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Honoring of Veterinary Assistant who received promotion

... Jagtial Correspondent, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): "The District Fourth Class Employees' Association honored Sirikonda Rajender, who was promoted from a fourth-class employee to a Veterinary Assistant, on Sunday. The ceremony took place at the Fourth Class Employees' Association building under the leadership of District President Kyarangula Aruna. Rajender was honored with a shawl and presented with a flower plant. Aruna wished him further promotions in the future. The event was attended by jagtial press club president Ennam Kishan Reddy, Secretary Ummadi Narayana, Treasurer Chirra Sathish Kumar, Kadapa Bhagya, Gundrapu Rajesham, Pilla Srinu, Dikonda Rajitha, Jumbarti Aruna, and other employees.



Speaker's ruling on BRS MLAs sparks debate over anti-defection law

Hyderabad: The Speaker's verdict on petitions seeking disqualification of ten MLAs who allegedly defected from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) has triggered a political and legal debate, with critics questioning whether the ruling could redefine the interpretation of the Anti-Defection Law. Geographic Reference

According to the ruling delivered by Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar, there was insufficient evidence to take punitive action against the ten BRS MLAs whose defection had created a stir in Telangana politics.



2-phase polls in WB; Kerala, Assam to vote on April 9, Tamil Nadu on April 23

in the shadow of the controversial special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. The SIR in these states (except in Assam, where special revision was conducted) and in Puducherry was conducted between December 2025 and February 2026.

Apart from this, Assembly bypolls for eight seats across six states will also take place next month. The results will also be declared on May 4.

Bypolls in Maharashtra's Baramati and Rahuri seats, as well as in Gujarat's Umreth, will be held on April 23. The byelections in Goa's Ponda, Tripura's Dharmanagar, Nagaland's Koridang, as well as in two seats of Karnataka — Bagalkot and Davangere South, will take place on April 9.

All bypolls have been necessitated due to deaths

of sitting MLAs.

Baramati is the most significant Assembly seat which will go to the polls, after its MLA and NCP chief Ajit Pawar died in a plane crash on January 28.

In West Bengal, the Assembly elections will be held in two phases whereas in 2021, these were conducted in eight phases. EC sources indicated that concerns regarding poll violence were a major reason behind the move.

Sources, however, indicated that another reason was to mitigate the anger among West Bengal voters towards the SIR, in which 62 lakh electors' names have been deleted, while another 60 lakh names have been kept under judicial adjudication.

Of the 294 Assembly seats in West Bengal, 152 seats will vote in the first phase on April 23, while the

remaining 142 seats will vote on April 29.

Significantly, most of the constituencies bordering Bangladesh, namely Murshidabad, Malda, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur, will go to the polls on April 23.

Assam, where the Assembly elections were held in three phases in 2021, polling will be held in a single phase.

Responding to queries on the fate of 60 lakh voters in West Bengal who have been placed under judicial adjudication, Kumar assured that those names, which would be there in the supplementary list to be released by judicial officers, would be included in the electoral rolls.

On the timeline of release of the supplementary list, the CEC said, "the learned judges are looking

at it on a case-to-case basis."

On fears of election-related violence, especially in West Bengal, Kumar said, "No violence will be tolerated. We have zero tolerance towards this and strict action will be taken if any such cases are brought to the cognisance of the EC."

The CEC did not respond to questions regarding allegations of bias towards the ruling BJP levelled by the Opposition parties, and also on the notice submitted in Parliament for his removal. "The EC cannot engage in political statements," he said.

On the curtailed phases of polling in West Bengal and Assam, Kumar said after holding detailed discussions with parties, it was decided to reduce the phases to ensure voter convenience.

He further informed that arrangements would be made to file FIRs against deepfake or AI-generated videos during the campaigning.

The Assembly elections are being held after the SIR was conducted in these states, with Tamil Nadu witnessing the defection of 74 lakh voters, West Bengal 62 lakh voters and Kerala 8.5 lakh voters.

The tenure of the West Bengal Assembly will end on May 7, while the Assam Assembly's term comes to an end on May 20. Similarly, the Kerala Assembly's tenure will end on May 23, while the Tamil Nadu House's tenure is ending on May 10.

