption agencies and the CCIs. She added that the idea that every child deserves a

family is not strong in India. Data shows that over 22,000 children are in the CCIs, 8.5 times more than the number of children legally free for adoption, in 2025 (2,652). The children in the CCIs include those orphaned, abandoned, surrendered by parents and those who have parents/guardians who are unfit for parenting or do not visit them.

The process of declaring children in the CCIs as legally free for adoption remains a grey area. Smriti Gupta explained, "There are children whose parents keep them in the shelter because of economic issues. They might occasionally visit them.

There is another set of kids who are completely abandoned/orphaned. Then, there are these kids in the middle, who have a guardian/parent on paper. And this person never visits the child, but exists only on paper. CARA is pushing to evaluate children with no visitation and an unfit parent/guardian, but needs a lot of follow up and follow through." Because of these complexities, not every child in the CCIs can be made free for adoption. Even after accounting for that, the gap between the number of children in these institutions and those entering the adoption pool is still quite high. For instance, in Himachal Pradesh, only one child is legally free for adoption in 2025, whereas 829 are in the CCIs, as shown in the chart below.

In Maharashtra, only 236 children are legally free for adoption, while 5,284 are in the CCIs. It will be a big leap to assume that these gaps are only due to the complexities stated above and the delay needs to be audited. The delay in declaring children legally free for adoption reduces their chances of getting adopted. Close to 34% of the children currently in the adoption pool fall in the 14-18 age group. As the Parliamentary Committee had stated, "older children and children with special needs are usually not preferred for adoption by Indian parents". Moreover, delay would make it harder for the child, who has been in the institution for so long, to adapt as well. The longer wait times also have an impact on the registered prospective parents. Gayatri said, "Many parents start looking for children in the 0-2 group.

Then, they see the waitline is three years, and become anxious. They then become willing to make the switch to adopt slightly older children, willing to jump the queue. Waitline shouldn't be the reason one changes categories, especially not while going through the process." Sources: RTI reply received from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the 2020 Orphan Report (INSAMER), and "Review of Guardianship and Adoption Laws", by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances and Law

How is China leading the green energy sector?



China installed more wind turbines and solar panels in 2024 than every other nation combined. This statistic alone underlines how China has sped ahead in the global green energy race, cornering the entirety of the renewable supply chain due to firm control over the extraction of key raw materials such as polysilicon and lithium. China also asserts dominance over the manufacturing of solar panels, wind turbines, and batteries. China's renewable energy revolution is the result of decades of strategic state planning and massive investments in innovation. Starting with modest pilot projects in the early 2000s, Beijing is now leading in solar panel and battery production. In 2024 alone, China allocated a remarkable \$940 billion into the renewable energy sector, according to U.K.-based research organisation Carbon Brief, from an initial investment of \$10.7 billion in 2006. In comparison, India's renewable energy sector received a combined total investment of \$3.4 billion in 2024-25 as per the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water, highlighting the stark gap.

Turning crisis into opportunity Apart from climate goals, what mainly inspired China's green revolution was a mounting crisis of extremely high levels of air pollution, coupled with concerns about energy insecurity. By the early 2000s, the country's reliance on coal had made its cities nearly unliveable, resulting in air pollution so bad in Beijing and Shanghai that it was visible from space and had garnered global attention. Importantly, growing public awareness about the adverse effects of air pollution played a key role in pressuring the government to act. Moreover, surging electricity demand left parts of the nation teetering on the edge of blackouts. Also, increasing dependence on foreign oil triggered concerns over energy security. China's oil imports are largely dependent on West Asia and sensitive shipping lanes through the Strait of Hormuz and the South China Sea. Therefore, what began as a survival strategy quickly evolved into a platform for national ambition. In less than two decades, China transitioned from an environmental underdog to a clean-energy driven superpower. The turning point came with the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010), which elevated renewable energy to a national strategic priority. The passage of the Renewable Energy Law in 2005 created legal backing for this vision, offering grid access guarantees and price incentives for wind and solar producers, particularly private enterprises that received generous government subsidies. The state poured billions into infrastructure and R&D, while provinces like Gansu, Inner Mongolia, and Jiangsu were identified as early testing grounds for wind and solar farms, in keeping with the Chinese economic practice of starting with pilot projects before scaling up.

State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) and banks had a key role to play in executing plans that were led by China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the National Energy Administration (NEA). Public sector banks provided heavy loans, while industrial giants like State Grid, Huaneng, and Genertec brought wind farms and solar parks online at record speed. As SOEs, these firms didn't face the financial limitations of the private sector. The speed was enabled by a blend of state coordination and market dynamism. While the policy push ensured demand at home, the sheer manufacturing scale drove down prices abroad. From the start, Beijing had a global vision for its ambitions, using programmes such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to push green trade, whether through the export of solar panels, construction of hydropower stations in Africa or building wind farms in Latin America. "The undertaking of major national projects, quickly integrating funds, technology, and policy resources, and achieving scale effects that private

enterprises cannot achieve, that is what led to this growth achieved by SOEs," explains Li Menghui, representative of Genertec. SOEs translated national climate policy into large-scale action, deploying wind farms, solar parks, and high-voltage transmission lines in remote regions. Due to the substantial support provided by the central government in the form of mandates, low-interest credit, and political backing, these companies could move more quickly and take significantly greater risks to innovate than their private counterparts globally.

SOEs were also deployed to focus on niche industries, allowing them to use their vast investments in the development and enhancement of a particular technology. Specialised SOEs were not only involved in building domestic energy infrastructure but also served as ambassadors of China's green agenda abroad. SOEs account for 55% of global renewable energy investment, as per Bloomberg Finance. China's SOEs turned clean energy into a tool of statecraft, aligning economic development with global dominance in renewable energy. Without them, China's rapid leap from fossil-fuel giant to renewable superpower with global influence would not have been possible. China's green energy push wasn't without bumps along the way. For instance, in the mid-2010s, wind and solar installations outpaced the ability of the national grid to absorb their output. This led to the curtailment of energy, especially in northern provinces such as Inner Mongolia, Jilin, and Gansu where wind power curtailment was as high as 20% in 2014. These bottlenecks revealed a critical gap in transmission infrastructure. Although the creation of renewable energy projects was rapid, other aspects of national infrastructure could not keep up with the growth. Beijing responded through heavy investments in ultra-high voltage transmission lines and more focus on better integrating renewables into the national grid. Over a decade, State Grid doubled its investment from \$33.31 billion in 2010 to \$88.7 billion this year, according to Reuters. Another problem was haphazard subsidy policies to SOEs that encouraged wasteful expansion, without adequate oversight. The vast expansion of projects encouraged a build-at-all-costs mentality, leading to redundant projects and inefficiencies across the sector. To correct those issues, Beijing tightened oversight mechanisms and emphasised planning that favoured efficiency and grid-readiness over capacity. One lesson for Beijing was that in the race for renewable development, speed could not trump structure and organisation.

With a sprawling global network spanning 61 countries and a web of joint ventures, with local state-owned enterprises, from Angola to Hungary to Bangladesh, China's geopolitical presence in the sector has become deeply entrenched. The current focus is on ensuring dominance in the next wave of clean energy technologies. With support guaranteed by the state to firms such as Longi, Goldwind, and CATL, production costs have been slashed due to market dominance, leading to vertical integration and economies of scale. The next wave of advancement in renewable technology will arrive in the form of AI-powered smart grids, green hydrogen, and next-generation nuclear technologies like thorium reactors, all of which Beijing has set its eyes on with the same formula of aggressive state investment, break-neck deployment, and focus on the export of technology and influence. The world now faces a bifurcated energy landscape, as the U.S. and its allies scramble to pump billions into reshoring clean energy industries through mechanisms like the Inflation Reduction Act. The key difference between Chinese SOEs and Western private enterprises is the ability of the Chinese state to mobilise large-scale manufacturing capabilities and properly utilise their vast scale. This enables low-cost, high-speed deployment of renewable tech, while the West grapples with higher costs, slower implementation, and far more complex political considerations on the adoption of green energy within each of their countries. The contest of the future, ultimately, will not be about panels or turbines or climate targets but who sets the rules of the global energy game. Will the future of climate tech follow Beijing's centralised, scale-driven blueprint, or will any other player be able to innovate fast enough and demonstrate a credible counter-model to offer to the world? Kabir Jeet Singh is a student and writer based in Beijing, with a deep interest in global economics, energy policy, and China's ascent.