West Bengal has 294 Assembly seats, Assam has 126, Kerala 140, Tamil Nadu 234 and Puducherry 30.

New Delhi, March 15

The Assembly elections in West Bengal will be held in two phases on April 23 and 29, while Assam, Kerala and the UT of Puducherry will vote in a single phase on April 9, the Election Commission (EC) announced on Sunday. The

elections in Tamil Nadu will be held on April 23.

The results for all four states and the sole UT would be declared on May 4, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek

Joshi, announced while addressing a press conference.

The model code of conduct came into effect immediately with the announcement of the poll schedule.

The Assembly elections are being conducted

Airlines curtail UAE operations; DGCA relaxes flight duty norms for Air India

New Delhi, March 15

Flight operations between India and the United Arab Emirates faced disruptions on Sunday, with several airlines cancelling or scaling back services amid operational restrictions due to rising tensions in West Asia.

In a related development, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has granted temporary relaxations in pilot duty time limits for long-haul flights operated by Air India as the airline is taking longer routes to avoid restricted airspace in the warzone. The restrictions over Iranian and Iraqi airspace have forced the airline to reroute services bound for Europe and North America via Egypt.

Air India and Air India Express confirmed that a number of flights scheduled between India and the UAE were cancelled after directions from UAE airport au-



thorities. The restrictions also forced the airlines to temporarily curtail certain ad-hoc operations, additional flights usually scheduled outside the regular timetable to meet higher passenger demand.

In a statement, Air India said both the full-service carrier and its low-cost subsidiary had scaled back

such ad-hoc operations for March 15 in line with the instructions issued by UAE airport authorities. IndiGo said it had cancelled several flights to and from Dubai due to continuing airspace restrictions in the region.

As regards relaxations in pilot duty time limits for Air India, Sources said the aviation watchdog relief applied to long-haul opera-

tions conducted with two pilots until April 30.

Under the temporary arrangement, the permitted flight time has been increased by one hour and thirty minutes, allowing a maximum of 11 hours and 30 minutes. The allowable flight duty period has also been extended by one hour and forty-five minutes to 11 hours and 45 minutes.

From Reel to Real: Will Vijay's TVK rewrite Tamil Nadu politics?

Chennai: March 15

Actor Vijay's political entry, as his appearance in his films, was packed with suspense and expectations by a multitude of his followers. But the tragic stampede in Karur that claimed 41 lives on September 27, 2025 brought the spotlight on numerous issues leading to the state government framing SOPs for conducting political meetings and rallies.

Nearly five months after the stampede, Vijay, facing a CBI probe over the incident, is currently involved in interviewing the TVK party candidates for upcoming Assembly election.

The 51-year-old leader of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam who will be making his maiden electoral ahead of the April 23 election, has already announced that the poll battle will be only between the TVK and DMK and that others hardly matter.

1. Vijay's charisma and established fan base and the young voters will play a crucial role in tilting the scales in favour of the TVK.

2. Social justice, egalitarian society and two language policy outlines TVK's ideology, conforming to Tamil Nadu's Dravidian pitch.

3. He announced the "super six" poll promises for women including six free LPG cylinders and monthly financial aid.

1. Vijay is a political novice and faces criticism that he delivers political speeches like he renders dialogues in films.

2. Virtual one-man show: For the present he is the



only star campaigner for his party.

3. The TVK meet invariably draws frenzied fan crowds often leading to road accidents, bringing bad publicity.

1. He hopes to cash in on a huge vacuum for a strong non-Dravidian party to serve as an alternative to both the DMK and AIADMK in the state.

2. The party targets young voters and the tech savvy community. Voters tired with the traditional Dravidian giants—the DMK and AIADMK, may prefer TVK.

1. The Karur tragedy is a significant setback to the TVK affecting its poll prospects.

2. Vijay, for now, has opted to go alone in facing the election.

3. Party faces a tough competition from the established players AIADMK and DMK which are strong in organisation structure.