The icing on the cake while covering a sport

More than a decade ago, my professor at journalism school advised us to always carry a few chocolates or an energy bar while we were on the field. This was to counter the uncertain world of day-to-day reporting, where both availability of food and windows to eat are erratic. However, I took up sports journalism, where a day is more structured. We know of events beforehand, and we usually cover a sport which has designated breaks for lunch and tea, and of late, even dinner. This has given us the opportunity to explore multiple culinary worlds. So much so that the lunch and tea spreads rank second in the list of our curiosities, just below the great sport itself.

There are those who consider catering at stadiums as an enabler and not a main event. It helps scribes do their jobs without having to worry about filling their stomachs. It is a complimentary service, not a right. But cricket in India — at least at a majority of the stadiums — has such good arrangements for food that it has become an integral part of our experience. In this, I can say with authority — and can speak for a lot of others too — that Chennai and its iconic venue Chepauk ranks the best. It did when I worked there from 2012 to 2015, and it still did when I went back last year. During IPL 2024, one favourite dish was karan pattani milagu peral (mushrooms and green peas cooked in crushed black pepper and onion masala). It was rich and layered, in line with its long name and elaborate explanation.

Bengaluru, my home city; Indore, widely regarded as the street food capital of India; and Ahmedabad, which I have visited often in the past two years, offer excellent spreads too. In fact, cricket reporters regularly upload photos of 'today's menu' on social media platforms, and two enthusiastic journalists even started a web portal to document each venue and the food it had to offer. A month ago, I landed in Leeds, United Kingdom, to cover the opening match of the ongoing five-match Test series between England and India. I had, of course, packed my usual set of ready-to-eat meals, but I was very much looking forward to the lunch and tea buffets at the famed cricket ground in Headingley. Mac and cheese and one boiled vegetable welcomed me on day one. With that, my bubble, which had swollen disproportionately because of years of pampering, burst immediately. The local press corps was upset with the cuisine too, and though things got better in the days ahead and the desserts were



More than a decade ago, my professor at journalism school advised us to always carry a few chocolates or an energy bar while we were on the field. This was to counter the uncertain world of day-to-day reporting, where both availability of food and windows to eat are erratic.

outstanding throughout, the first afternoon was a rough reminder that catering was indeed a service and not a right. My colleagues from other Indian media houses, who had past experience of covering cricket in England, assured me that I would be better off in Birmingham, the venue for the second Test. The West Midlands city has a significant Asian population and I was desperate to see that rich diversity reflect in my plate. The Industrial Revolution-era megapolis did not disappoint, with the first afternoon offering masala chickpea salad, Indian chopped salad, slow cooked carrots and broccoli, and home-made flavoured bread. To round it off, there was chocolate mint with chocolate mousse and egg custard tart, tickling my taste buds no end. Wimbledon, my last stop of the work tour, was predictable but perfect. From the menu to the chefs to the counter-managers in the media cafeteria, nothing had changed much since my first visit in 2019. The world famous strawberries and cream was inflation-proof from 2010 to 2024 at £2.50, and rose by 20 pence only this edition. And like a champion tennis player's repeatable technique, the catering at the All England Club delivers every single time. A great service that everyone rightfully enjoys.

Oil soars more than 9% after Israel strikes Iran, rattling investors



Oil prices surged more than 9% on Friday hitting their highest in almost five months after Israel struck Iran, dramatically escalating tensions in the Middle East and raising worries about disrupted oil supplies. Brent crude futures jumped \$6.29, or 9.07%, to \$75.65 a barrel by 0315 GMT after hitting an intraday high of \$78.50, the highest since January 27. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude was up \$6.43, or 9.45%, at \$74.47 a barrel after hitting a high of \$77.62, the loftiest since January 21. Israel strikes Iran LIVE: Military official says nuclear targets hit; explosions heard across Tehran Friday's gains were the largest intraday moves for both contracts since 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine, causing energy prices to spike.

Israel said it targeted Iran's nuclear facilities, ballistic missile factories and military commanders on Friday at the start of what it warned would be a prolonged operation to prevent Tehran from building an atomic weapon. "This has

elevated geopolitical uncertainty significantly and requires the oil market to price in a larger risk premium for any potential supply disruptions." ING analysts led by Warren Patterson said in a note. Several oil traders in Singapore said it was still too early to say if the strike will affect Middle East oil shipments as it will depend on how Iran retaliates and if the U.S. will intervene. "It's too early to tell but I think the market is worried about shutting off of the Strait of Hormuz," one of the traders said.

MST Marquee senior energy analyst Saul Kavonic said the conflict would need to escalate to the point of Iranian retaliation on oil infrastructure in the region before oil supply is materially impacted. He added that Iran could hinder up to 20 million barrels per day of oil supply via attacks on infrastructure or limiting passage through the Strait of Hormuz, in an extreme scenario. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Israel will receive "harsh punishment" following Friday's attack that he said killed several military commanders. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday called Israel's strikes against Iran a "unilateral action" and said Washington was not involved while also urging Tehran not to target U.S. interests or personnel in the region. "Iran has announced an emergency and is preparing to retaliate, which raises the risk of not just disruptions but of contagion in other neighbouring oil producing nations too," said Priyanka Sachdeva, senior market analyst at Phillip Nova. "Although Trump has shown reluctance to participate, U.S. involvement could further raise concerns." In other markets, stocks dived in early Asian trade, led by a selloff in U.S. futures, while investors scurried to safe havens such as gold and the Swiss franc.

Ivory Coast workers say Unilever is violating their union rights amid share sale, documents show

Unilever workers in Ivory Coast say the global consumer goods giant is violating their collective bargaining agreement in refusing to ensure severance pay if layoffs take place after the company sells its business there, documents show. British-based Unilever is selling all of its shares in its struggling Ivory Coast unit, which employs some 160 people, to a local consortium of investors led by wholesale distributor Société de Distribution de Toutes Marchandises Côte d'Ivoire (SDTM).

Unilever Cote d'Ivoire manages the consumer giant's domestic and international brands in Ivory Coast, but SDTM will only take over Unilever's domestic brand business, according to an internal memo dated April 8. Unilever has not said how its international brands will be sold in Ivory Coast in future. Workers began staging protests at Unilever offices in Abidjan on April 25, fearing the unit's falling turnover in recent years and the loss of the international brand business will trigger layoffs after the sale, which is expected to close by June 20.

Their collective bargaining agreement with Unilever, seen by Reuters, states that in the event of layoffs associated with disposing of its Ivory Coast business, Unilever will give employees severance pay equal to "one month of average gross salary per year of seniority, with a maximum of 18 months." The bargaining agreement, dated from 2004, was confirmed by management in 2007 and remains valid, according to Lex Ways lawyer Soualiho Lassomann Diomande, who represents local staff.

However, in a meeting at the Labor Inspectorate in Abidjan on April 25, the head of Unilever Cote d'Ivoire, Arona Diop, stated that workers' rights and salaries would be decided by SDTM, and not regulated by the collective bargaining agreement, according to minutes of the meeting reviewed by Reuters. Unilever confirmed it was selling the Ivory Coast unit but said in a statement to Reuters: "the proposed transaction is by way of a sale of shares, which does not result in the termination of employees' contracts." "Severance pay is not therefore relevant, as employment continues," it added.