Rajya Sabha elections: NDA, INDIA Bloc in fierce Bihar contest

New Delhi: With just a day left for the Rajya Sabha elections, leaders across party lines are making all possible efforts to ensure their victory.

Deputy Speaker of the Bihar Assembly and Janata Dal (United) leader Narendra Narayan Yadav seemed confident of the NDA's victory in the polls. He said, "I have said that the NDA will win all five seats; that much confidence should be kept."

"Look, the INDIA bloc and our Mahagathbandhan have full capability to plan their strategy for victory. What the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or JD(U) are doing, whether they merge or align, is for them to decide. But we are confident that under the leadership of the Leader of Opposition in the Bihar Assembly and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav, we will ensure our candidate wins," he told IANS.

Bihar Minister and BJP leader Ram Kripal Yadav stated that RJD will lose the election.

"Tejashwi (Yadav) is not going to survive; he will win from the bottom. His vote is also going to come to us. Who wants to move towards a dark future by staying in the Rashtriya Janata Dal? Whoever wants to secure their fu-

ture and be in politics is aligning with us," he said.

Highlighting the battle for the fourth Rajya Sabha seat in Bihar, RJD MLA Bhai Virendra told IANS, "We are ready to accept that four seats will go to the NDA, but the fifth seat will definitely go to the Mahagathbandhan, the INDIA bloc, this is for sure."

Notably, parties have been holding meetings with their MLAs ahead of the Rajya Sabha polls.

Speaking about the same, JD(U) spokesperson Neeraj Kumar said, "Since it is the biennial election of the Rajya Sabha, naturally, collective meetings of our various constituent parties are taking place, and responsibilities are being assigned during the meetings, like how polling will be conducted, what the system will be. MLAs have a crucial role to play here, not the legislative council."

"We have come to this meeting to show support," he added

Polling for the biennial elections to fill 37 Rajya Sabha



seats across 10 states is scheduled for Monday. The states are Maharashtra (7), Tamil Nadu (6), Bihar (5), West Bengal (5), Odisha (4), Assam (3), Telangana (2), Chhattisgarh

(2), Haryana (2), and Himachal Pradesh (1). Telangana tourism guide

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

When stock trading feels like a game – hidden risks for India's young investors

India's sustained trend of strengthening digital infrastructure is undergoing a quiet but seismic shift into its financial landscape. For decades, Indian civic finance operated within a classical cultural baggage of high caution — a savings-first ethos, deep-rooted risk aversion, and a preference for familiar, low-volatility instruments, which is now undergoing a demographic realignment that integrates new forms of financial capital that cut across age, gender, employment categories, and sources of income.

The National Stock Exchange reports a striking recalibration of the average market participant. It noted that 40 per cent of all registered investors are now under the age of 30, driving the median age of the Indian investor down from 38 in 2018 to just 32 today. The monthly SIP (Systematic Investment Plan) inflow of Rs 29,529 crore recorded in October 2025, with over half contributed by this under-30 cohort, suggests a generation stepping into financial markets with unprecedented confidence.

However, to view this solely as a sign of economic maturity would be a misdiagnosis. Instead, it reveals a sociological shift in which young Indians are navigating complex markets within digital environments that incentivise impulse, speed, and emotional volatility over the slow, compounding nature of genuine wealth creation.

Academic research reveals clear differences between new investors and earlier generations. Younger cohorts, shaped by pervasive digital financial infrastructure, exhibit distinct risk preferences and investment behaviours compared to their predecessors (Sreelakshmi & Arun, 2023), marking a significant shift in India's financial motives and market participation patterns. The medium has fundamentally altered the message. Today's young investors do not encounter the markets through the sober lens of brokers or workplace schemes, but through the hyper-efficient interfaces of their smartphones. With 80 per cent of this demographic trading primarily through discount brokerage apps like Zerodha, Groww, and Upstox, the entry friction has all but vanished. While these platforms have successfully democratised access, allowing students and first-time earners to participate in the equity cult, this very ease has distorted the perception of risk. With equities under the preferred asset class for 45 per cent of Indians under 35, the market is being embraced by a cohort that lacks the necessary literacy to navigate it safely.