Unilever's international brand portfolio has accounted for more than 60% of Unilever Cote d'Ivoire's turnover, according to three Ivory Coast employees, which totalled 34.6 billion CFA Franc in 2023. Since the share sale excludes the most important brands, job security is at risk, said Diomande. Moreover, under article 16.6 of the Ivorian La-



bor Code, any substantial modification of an employment contract requires the prior agreement of the employee, Diomande added. "No assurances have been given regarding job security," said a Unilever Ivory Coast employee, who did not wish to be named. Contrast with Europe: The severance rights Unilever guaranteed under the collective bargaining agreement are a lot more generous than required under Ivory Coast labour law, according to Diomande as well as two workers interviewed by Reuters. According to the International Labor Organization's EPLex database website, workers in Ivory Coast are entitled to severance pay equal to 30% of their gross monthly wage per year for those who have worked up to five years. The percentage rises to 35% from the sixth to the 10th year and 40% for above 10 years of service. Unilever said early last year it would axe 7,500 jobs globally as part of a turnaround to save about 800 million euros (\$913.12 million).

Diomande said Unilever's treatment of its Ivory Coast staff contrasted sharply with how it treated staff in Europe. Last month Unilever agreed to guarantee its ice cream workers' employment terms in Europe and Britain for at least three years after the business' spin-off, Reuters reported, tripling the usual period in such deals despite no legal requirement to do so. The generous terms agreed in Europe reflect the power of local unions and strict labour laws on the continent. Workers in the Ivory Coast told Reuters they had asked Unilever to guarantee the same conditions, including severance pay, for two years, one less than what was granted to roughly 6,000 Unilever workers affected by the ice cream spin off in Europe and Britain. "Not applying the same conditions in Ivory Coast is unequal treatment and negative discrimination," Diomande said.

Fall in food prices pulls down May CPI inflation to 2.82%, lowest since Feb 2019

A fall in prices of fruits, pulses, and cereals helped lower India's headline retail inflation rate to a 75-month low of 2.82 per cent in May 2025, according to data released on Thursday by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), possibly providing some more easing room to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

At 2.82 per cent, the latest inflation rate based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was somewhat lower than economists' expectations of around 3 per cent. CPI inflation stood at 3.16 per cent in April 2025 and 4.80 per cent in May 2024. The last time retail inflation was lower was in February 2019, when it stood at 2.57 per cent. Per MoSPI data, food inflation as measured by the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) almost halved to a 43-month low of 0.99 per cent last month from 1.78 per cent in April 2025 as fruit prices declined by 2 per cent month-on-month (m-o-m) while those of pulses were down 1.7 per cent. Cereals also helped to bring down the overall food inflation in May 2025, with prices down 0.6 per cent compared to the previous month.

Prices of vegetables, meanwhile, inched up slightly last month from April 2025. However, in year-on-year (y-o-y) terms, retail prices of vegetables were down 13.7 per cent — the sharpest pace of decline since December 2022, according to Paras Jasrai, associate director and economist at India Ratings & Research. Proteins became more expensive on a sequential basis in May 2025. While the price of meat and fish was up 1.5 per cent m-o-m, egg prices rose 2.5 per cent and milk turned 0.7 per cent more expensive in May. Core inflation — which excludes items whose prices are volatile such as food and fuel and is seen as an indicator of underlying demand conditions — inched up to around 4.2 per cent, according to calculations done by The Indian Express. The steady rise in core inflation over the last year-and-a-half or so is suggestive of "steady demand conditions" in the economy, said Jasrai of India Ratings. In terms of the regional break-up, urban inflation eased to 3.07 per cent in May 2025 from 3.36 per cent the previous month, while rural CPI inflation declined to 2.59 per cent from 2.92 per cent. Inflation in May 2025 was highest in Kerala at 6.46 per cent, while it was lowest in Telangana, at 0.55 per cent.

According to Sujana Hajra, chief economist at Anand

Rathi Group, the downward trend in CPI inflation is expected to continue through October 2025, with averaging for FY26 likely to undershoot the RBI's latest forecast of 3.7 per cent. ICRA Chief Economist, Aditi Nayar, expects retail inflation to decline further to around 2.5 per cent in June 2025 and average 3.5 per cent in FY26. "Looking ahead, on a y-o-y (year-on-year) basis, as many as 17 of the 22 food items for which the daily data is released, recorded a lower y-o-y inflation in June 2025 (until June 10, 2025) vis-à-vis May 2025, barring most edible oils and tea," Nayar said. "Moreover, the GoI (Government of India) has reduced the import duty on edible oils effective end-May 2025, which would lead to a softening in prices going forward, thereby auguring well for the oils and fats inflation readings through the fiscal, which would also be suppressed by a high base." Rajani Sinha, chief economist at CareEdge, said that while the India Meteorological Department's forecast of an above-normal monsoon reinforces the favourable outlook for food inflation, the spatial and temporal distribution of the rains will be critical. "Despite the early onset, monsoon activity has slowed, although it remains early in the season, with potential for recovery in the coming weeks. Weather-related risks will need close monitoring," Sinha added. While the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) last week cut the policy repo rate by an unexpectedly large 50 basis points (bps) to 5.50 per cent, it also tightened the stance of its policy to 'neutral' from 'accommodative', arguing that "monetary policy is left with very limited space to support growth". However, economists see the space for more one rate cut from the MPC, although not at the committee's next meeting in August 2025. Jasrai of India Ratings, for instance, expects a status quo on interest rates in August 2025 considering inflation is heading for the RBI's forecast of 2.9 per cent for April-June 2025 and the monetary easing affected so far. "We expect, at max one more 25 bps cut this fiscal, unless there are surprises from global development or growth declines sharply," Jasrai said. On Tuesday, the World Bank lowered its global growth forecast for 2025 to 2.3 per cent from its January 2025 prediction of 2.7 per cent citing "heightened trade tensions and policy uncertainty". Growth in 2026 is expected to pick up only slightly to 2.4 per cent and further to 2.6 per cent in 2027.

Pune doctor dies during Himachal trek: Why sudden deaths happen in apparently fit people?



As a 42-year-old doctor and avid trekker from Sassoon General Hospital in Pune died due to breathing difficulties and a suspected cardiac arrest while trekking in Himachal Pradesh, there seems to be more questions about heart health than answers. However, there are conditions which can cause sudden deaths. Dr Nitin Abhivant, Head of the Psychiatry Department at the government-run hospital, was on an expedition with his friends from Mumbai. "The group began the trek on Monday morning, but within half an hour, he started experiencing severe breathlessness. His doctor friends attempted to revive him and rushed him to the base camp but he could not be saved," a hospital official said. This is thought to be a sudden cardiac arrest, when the heart's electrical impulses go haywire and stop suddenly, or pulmonary embolism, when a blood clot sneaks up to the lungs and obstructs blood flow.

Can a fit person get a sudden cardiac arrest?

Since he was fit through the years and a doctor at that, most probably, he didn't do an immediate heart test to understand what condition it was in and whether it could adapt to unaccustomed physical activity or stress of any kind. "A person could be trekking with a 50-60% arterial blockage, which might remain symptomless until a moment of extreme exertion. During high physical stress like trekking or running, blood pressure and heart rate rise significantly. If there are cholesterol plaques in the arteries, they can rupture. The body tries to repair this rupture using platelets, but in the process, a clot might form, blocking the artery en-

tirely and triggering a heart attack. A heart attack can also alter the heart's electrical activity, triggering cardiac arrest," says Dr Kaushal Chhatrapati, interventional cardiologist at Saifee Hospital, Mumbai. That's why besides extended lipid profile and blood tests, he recommends a 2D Echo (which assesses the structure and function of the heart) and calcium scoring (an imaging test of calcium deposits and plaque) to every adult over 40 years before undertaking any adventure activity. "At high altitudes, oxygen thins out. When the body and lungs cannot adapt to this reduced availability, this results in pulmonary edema. Fluid accumulates in the lungs, blood vessels in the lungs squeeze together, causing fluid to leak into air sacs. Consequently, blood oxygen saturation (SpO2) levels fall. Low oxygen levels can strain the heart and potentially trigger arrhythmias (irregular heartbeats) and stop the heart," says Dr Rajiv Bhagwat, senior consultant cardiologist at Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai.

What about family history?

Family history could be the reason for a sudden onset of a heart issue. Dr Bhagwat feels family history should be taken very seriously as a risk factor because such patients have elevated levels of lipoprotein (A), a stubborn kind of cholesterol that clings easily to heart vessels, leading to aggressive build-up of plaque. It is also the reason for recurrent heart attacks. "Lp(a) causes embolism, which leads to a sudden drop in oxygen levels, a rise in blood pressure and ultimately, cardiac arrest," says Dr Balbir Singh, Chairman, Cardiac Sciences, Max Healthcare. Some people have a rare genetic disorder called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, which thickens the heart muscle gradually, preventing the heart from pumping the required amount of oxygenated blood with each heartbeat. "Such people may only feel symptoms with exercise or exertion, which in turn trigger sudden cardiac arrest," says Dr Singh. The role of stress and other factors stress impacts the heart's electrical properties directly. Viral infections can cause myocarditis, leading to scarred heart tissue over time that interferes with heart rhythm. "Asymptomatic or silent viral infection, apparently trivial, can have myocardial or heart muscle involvement, triggering cardiac arrest," he adds.

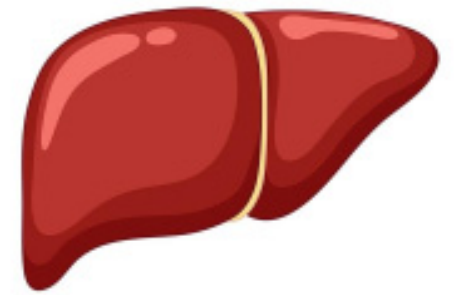
AI tool developed by Hyderabad hospital brings down fatty liver screening cost from 5,000 to 500

GNS News Agency, March 12

Researchers at AIG Hospital have developed an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based tool that can detect fatty liver disease with 95-96% accuracy using basic blood tests and body measurements, at a 10% cost of existing technologies. The innovation, developed in collaboration with the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, uses four widely available blood parameters, complete blood count, liver function test, HbA1c, and lipid profile combined with BMI and waist circumference data. The tool is designed to predict both steatosis (fat accumulation) and fibrosis (hardening of the liver), traditionally detected using expensive machines like FibroScan, which costs over 1.2 crore.

Panel of doctors who participated in the awareness session on Global Fatty Liver Day at AIG Hospital in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

"This model brings down the cost of screening from ₹4,000 to 5,000 per scan to just ₹500. We have validated it on over 10,000 patients internally, and it is now being rolled out in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh at community level," said Dr. Rakesh Kalapala, Director of Endoscopy at the Centre for Obesity and Metabolic Therapy. This was announced during an awareness session held at the hospital on Wednesday, ahead of Global Fatty Liver Day, which is observed annually on the second Thursday of June. "Earlier, it was seen as a benign condition. Now we know it is the epicentre of all cardiometabolic disorders. It worsens diabetes, increases heart disease risk, and even leads to liver



cancer. What we are seeing is a silent epidemic," said Dr. D. Nageshwar Reddy, Chairman, AIG.

"Fatty liver is like a red flag for what is going on in the rest of the body. Many patients with fatty liver actually die of heart attacks, not liver failure," said Dr. Anuj Kapadia, a cardiologist. Dr. Merugu Chandhana, an endocrinologist, said nearly 70% of her diabetic patients have fatty liver, with many having Grade 2 or 3 disease detected on ultrasound. "Earlier we thought of them as separate diseases. Now we know they are deeply connected," she said. Despite ongoing research, no drug has yet been approved in India specifically for fatty liver disease, the doctors cautioned. The only proven treatment is lifestyle modification. "5% weight loss reduces liver fat, 7% reduces liver inflammation and 10% can reverse liver fibrosis," the doctors said.

Delhi heatwave: City under 'red alert' as mercury soars beyond 45 degrees Celsius

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a red alert for Delhi as the city grapples with an intense heatwave, with maximum temperatures soaring to 45.5 degrees Celsius in several areas. The maximum alert on Wednesday (June 11, 2025) comes amid a forecast of continuing extreme conditions over the next two days. However, there may be some relief on June 13 night and June 14 as the western disturbances are likely to bring light showers. According to the IMD's daily weather bulletin issued at 2 p.m., "Heatwave conditions are likely to prevail at many places across Delhi-NCR," with temperatures ranging between 44 degrees Celsius and 46 degrees Celsius. Safdarjung recorded 43.8 degrees Celsius, while Ayanagar registered the highest at 45.5 degrees Celsius — both significantly above normal.

Humidity levels in the capital remained moderate at 39% during the early hours, but the combination of heat and dry south-westerly winds has worsened the discomfort. A red alert implies a "take action" warning, urging residents to avoid heat exposure, remain hydrated and limit outdoor activity. It warns of a very high likelihood of developing heat illness and heat stroke in all ages and advises extreme care for vulnerable people.



Humidity levels in the capital remained moderate at 39% during the early hours, but the combination of heat and dry south-westerly winds has worsened the discomfort

Dr. Naresh Kumar, a senior scientist at IMD, stated that the severe heat across northwest India — including Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan — is expected to persist till June 12. From June 13, an approaching western disturbance may bring partial relief in the form of light rain and thunderstorms, and an orange alert will replace the red. "Northwest India is currently experiencing severe heat. Over the next 3-4 days, heatwave conditions are expected in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh,

northern Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan will remain under red alert for the next three days." Delhi-NCR is under red alert today and tomorrow, followed by an orange alert on June 13. Light rain and thunderstorms are possible on the night of June 13 due to a western disturbance, which may bring some relief," Mr. Kumar told PTI.

The city also reported poor air quality, with an AQI of 225 at 2 p.m. The IMD has forecast partly cloudy skies for June 12 and 13 with dust-

raising winds gusting up to 60 kmph during thunderstorms. Authorities have urged citizens to take precautionary measures, particularly vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions. According to IMD data, temperatures are expected to dip slightly after June 14, with possible light to moderate showers bringing some respite from the scorching heat. Until then, the capital remains on high alert as extreme temperatures continue to pose health and safety risks.

Jasprit Bumrah set to play in do-or-die Test, Arshdeep Singh gets cut on bowling hand during nets session



GNS News Agency, March 12

While Jasprit Bumrah looks certain to play in the all-important fourth Test against England, Team India is staring at another injury blow after pacer Arshdeep Singh suffered a cut on his bowling hand during nets in Manchester on Thursday. Arshdeep, who is yet to feature in the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy, suffered a cut while stopping a ball hit by Sai Sudharsan on his follow-through. After the session concluded, the medical team swung into action, checking if the

26-year-old would require stitches.

This was India's first practice session after suffering a 22-run loss to England in the third Test of the series to go 2-1 down. Arshdeep Singh hasn't been entrusted with a spot yet in Tests but if the team management chooses to rest one of the pacers, he was in the running to make his debut. That, however, will now depend on the extent of his injury. India's assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate said: "Arshdeep took a ball while he was bowling there, Sai hit a ball and he tried to stop it and it's just a cut. So we have to see how bad the cut is. Obviously, the medical team have taken him off to see a doctor and obviously, if he needs stitches or doesn't need stitches it's going to be important to our planning for the next few days." The tourists are already faced with concerns over the injury to wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant. He was struck on the index finger of his left hand as he attempted to collect a Jasprit Bumrah delivery that flew down the leg side during England's first innings on Day 1 of the Lord's Test. Pant was in visible pain and did not keep wickets for the rest of the Test. India captain Shubman Gill, however, said Pant will be fit to play in the fourth Test, starting July 23 in Manchester. Doeschate, meanwhile, all but confirmed that pace spearhead Bumrah, too, will play the do-or-die Test. "We'll make that call in Manchester. We know we've got him for one of the last two Tests. I think it's pretty obvious the series is on the line now in Manchester, so there will be a leaning towards playing him," he said.