There is a widening gap between access and competence. RBI-National Centre for Financial Education (NCFE) surveys indicate that financial literacy among India's youth remains stagnant at 27 per cent, a statistic that barely improves even among active traders. The source of their capital exacerbates this deficit; many student investors trade with stipends, pocket money, or borrowed funds. Consequently, the psychological weight of every transaction is amplified. In this context, a minor gain is celebrated as a personal triumph, while a loss is felt as a devastating failure. Rather than a disciplined apprenticeship in capital allocation, investing becomes an exercise in emotional regulation. This is further complicated by family-operated demat accounts where minors trade in the name of guardians, diffusing accountability and turning the market into a low-stakes sandbox for high-stakes habits. The architecture of modern fintech platforms bears significant responsibility for this behavioural shift. Whether by accident or design, trading apps have adopted the vernacular of the gaming industry.

Demise of Former Kakatiya University Vice-Chancellor Prof. N. Lingamurthy a Profound Loss to Academia.

“P. S. ASHOKAN “KARIMNAGAR BUREAU “The sudden demise of noted economist and former Vice-Chancellor of Kakatiya University, Prof. N. Lingamurthy, has been described as an irreparable loss to the field of economics and to the university education system, stated Nedunuri Kanakayya, President of the Telangana Economics Forum, in an official statement. “Prof. Lingamurthy, who had earlier served as the Vice-Chancellor of Kakatiya University, passed away in Warangal on Saturday due to illness.” Speaking at a condolence meeting organized on this occasion, Kanakayya recalled the remarkable contributions of Prof. Lingamurthy to higher education. He noted that during his tenure as Vice-Chancellor, Lingamurthy introduced several innovative academic courses and implemented meaningful reforms that helped make university education more accessible to rural, economically disadvantaged, and marginalized communities. “Kanakayya emphasized that the passing of such a distinguished educationist represents a significant loss to the higher education sector. He further remarked that the most fitting tribute to Prof. Lingamurthy would be to continue working towards realizing the ideals and vision he championed.” He also described Lingamurthy as a progressive and democratic academic administrator who worked tirelessly to expand the reach of distance education, thereby bringing learning opportunities closer to rural populations. “On the occasion, Dr. K. Murali, Advisor to the Economics Forum, stated that Prof. Lingamurthy earned widespread recognition as an eminent scholar and professor in the field of Labour Economics. He added that Lingamurthy played an active role in shaping labour policies at both the central and state government levels. “Forum State General Secretary Dr. C. H. Srinivas moved a condolence resolution during the meeting, praising the invaluable services rendered by the late Vice-Chancellor for the development of university education. He noted that Prof. Lingamurthy's contributions to the academic community will remain memorable and will continue to inspire young economists. “Others who participated in the meeting and paid rich tributes included Dr. Manoharachari, Dr. T. V. Swami, Parusharam Reddy, Veerashwamy, Bairi Sudhakar, Tirumal and several other members of the forum.



Oil Palm Factory Works to be Completed by End of April: Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao “Farmers Advised to Focus on Profitable Crops

“Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Reporter March 15 Indian Chronicle: “Telangana State Agriculture, Marketing, Cooperation, and Handlooms & Textiles Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao said that the construction works of the Godrej Agrovet Oil Palm Factory at Anjanapuram in Konijerla mandal will be completed by the end of April and made available for farmers. “The minister visited Konijerla mandal on Sunday and inspected the progress of the factory works at Anjanapuram along with Ramdas Naik, MLA of Wyra, and Additional Collector P. Srinivasa Reddy. “Speaking on the occasion, Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao recalled that oil palm cultivation was first introduced in the undivided state during the tenure of former Chief Minister N. T. Rama Rao. He stated that earlier this crop did not exist in the region and that he later secured permissions to expand oil palm cultivation across all districts in the state. “He said the government is providing a subsidy of 751,000 per acre to farmers for oil palm cultivation. The minister warned that farmers could face difficulties if they do not adopt crop diversification. He noted that the Central Government is gradually reducing paddy procurement and cited the example of Punjab, where farmers are being encouraged not to cultivate paddy. He also cautioned that excessive use of urea fertilizer has led to increased cancer cases in Punjab and that similar risks could arise if overuse continues elsewhere. “The minister said multinational company Godrej has focused on agricultural products and had already set up factories in Andhra Pradesh. He added that, along with the oil palm factory in Khammam district, a Research and Development Centre is also being established to help farmers resolve their queries. “He invited farmers to attend the inauguration of the newly built Narmetta Oil Palm Factory in Siddipet district on March 22, which will be inaugurated by Telangana