Rishabh Pant should not play Manchester Test as a specialist batter: Ravi Shastri cautions India team management

GNS News Agency, March 12

India wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant should not be playing next week's Manchester Test with a lingering injury, said former head coach Ravi Shastri. Pant copped a blow on his index finger while wicket-keeping in England's first innings at Lord's last week. The delivery from Jasprit Bumrah hit Pant's left index finger as he was attempting to collect the ball down the leg side. Wicket-keeper Dhruv Jurel substituted as the keeper for Pant, who was visibly in discomfort due to the hit. Pant, however, batted in both innings during India's 22-run defeat, scoring 74 and nine at No. 5. While India have moved to Beckenham for preparations after finding themselves 1-2 down in the series, assistant coach Ryan Ten Doeschate on Thursday hinted that Pant could play the forthcoming Test as a specialist batter. "He will bat in Manchester before the Test. I don't think you're gonna keep Rishabh out of the Test no matter what. He batted with quite a lot of pain in the 3rd Test, and it's only going to get easier on his finger," ten Doeschate said. "Keeping is the last part of the process. We need to make sure that he can keep — we don't want to go through that again where we have to replace the keeper halfway through an innings," he added. However, Shastri said he would opt against such a move and said it could only worsen the injury situation. "I don't think he should go in as a specialist batter if he can't keep because he will have to field. If he fields, that will be worse. With the gloves at least there is some protection. Without gloves, if he gets something that stings in there, then it won't be very good. It'll only worsen the injury," Shastri said on the ICC review podcast. Shastri also added that the



management must assess the extent of the injury before deciding on a move to include Pant in the XI. "You've got to see if it is a break. If it is a break or a fracture, then he rather rests it and comes fully fit at The Oval. He won't get a substitute now. Now they'll know that he has been injured. When you pick the team for the next Test, he'll have to keep and he'll have to bat. He can't do one of the two. It's if it is fully fit. If it is not a crack, I think he'll play,"

Shastri added Pant has been among India's most successful batters on the tour, scoring 425 at an average of 70.83 in six innings. ten Doeschate affirmed that India are aiming to give Pant as much time as possible to recover. "But he rested today, was trying to give the finger as long as possible, and hopefully, he's good to go in Manchester in the first session. He is in the equation, but I mean if he's fit, he plays the next Test and does both," ten Doeschate added.

Meet Sadom Kaewkanjana, a 27-year-old Buddhist monk and golfer from Thailand who is contending at British Open

GNS News Agency, March 12

Kaewkanjana is an ordained Buddhist monk from Thailand who took a break from golf in 2023 to practice meditation. (AP)Kaewkanjana is an ordained Buddhist monk from Thailand who took a break from golf in 2023 to practice meditation. (AP)Fickle weather and funny bounces are classic features of links golf, making the British Open a test of the mind as much as anything else. Perhaps, then, it's no surprise to see Sadom Kaewkanjana near the top of the leaderboard at Royal Portrush. Kaewkanjana is an ordained Buddhist monk from Thailand who took a break from golf in 2023 to practice meditation. He said being a monk was helping him "concentrate on the golf course" and improve his focus. "Forget everything outside, just live in the present," he said after shooting a 3-under 68 in his first round to be one stroke off the clubhouse lead in his second appearance at golf's oldest championship. "I was cut off from the rest of the world when I was ordained," Kaewkanjana, ranked 262nd in the world, told golfchannel.com. "That made me feel more calm. I was able to concentrate more, which will help me improve my game of golf." In his first — in 2022 — he finished tied for 11th place at the home of golf in St. Andrews. That was his only previous experience of links golf. "When I play links course, it's a new experience for



me," the 27-year-old Kaewkanjana said. "I really enjoy to play a links course. It's fun to play with a windy course and tough conditions." Kaewkanjana had the most fun at No. 5, a drivable par 4. He reached the green with his tee shot and holed an eagle putt from 20 feet. Sadom Kaewkanjana's major championship experience Kaewkanjana is competing in his fourth major championship. He had previously qualified for the PGA Championship in both 2022 and 2023 due to his strong World Golf Ranking, where he has reached as high as 75th globally. Kaewkanjana also holds the record for the highest finish by a Thai player in British Open history, tying for 11th at St. Andrews in 2022.

'He got up under Sachin's armpit with a short ball': Mitchell Starc spell to Tendulkar in 2012 destined him for greatness, says Ricky Ponting

GNS News Agency, March 12

Australia's pace superstar Mitchell Starc had a milestone 100th Test match that not a lot of fast bowlers can dream of. Starc perfected it with his career-best figures as his otherworldly 6/9 tormented West Indies and reduced them to the second-lowest score (27 all out) in Test history in Jamaica. Sixteen years on since making his First-Class debut for New South Wales, Starc has stamped his legacy among the greats of fast bowling and former Australia captain Ricky Ponting who has seen the left-arm through his early days believes he has gotten "better and better" with age. The 35-year-old Starc took home a heap of records as he became the second-fastest man to reach 400 Test wickets and even extended his record with the new ball with 23 scalps in the first over, the most since his Test debut. "Skill-wise and mentally, I think he understands his body, understands his game probably better than ever, especially the last couple of years," Ponting noted in the ICC Review podcast. "He's added a couple of different skills maybe the

last two or three years that don't seem like massive things, but he's sort of incorporated that three-quarters seam, that wobble seam delivery that's just made his in-swing of that little bit more potent as well and has given him a little bit more variation." Ponting recalled how it was a fiery 2012 spell at WACA, Perth to his long-time contemporary and India batting great Sachin Tendulkar that destined Starc for greatness in his eyes. In the second innings of the WACA Test in 2012, Ponting recounted how Starc, playing only his third Test and a first against India, had constricted Tendulkar by targeting his shoulder. "I remember, he was bowling a spell to Sachin Tendulkar and was able to sort of bowl a short one, get up under Sachin's armpit and Sachin just sort of knocked one into short leg on the leg side. "And when you could see that sort of pace and bounce and have someone like Sachin not be able to cope with it, I think that was the reassurance for all of us that there was probably something extra special there for Mitchell Starc," said Ponting. Starc ended up trapping Tendulkar lbw on 8 as Australia rolled over India by an innings and 37 runs.

'After Sachin, I've seen somebody who will take the world by storm': How Rohit Sharma was picked for India A before Mumbai debut



GNS News Agency, March 12

India ODI captain Rohit Sharma has completed 18 years since making his international debut in June 2007 in Ireland. What makes the 38-year-old's journey in professional cricket is the fact that Rohit belonged to a rare bunch of players in making his senior debut on a rung above his state team, Mumbai, back in 2006. Interestingly, Rohit's maiden First-Class match at the senior level was against New Zealand A with the India A side on a quaint cricket ground on the northern stretches of Australia in Darwin. Rohit also went on to make his 50-over List A debut in the Deodhar Trophy for West Zone, scoring an unbeaten 31 in a match-winning cause at No. 8. Within a year, Rohit burst into the India ODI team and played a crucial hand in the T20 World Cup triumph in 2007. Former India batter and selector Jatin Paranjape recently revealed how his late father and renowned coach, Vasoo Paranjape, spotted a young Rohit's talent and even passed on a glorious prophecy.