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy. A three-day agriculture exhibition will also be organized there. “The minister assured that the government would fully support companies in setting up seed gardening facilities near the factory. He instructed officials to ensure fair compensation for farmers if land is acquired for the project. “Tummala said seed gardening would benefit farmers across the country and called for cooperation from all stakeholders. He described oil palm as a crop that can withstand adverse conditions such as unseasonal rains and drought. Farmers can also grow intercropped crops like chilli and maize during the first three years to generate income, he added. “He advised farmers to shift from paddy cultivation to more profitable crops such as arecanut, jasmine, and oil palm. According to him, oil palm is currently one of the most profitable crops with lower costs and fewer risks. “The minister directed officials to identify suitable land near the factory for seed gardening and complete the land acquisition process by the end of the month. He also asked them to ensure that roads and a substation are provided to the factory on time. “Speaking on the occasion, Wyra MLA Ramdas Naik said the establishment of the Godrej Oil Palm Factory would greatly benefit farmers in the region. He assured that all necessary support would be extended to complete the factory works quickly and start operations. He added that oil palm cultivation is gradually increasing in the district and the factory would significantly benefit the local farming community. “Khammam Market Committee Chairman Hanumantha Rao, District Agriculture Officer D. Pullaiah, District Horticulture Officer Madhusudan, Project DGM, the village sarpanch, officials, and public representatives were also present at the event.



Development Works to Begin Soon in Ramanthapur Bhagyaath

— CC Roads and Drainage Construction Planned

“Parameshwar Reddy Visits the Area under Basti Bata Program

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): “Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy, Congress Party In-charge of Uppal constituency, stated that CC roads and drainage systems will soon be constructed in Ramanthapur Bhagyaath. He assured that the colonies in Ramanthapur Bhagyaath will be developed on par with other localities. As part of the Basti Bata program, Parameshwar Reddy toured several colonies in Ramanthapur Bhagyaath on Sunday and interacted with residents. During the visit, colony residents brought several issues to his attention, particularly the need for proper roads, drainage facilities, and other basic infrastructure. “Parameshwar Reddy assured the residents that efforts are being made to provide the required civic amenities and address their concerns. Colony president Rasala Khaseem Goud and local residents including K. Sami, Golusula Swami, Nagaraju, Shankar Goud, Shyam, Meeraj, Ajay, Loan Srinu, Srinu Patel, Raghava Neta, P. Shivakumar, Madhu, Srinivas Goud, Balraju, Chinna Narasimha, Bhanu, Charan Teja, Kumar, Niranjan, Jangir, Saidulu, Swami, Arjun, Yadagiri Chari, Somesh and others participated in the program. “Congress party senior leaders and activists such as Toufiq, Uppal Constituency Youth Congress President Akarapu Arun, MD Rafiq, Vallapu Srikanth Yadav, Garika Sudhakar, Balayya Babu, Karipa Shankar, Upender Reddy, Bukka Suresh, Praveen, Srinivas Chary, Krishna, Shamyuel, Sandeep, Sridhar, G. Bhaskar, Jangayya, Babu Rao, Arun Sai, Meettu Goud, Satish Goud, Vijay, Ambika, Shobha, Bullet Ashok, Sachin, Naveen, Ashok, Rineesh, Kiran and many others were also present.



MLA chinta prabhakar inaugurated CC road works

“Sangareddy Indian Chronicle Correspondent March 15 “Sangareddy MLA Chinta Prabhakar laid the foundation stone for the construction of CC roads in Mubarakpur and veltur villages of Sadashivapet mandal of Sangareddy district on Sunday. He said that the construction of CC roads has been undertaken in these two villages at a cost of Rs 15 lakh. He said that the CC roads are being constructed with NREGS funds. Later, speaking to the media, MLA Chinta Prabhakar said that they are continuously working for the development of villages.