"I remember my father (Vasoo Paranjape) was the chief talent scout of the MCA. He came back saying, 'Jatin, after Sachin (Tendulkar), I have seen somebody who will take the world by storm'. I said, 'Who is it?'. He said, 'There is this boy called Rohit Sharma, who hasn't played any cricket and they don't rate him, but I have had a chat with a couple

of coaches today and they have picked him in the developmental squad'. I said, 'Yeah, we have heard of him too in the Mumbai dressing room'. He said, 'This guy is going to be the next Mumbai player to play for India,'" revealed Jatin on 'A Century of Stories' podcast with Cyrus Broacha. Paranjape also said that it was the involvement of former India wicket-keeper and then-selector Kiran More who brought Rohit into the national radar, even before he had made his Mumbai debut in any format. "For players like these, you need a lot of strategic planning to be had in your career. That cannot be done by a player. For me, Kiran More being a part of the selection committee when Rohit was just kind of coming up was a very big advantage because Kiran has got a super, super eye for talent. Kiran picked him before the MCA picked him. He played for India A before he played for Mumbai. Those are the kind of people you need".

After a disastrous tour to Australia, Rohit announced his Test retirement in May, wrapping up his stint in whites with over 4000 runs and an average just above 40. The former India skipper still, however, remains as India's leading run-scorer in the World Test Championship. Jatin stated that Rohit received a much-needed revival in Tests from former head coach Ravi Shastri, who pushed him to open in 2019. "That's the big moment (when Shastri told him to open the batting). I remember I was part of the selection committee at that time. That was Ravi Shastri's idea (to get Rohit Sharma to open the batting). Superb thinker. Ravi is 3-4 steps ahead of everybody when it comes to reading the game." "I remember he was not playing Test cricket for India. And we had this conversation, and he said, 'I started playing cricket with a red ball, Jatin. How can you say that I am not interested in Test cricket?' I got the message and I was hoping that that was what he would say. He said he lives for Test cricket. I think Rohit Sharma could have done a lot more in Test cricket. I think he would be the first one to say that as well. I was a little bit disappointed that he chose to drop himself in Sydney because we could have levelled the series," Paranjape said.

Who is New Zealand explosive hitter Tim Robinson with a javelin past?

GNS News Agency, March 12

It's barely been 15 months since his international debut for New Zealand, but Tim Robinson has put behind the first impression of Shaheen Shah Afridi bowling him for a two ball duck. Midweek, he took on South Africa pacers in the T20 triseries in Zimbabwe and helped deliver a win after resurrecting a crumbling innings with his 57 ball 75 as NZ scored 173/5 and shot out SA for 152. The right-handed 23-year-old who's turned out for Northamptonshire, Wellington Firebirds, Guyana Amazon Warriors, might have struggled against Pakistan but has slowly picked up his average to 29.77 in 11 innings, striking at 131.

What makes Robinson, an all-rounder, unique is his past as a javelin thrower. According to collegesportmedia.co.nz, Robinson in addition to cricket was a leading javelin thrower, winning the intermediate title at the Secondary Schools Championship in 2017. He finished fifth in senior grade behind his brother Cam, who proceeded to study business agriculture at Massey University. His bowling might have needed managing with age old back problems that torment throwers, but his batting found a career top score in Zimbabwe against the Proteas. Robinson had thrown a 700 gm javelin to 54.43 for Wellington Amateur athletic club at 15, and 45.82 in 2021 for a 800gm javelin, before shifting to cricket. He replaced Finn Allen in the domestic franchise of Smash, as a rookalike batter, but the turning point was touring Pakistan in a Kiwi squad without IPL players, after he came to attention because of 139 off 64 balls with 10 sixes against Otago Volts. According to cricinfo, Robinson alongside Dean Foxcroft and Mitch Hay spent two weeks at the Super Kings academy in Chennai with old friend and Wellington coach Sriram Krishnamurthy to get used to red and black soil pitches last July. Learning to pick right deliveries to sweep was high on their agenda as per cricinfo. As New Zealand rebuilding their T20 side, Robinson will be key to their fortunes in the upcoming World Cup. In 2017 in his erstwhile avatar, with a javelin, Tim and Cam won junior and senior titles at Secondary School Championships, after which Cam had famously quipped



to collegesportmedia.co.nz that, "We've always been good at throwing things except tantrums." Composed under fire — Tim Robinson, take a bow ?? Tim's best throw of 54.99 had been 4th out of 6, though their spear-throwing journey hadn't started too long before 2017. Winning at McEvedy shield athletics meet, an inter school, had piqued their interest in javelin. "I gave up cricket because I thought I was fast, when I was not," Cam had told collegesportmedia.co.nz. At Wellington, they had been trained by coach Debbie Strange, coach of Olympian Stuart Farquhar. They spent their holidays shearing sheep at the family farm at Hunterville. Against Proteas, Robinson had a partnership of 103 in 63 balls with SA-born Bevon Jacobs (44 off 30) after all of Devon Conway, Daryll Mitchell, Mitchell Hay and Jimmy Neesham went for single digits as Proteas' Kwena Maphaka and Lungi Ngidi and Gerald Coetzee struck blows. Robinson later told New Zealand Cricket & CSA, "We were obviously struggling when we lost those early wickets and it's something we discussed me & Bevon... during the innings and that's obviously... But I think the way we sort of thought about it was that longer we spent at crease easier runs would come and we couldn't afford to lose more wickets so we tried to take it as deep as we could and we had to run hard on long side but obviously we got lucky along the way. That's cricket." On Jacobs, who moved to NZ at 3, Robinson said, "You look at him and he's quite the big guy and will hit the ball long and he sure did. It's fantastic batting with him.

What struck me was when he came out and seemed to enjoy it and looked comfortable out there and played a good knock. I think he's going to play a lot

of cricket so it's a good sign." Tim Robinson (left) with his brother Cam during their javelin days. (College Sport Media) Maphaka claiming wickets signalled arrival of new express pacer, and Robinson said, "I think the Proteas balling is exceptional and their use of long side was exceptional. They bowled well with the new ball. It was hard when we continued to lose wickets. As we went deep we kept more wickets in the bank so we could capitalise in the end. As a batter that's one thing you do... Know where your feet are and play the ball that comes to you. For me, it's not about milestones, they are not on my radar but contributing to a win for your country is a great feeling and one I hope to replicate. Obviously it's nice you got to a 50 or something but it's about contributing to the win is rewarding." He typified the NZ approach to adaptability. "T20 cricket — When you lose wickets it's hard to keep momentum and it's about small moments. While getting the win gives us confidence which we hope to carry on to Friday. We pride ourselves in adapting as quickly as we can. But different game, different wickets, different bowlers," he said. Robinson was enjoying playing in Zimbabwe. "Zimbabwe's a great country to play in. Weather is fantastic, people are nice and accommodating. And I love steaks. Steaks are my favourite. They make it a little different," he said.

SA batting coach Ashwell Prince ceded the Robinson-Jacobs partnership had been costly. "The target was gettable. It was a good pitch. We lost a few wickets early on and were up against it. But we got to get something going but kept losing wickets all the way through and fell short. We bowled well. Used the bouncers that got us some wickets. But their partnership towards the end gave them a competitive score," he said. On their own batting he added, "It's nature of T20 cricket. This is how we can go. They have a good side. We have a fairly young side. But we didn't get any batting rhythm going early on. And that's the key when chasing a score to get some rhythm and a partnership early on. We know we have power to catch up, and balance between runs required and how many we need to get." The two teams rebuilding after some high profile retirements in T20 are trying out new names. Lhuandre Pretorius who scored a century in Tests was stuttering a bit in T20s, but Prince laughed off suggestions he was struggling. "Lhuandre? Struggling? I don't think so. You gotta bear in mind he's 19. Not everytime he's going to walk out and smash 50, 100s. Against Zimbabwe he played a pull shot. Today against New Zealand he was playing well. Maybe he got a little cute with his shot and lost his wicket. He's a talented player but he's 19. He'll make errors that young players do. Against New Zealand today's lineup was also a bit experimental in terms of left right combination that you try to maximise the short boundary. Next time you play what's in front of you. But we are also beatable. We take it one game at a time." When told none of Saffers had got to 50, he explained, "It's not about getting to a 50. If it was that then he would've taken 6 more. It's not about that. It's about going out there and playing on the front foot — that is sticking to your style. If you are aggressive that's how you play. And what we encourage. It's not about getting to a 50. Brevis has played around the world, exposed to different leagues, teams and pressures. But at end of the day they have come to international cricket and its biggest stage at 18, 19. But we trust their abilities."

James Gunn's idea of an India-coded country is regressive and riddled with stereotypes; the Man of Steel wouldn't stand for it



By now, Quentin Tarantino's not take on Superman has resurfaced online enough times for it to have seeped into the cultural consciousness. Via one of his onscreen mouthpieces, Tarantino theorised that Superman truly was an alien living among us. The blue suit with the large 'S' wasn't a costume for him; it was the attire of his people. The real costume was the suit and tie he wore as Clark Kent. "Clark Kent is how Superman views us," Tarantino said. "And what are the characteristics of Clark Kent? He's weak... he's unsure of himself... he's a coward. Clark Kent is Superman's critique on the whole human race." The same theory, funnily enough, could be applied to James Gunn. In his new Superman movie, the filmmaker offers a similar outsider's perspective on earthly matters. Positioned as a quasi-apology for Zack Snyder's Man of Steel — the most expensive emo music video ever filmed — Gunn's Superman harkens back to the goofy cartoons of the 1980s. It's bright, kid-friendly, and energetically performed. It's also surprisingly contemporary. Not only does this Superman live in the DC Universe's equivalent of 2025, he also finds himself at the centre of a divided world. The film's opening titles inform us that 'metahumans' like him first arrived on Earth 3,000 years ago. Three years ago, Kal-El 'came out' as Superman, and three minutes ago, he suffered his first loss on the battlefield.

Played by David Corenswet, Superman was already attracting heat for his unilateral decision to intervene in a clash between the Eastern European-inspired country of Boravia, and the very India-coded Jahranpur. It is unclear where exactly these fictional nations are located on the planet, although the third act appears to suggest that they are separated only by a fence of some kind. While the Boravians are fair-skinned and blue-eyed, their adversaries look like they're from the Subcontinent. It seems as if Gunn is commenting on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts; it could only have been more obvious had Vladimir Putin himself sauntered into frame and pointed fingers at Benjamin Netanyahu. This isn't the first time that Gunn has offered simplistic commentary through his colourful superhero movies. The Suicide Squad was a

pretty bold critique of American foreign policy, particularly the Iraq War. Superman alludes to this in its finest scene. The 10-minute scene involves zero action and no visual effects; no monsters are being slayed, no dimensions are being hopped. The scene is as much about the rigours of journalism as it is about a new couple having their first argument. It's framed around a simple conversation between Clark and his girlfriend, the intrepid reporter Lois Lane, played by Rachel Brosnahan. They agree to put their personal equation to the side for a few minutes, during which Lois interviews 'Superman' about his interference in the Boravia-Jahranpur crisis. Superman tells her that the Boravians were about to annihilate the less-resourceful Jahranpurians; he simply couldn't wait for the American government to give him the green light. Plus, he tells her, he doesn't represent America. "I represent me!" But Lois grills him about the repercussions of his actions; Boravia is an ally, whereas Jahranpur has a rocky history with America. "People were going to die," Clark yells, losing his patience. It is the only time in the movie that he views human beings as inferior to himself. He cannot understand why random protocols should be followed when innocent lives are at stake. Armed to the teeth, the Boravians are the clear aggressors, while the Jahranpurians are shown to be rag-wearing cave-dwellers of some sort. Even by superhero movie standards, which aren't as low as you'd think, this is a rather racist view of the third-world. Gunn's intentions might be pure, but his expression is flawed. There is also the rather unfortunate parallel that one can draw between Superman and Donald Trump, especially the Nobel-hungry version of POTUS that we've been seeing recently, the same version that intervened to de-escalate tensions between India and Pakistan earlier this year. Gunn couldn't have predicted this, of course. But perhaps this is the universe's way of reminding him that he shares a similar outlook to that of the POTUS about this part of the world. "They've been fighting for thousands of years," Trump remarked (incorrectly and ignorantly) on more than one occasion. Superman is a fun movie, but was it necessary to portray the Jahranpurians as so stereotypically backward? Was it necessary to shoot those scenes with a yellow tint, as if we're in a Tony Scott movie from 2004? The white saviour trope doesn't really apply here, though, seeing as that's Superman's thing. He's still quite young in the movie, around 33. He grew up listening to Dashboard Confessional probably, witnessing the evolution of technology before his eyes. He probably witnessed Lex Luthor's rise from an ambitious start-up bro to a full-blown technocrat villain. Superman has always been an empath, but perhaps being a millennial made him a bigger one. And he's right; he doesn't represent America. He doesn't discriminate. Superman's greatest challenge — Gunn isn't interested in exploring this, by the way — isn't who to save, but who not to. Even he can't be everywhere at once. But every nation, not just America, can learn something from him. After all, we used to be a country that welcomed the Dalai Lama in the 1950s and granted him refuge; now, we're a country that lets a fleeing mass murderer onto our land when her countryfolk kick her out. Post Credits Scene is a column in which we dissect new releases every week, with particular focus on context, craft, and characters. Because there's always something to fixate about once the dust has settled.

James Gunn reacts to viral Batman makeover theory; teases Clayface horror, triple Lantern chaos, and Peacemaker 2



DC Studios co-CEO James Gunn is now gearing up for the DCU's interconnected future, following the successful run of Superman. In a recent conversation with CBS, Gunn let out a sigh of relief, saying David Corenswet's reboot hit all three marks: audiences, critics, and the box office, after he spent three years building it. Now, Gunn's teasing Batman's arrival in The Brave and the Bold, but stayed cagey on whether we might see the Dark Knight even earlier. For now, he's got other heroes to roll out, starting with Peacemaker season 2, which drops next. Gunn didn't reveal too much about Batman, but he didn't shut the door on fan theories either. In an extended interview with the outlet, when

asked if Batman would be donning a new costume, perhaps something different from the traditional black and grey, Gunn dodged, laughing and responding, "I have no idea what Batman's going to wear." He instead switched the topic to what he does know for sure is what's immediately ahead in the DCU. "Peacemaker Season 2, which arrives in a month and is directly tied to events in Superman, with some overlapping characters," he said. Following that, the timeline includes Supergirl, Lanterns (featuring Hal Jordan, John Stewart, and Guy Gardner), and Clayface, which the Superman hitmaker described as a full-blown horror film set within the same universe.

Further, Gunn

emphasised that gone are the days of the old DCU; his version won't follow a one-size-fits-all formula. "Each film will reflect the unique vision of its creators. There's not a company style," he said. "Just like comics, every story can be tonally different." While Gunn neither confirmed nor denied the Batman makeover rumours, he definitely added fuel to fan theories that have been making rounds for months. Over the years, around 11 live-action Batmen have worn the Caped Crusader's iconic look. In an earlier interview with CBR, Gunn said, "You know, there's no decisions made about the costume at all yet. I do [like the blue-and-gray Batsuit]! But I like the other versions, too. I like

many different versions. I'm a Batman superfan. And so I like all the different versions of the Batman suit." But he did hint at the trunks. "I didn't know the trunks were going to be that important until I took this job," he said, revealing that the first thing people asked when he got onboard DCU was what he planned to do with them. Fans have been speculating that Gunn and Andy Muschietti might shake things up costume-wise, but that'll only become clear once the film rolls. There's already buzz around patterns, a different colour palette, new materials, and details like longer ears and lenses," doing the rounds online. As for Batman, beyond the costume chatter and release timeline, Gunn dropped something more telling, how this new take pushes back against the whole 'government puppet' label. He pointed out how Batman has traditionally seen Superman as a tool of the establishment, especially in The Dark Knight Returns. But now that Superman's stepping out of line and making moves on his own, he's starting to align with Batman's values more. "Usually, Superman and Batman have different ways of doing things, but they're best friends.

That's something we think a lot about for the DCU," Gunn said.