My goal is to develop the municipality, said Municipal Chairperson Munipalli Anjamma



“Sangareddy Indian Chronicle Correspondent March 15. “Sadasivapet Municipal Chairperson Munipalli Anjamma said that she will continuously work for the development of the municipality. Suhasini Puja was performed at the Vasavi Kanyaka Parameswarilayam temple in the town on Sunday, after which the newly elected members of the Sadasivapet Municipal Council were felicitated. Arya Vaishya Sangam leaders felicitated Municipal Chairperson Munipalli Anjamma and the Vice Chairman Councillors on this occasion. Speaking on this occasion, Municipal Chairperson Munipalli Anjamma said that she will continuously work for the development of the municipality and will be available to the people whenever she can. Arya Vaishya Sangam leaders and local Congress leaders participated in this program.

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Run for She 3.0 Organized by DSL Virtue Mall, Uppal A Grand Success Dedicated to Women Empowerment

Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy participated as the Chief Guest



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): “A 5K and 10K fun run titled “Run for She 3.0”, aimed at promoting women empowerment, was successfully organized on Sunday morning by DSL Virtue Mall in Uppal. “The event was conducted with the support of sponsors and organizers Arjun, Satish, and Devayani, and was held in the presence of Chief Guest Bandari Lakshma Reddy, MLA of Uppal, along with Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, BRS State Leader. “More than 500 participants, including runners, families, students, women's groups, and supporters from different parts of the city, enthusiastically took part in the run. The event brought the community together in support of women's equal rights and empowerment. Several voluntary and social organizations also actively participated, making the program a large community-driven initiative. “This year's event was organized under the theme “Count Her In: Accelerating Gender Equality through Economic Empowerment.” The program conveyed a strong message about the importance of providing equal opportunities to women and ensuring their full participation in economic and social development. “DSL Virtue Mall expressed heartfelt gratitude to organizations such as Uppal Runners, Scholars World School, Vibhag Foundation, and Care Good, as well as to all the participants who contributed to the success of the event. “Through such social initiatives, DSL Virtue Mall continues to inspire positive change in society and promote stronger community participation.

Weekend Drunk-and-Drive Drive: 223 Offenders Caught by Malkajgiri Traffic Police

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 15, (Indian Chronicle): “The Malkajgiri Traffic Police conducted a special weekend drunk-and-drive enforcement drive and caught 223 offenders for driving under the influence of alcohol. According to the police, the cases registered during the drive were mostly against two-wheeler riders. The vehicle-wise breakdown is as follows: 194 two-wheelers, 8 three-wheelers and 21 four-wheelers, while no heavy vehicle drivers were found violating the rule. Based on Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) levels, offenders were categorized into three groups. 204 offenders recorded BAC levels between 36 mg/100 ml and 200 mg/100 ml, 10 offenders had BAC levels between 201 mg/100 ml and 300 mg/100 ml, and 9 offenders recorded extremely high BAC levels between 301 mg/100 ml and 550 mg/100 ml. Police said all the offenders will be produced before the court for further legal action. Malkajgiri Traffic Police warned that driving under the influence of alcohol is a serious offence. If any person drives in a drunken condition and causes a fatal accident, a case will be registered under Section 105 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (Culpable Homicide Not Amounting to Murder). The offence carries a maximum punishment of 10 years of imprisonment along with a fine. Meanwhile, police also released details of drunk-and-drive cases disposed of in courts last week. From March 8 to March 14, 2026, a total of 238 cases were disposed of in courts. Among them, 8 persons received both fine and jail punishment, 11 persons were given fine along with social service, while 219 persons were imposed fine only.