Even BTS' V and Taylor Swift couldn't save The Summer I Turned Pretty S3's 'cringe' start, with Belly and Jeremiah's 'frustrating' chemistry



The Summer I Turned Pretty Season 3's first two episodes were frustratingly painful to sit through. After waiting for four years and watching Belly (Lola Tung) still torn between the Fisher brothers felt like a slap. The new season is out, and there's absolutely nothing new. Same old triangle, same worn-out drama, just wrapped in a shinier, college setup. Based on Jenny Han's novel and hyped as one of the most anticipated summer shows, it had Taylor Swift's hits blaring and even summoned the K-pop crowd with BTS' Kim Taehyung on the soundtrack, but seems like those tracks might be the only thing worth talking about. Spoilers ahead. Season 3 picks up with a time jump, longer than anyone expected. We're now four years ahead. Belly's in her junior year at Finch College, still dating Jeremiah, which was teased in the promos too. Meanwhile, Conrad's sort of out of the picture, he's at Stanford, studying medicine, trying to move on while still dealing with his mom's death and the

whole Belly fallout. Team Conrad might've been happy at first with this development, but the way Belly handled things made it too cringe to even fathom.

She finds out Jeremiah cheated on her during spring break in Cabo. He pulls the classic "we were on a break" card (Must be watching Ross-Rachel FRIENDS playback on loop). One thinks they're still together, the other's off doing their own thing. But here's where it gets more frustrating. He didn't just cheat once, but twice. Thankfully, the show threw in some screentime for other characters too, Taylor and Steven (Belly's best friend and her brother), still trying to figure out whatever it is they're doing. Steven gets into an accident, he is hospitalised, and that's when Belly forgives Jeremiah. And right there, outside the hospital, with absolutely no effort, no ring, no build-up, no logic, he proposes. And she says yes. Book readers are left horrified. The rushed pacing. What was the point? We get it, the show is trying to explore mature themes with college, adulthood, heartbreak, but everyone still acts like they're stuck in high school. Even the dialogues are flat. The decisions are abrupt. And worst of all, nothing feels earned. We're being told that Belly and Jeremiah are in love, but their chemistry is completely missing, and at this point, we can just hope she ends up choosing the right brother. Speaking of the characters, Gavin Casalegno and Christopher Briney (Jeremiah and Conrad) look good, but aren't given much to do beyond posing and reacting. Is anything working? Yes, the tracks. We're obsessed. Every song hits right where it should. Taylor Swift, BTS' V, Lana Del Rey, Cranberries, Chapel Roan, all fire. Taehyung's 'FRI(END)S' feels like a breath of fresh air as it sets up the whole Taylor-Steven vibe, while Taylor's 'You're Losing Me' plays right when Belly finds out about Jeremiah's cheating, couldn't have been more fitting. Even the costumes stand out, subtle but detailed, and they do their part in telling the story.

Shark Tank India founder's Rs 300 crore revenue doubled after show, entrepreneur who made Anupam Mittal change his mind now has 1.3 million users on his app



With registrations for the upcoming fifth season of Shark Tank India fully underway, the reality show's official Instagram channel has been sharing testimonial videos of previously featured contestants who secured deals on the show, and benefited from it. Shark Tank India is gearing up for its fifth season, which would also mark its fifth anniversary. The show gained popularity in the early stages of the pandemic, and has only become more popular with every passing year. The new season should debut in early 2026, going by the schedules of past seasons. In their videos, entrepreneurs shared how their companies have grown after being featured on the show, and encouraged others to not hesitate in taking the plunge. Season 3 contestant Simran Khara, who presented

her brand Koparo, said that their revenue increased from Rs 70 lakh per month to Rs 4 crore per month. "Around 60% of the people who first tried us out during Shark Tank month have stuck with us," she said. Jagrut, who pitched his brand Savani Heritage on the show's fourth season. Savani Heritage was already the highest revenue-generated show ever, at a projected Rs 300 crore. Jagrut said that their revenue doubled after the show, which he himself was stunned by. Randhir, who appeared on the final episode of the latest season to present his fashion label Subculture, said that his revenue showed a 20x growth. Dhananjay, the founder of a wearable AI-powered pendant company, gave a shoutout to the 'sharks' who believed in him, and helped him communicate his ambitions to the world. The founders of Shyle, Astha and Radhesh, said that they saw a 'sharp spike in sales, collaborations, and credibility, almost overnight'. Sanjay, the founder of a book lending app business who gained tremendous appreciation from Anupam Mittal in the show's fourth season, said that he witnessed a growth of more than 100% after he appeared on the show. The Shark Tank India Instagram also addressed some frequently asked questions that potential applicants might have, such as how long their pitch needs to be, whether they'd have time to rehearse beforehand, and whether they need to bring a prototype if their company is pre-revenue. The post also acknowledged potential conflicts of interest that 'sharks' might have, if they are previously invested in direct competitors of the products being pitched. The post outlined timelines that contestants can fall back on in the event that they make the final cut, are able to deliver a successful pitch, and receive an offer from one or more of the 'sharks'.

Shilpa Shirodkar says husband left New Zealand, quit his 'very successful job' to be with her as she battled depression: 'I wanted to be close to my sister Namrata'

Shilpa Shirodkar, a prominent name in Bollywood during the 1990s, known for her work with legends like Ramesh Sippy, Mithun Chakraborty, Amitabh Bachchan, Mukul Anand, and Gulshan Kumar, took a 13-year hiatus from show business to raise her family in London. She returned to Mumbai in the early 2010s, and although she eventually made her comeback on television, it wasn't initially part of her plan. In a candid conversation with Pinkvilla, Shilpa opened up about her journey back to India, not with the intention to return to films or television, but simply to be closer to her sister, Namrata Shirodkar, and to find solace following personal tragedy. She revealed, "I didn't get films and I didn't try also. I didn't even try for television also. In fact, when I came back to India, I wasn't in a great mental state. I had lost my parents and I was in really bad depression. And I actually came back to India to be next to my sister (Namrata Shirodkar). I had nothing on my mind about work. I came back in 2010, and I didn't even ask anyone to give me work or express the desire to work. But when Diya ji and Tony ji called... I didn't even know anything about PR at all, neither did I do some photoshoot or anything. My idea was only that I don't want to go back and want to stay close to my sister."

She further added, "So my daughter Anushka started her schooling and everything slowly started settling in. Soon we decided that we will set up a production house, and I'll produce content for television as it was still an upcoming industry back then. It was obviously big but there was still space in regional, so we wanted to do something there. So when I got Ek Mutthi Aasmaan, I don't know how I got it. I was only told this is a good production house and I had already seen Banegi Apni Baat, so I knew these were good producers and I loved what they narrated to me. Zee was also happy to take me onboard, and I got it like that. I didn't go looking for it."

Shilpa also opened up about the difficult time following the loss of her parents, which led to a deep depression. "It happened after my parents passed. It was very tough. I was in London, alone, with my husband and my Anushka. And



Apresh was very, very, very successful. He was doing so well in his space of work. Anushka was settled in her school. She had her own friends. Everything, everything was in place. But when my parents passed so immediately, one after the other... I don't know, I just couldn't handle it. And I was getting treated there, but I just wanted to come back. You know, there's a saying that behind every successful man, there's a woman. I think, and I say this from my own experience, behind every successful woman is a very, very understanding husband. And a very, very tolerant man. And I wouldn't have been doing this today, I wouldn't be sitting in front of you, if my husband hadn't been there. Because in 2010 when I decided to come back, Apresh's career was at its peak but he realised that I need to come back, and he left everything and came back. He quit his job and came back and said let's try something new." Discussing the symptoms and depth of her depression, Shilpa spoke with heart-breaking honesty: "I used to cry a lot, I had no control over my tears. Even when anything good happened, still I couldn't stop crying. I had become a robot, wasn't interested in anything. I had put on so much weight, I had dark circles, I had no interest in life."