BRS Leaders and Locals Perform Milk Abhishekam to MLA's Portrait for Sanctioning Development Funds in Venkat Reddy Nagar Division

Under the leadership of Former Division President Dr. B. V. Chari, KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): "Local residents have expressed happiness over the sanctioning of funds for several important development works in various areas of Venkat Reddy Nagar Division. As a mark of gratitude, BRS leaders and local residents performed a milk abhishekam to the portrait of Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy, who played a key role in securing the funds for these development projects. The program was organized under the leadership of former division president Dr. B. V. Chari. "Development works worth ₹8.36 crores covering 15 projects have been sanctioned in the Venkat Reddy Nagar area. These include construction of drainage systems, CC roads, box drains, community facilities, and development of the burial ground. Once these works are completed, basic infrastructure in the colonies is expected to improve significantly, providing greater convenience to the residents. "At the program organized under the leadership of former division president Dr. B. V. Chari, BRS senior leader Pasula Prabhakar Reddy attended as the chief guest and expressed appreciation for the efforts made by Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy in bringing development funds to the division. "BRS leaders



Srinivas Reddy, Narendra Raju, Ganesh, Dinesh, Madduri Srinivas, Santosh, Balakrishna, Abbu, Kaiser, Naveen and women leaders Radhamma, Yadamma, Rajyalakshmi, Rekha, Aishwarya, and Zarina participated in the event. On the occasion, sweets were distributed at the Venkat Reddy Nagar Bus Stop premises to celebrate the sanctioning of funds. "Residents of the area also expressed their gratitude to the MLA for supporting the development of the division.

Free Medical Camp Inaugurated by Uppal Constituency Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy and Ex Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): "A free medical camp was organized under the supervision of Yashoda Hospital at HMDA Layout in Uppal Bhagyaath. Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy and former Uppal Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy attended the program as chief guests and formally inaugurated the medical camp. "Speaking on the occasion, Parameshwar Reddy and Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy stated that free medical camps are highly beneficial to the public and play an important role in improving community health. They appreciated the efforts of Viplav Reddy, along with the management of Wave Saloon and Turbo Fit Gym, for organizing the mega free medical camp with the aim of serving society and prioritizing public health. "They further said that experienced medical specialists were conducting various health check-ups at the camp. The services included general health examinations, blood tests, blood pressure (BP) checks, screening for joint pains, diabetes, cholesterol levels, as well as eye, ear, and skin examinations. Free medical advice and medicines were also being provided to those in need. "The event was attended by medical camp organizer Viplav Reddy, representatives of Wave Saloon and Turbo Fit Gym, Uppal Bhagyaath Association members



Srinivas Rao, Eega Santosh Mudiraj, Chandrashekhar Reddy, Sudhakar Reddy, Vamsidhar Reddy, Ravinder Reddy, Charla Sudhakar Reddy, Lingampally Ramakrishna, Tummala Devi Reddy, Salla Prabhakar Reddy, Poojari Hanumanthu, Srinivas, Ashok Reddy, Prabhakar, Narasimha Reddy, Venugopal Reddy, Prashanth Kumar, Bhaskar Reddy, Harish, Suresh, Pawan, Shyam, P.C. Rao, and medical staff.

Sri Chaitanya School Inaugurated at Chengicherla

NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 15, (Indian Chronicle): "CHENGICHERLA: Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy inaugurated Sri Chaitanya School (Techno Curriculum) at Shiva Durga Nagar Colony in Chengicherla. During the visit, the MLA inspected the school premises and appreciated the educational facilities provided, including modern classrooms, laboratories, sports infrastructure and a well-equipped library. Speaking on the occasion, Bandari Lakshma Reddy said that providing quality education to students plays a crucial role in the development of society. He stated that the school, which offers education through modern technological methods along with IIT and NEET foundation programmes, will contribute significantly to shaping the future of students. School Chairman Buchi Reddy, along with BRS party leaders, activists and others, attended the programme.



Former Malkajgiri District Youth Congress President Kandi Shraavan Reddy Participates in Ramzan Tohfa Distribution

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): "On the occasion of the holy month of Ramzan, former Medchal-Malkajgiri District Youth Congress President Kandi Shraavan Reddy and Ramanthapur Division President Mohammed Rafiq participated in a Ramzan Tohfa distribution program held at the Qutb Shahi Ek Minar Mosque, located beside the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium, under Habsiguda Division. "The program was organized following an invitation from Muslim minority brothers of the area. During the event, Ramzan Tohfa (gift packs) sent by the State Government were distributed to poor Muslim brothers and sisters as per the instructions of Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy. "On the occasion, the leaders extended advance Ramzan greetings to the Muslim



Habsiguda Division President Gannaram Vijay Kumar, committee members Habib Jaffer Bin Hussain, Mohammed Samiullah Farooqi, Mohammed Giasuddin, Khazim Ali, Sabir Pasha, Mohammed Irshad, Asif Ali Khan, Mohammed Ayub, and Congress leaders Mohammed Javed, Fayaz, Khaleel, Dharma Naik, Vasu Naik, Gundu Rajanna, Malu Naik, Gangadhar Yadav, Murali Krishna, Sai Kiran, Babu Rao, Dharma Raju, Rama Rao and others participated in the program.

Vijayalakshmi meets State Women's Congress President

Jagityal Correspondent, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): "Tatiparti Vijayalakshmi Devender Reddy, President of Jagityal District Women's Congress and former Municipal Chairperson, met Errabelli Swarna, the newly appointed President of Telangana State Women's Congress, at Gandhi Bhavan on Sunday and congratulated her. "Vijayalakshmi said Swarna, who has taken over as the new President, had previously served as the President of Warangal District Congress Party and as the Mayor of Warangal. She said it was a positive development that Swarna, a senior woman leader with seniority in the party, has been appointed as the President of the State Women's Congress. "Vijayalakshmi expressed confidence that under Swarna's leadership, the Women's Congress in the state would continue to be at the forefront, just like in the past. She said they would take steps to strengthen the Women's Congress in the district, in line with the new President's instructions. "Vijayalakshmi praised the efforts, initiative, and encouragement provided by Mogli Suneeta Rao, the former



State President, and wished her greater heights in the future. She expressed confidence that the party would recognize Suneeta Rao's services and provide her with a suitable position. "Vijayalakshmi Devender Reddy said they would move forward with a plan to make the Jagityal District Women's Congress an example in the state, under the leadership of the new President Swarna.

Uppal Youth Congress President Arun Patel Participates as Chief Guest at Karate Belt Grading Ceremony

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): "Uppal Constituency Youth Congress President Akarapu Arun Patel attended the Karate Belt Grading Ceremony as the chief guest on Sunday at the Kamakshipuram GHMC Playground. The event was organized by the Japan Karate Association of India. On the occasion, Arun Patel distributed certificates and belts to the children who demonstrated outstanding performance. Speaking at the event, he appreciated the efforts of coach B. Naveen Nayak, who has been providing free karate training to children for the past 10 years. He praised the coach for guiding students towards national and international levels while instilling discipline, self-defense skills, and confidence. "Arun Patel assured that necessary facilities such as lighting and ground maintenance would be arranged at the playground. He also extended special thanks to the parents for encouraging their children to participate in karate training. "He encouraged children to join the Naveen Nayak Karate Academy to learn self-defense and discipline and grow into talented individuals. Grand Master Sudarshan, Master Vishwanatham, colony residents, Youth Congress District General Secretary Kishore, along with Shiva, Raghu, and other party workers participated in the program.



Awareness Seminar on POCSO and Other Laws

Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Reporter March 15 Indian Chronicle: "As per the directions of the District Legal Services Authority, Khammam, an awareness seminar on various laws was organized at ZPSS High School in Konijerla Mandal as part of the International Women's Day week celebrations. "During the program, awareness was provided to students studying TOSS 10th Class and Intermediate about the POCSO Act, which ensures protection and safety for girls below 18 years of age. Participants were also informed about important helpline numbers including Sakhi Women Helpline - 181, National Helpline - 15100, Cyber Crime Helpline - 1930, Child Helpline - 1098, and Police Helpline - 121. "The speakers explained laws related to child marriage, child labour, and domestic violence, creating awareness among women, elderly people, and children. "On this occasion, TOSS Coordinator Satish Reddy, Adarsha Mandal Samaikhya President Lakshmi, and Adarsha Mandal



Samaikhya Farmers' Association President B. Ramadevi were felicitated. "The program was attended by Para Legal Volunteer T. Madhavi Latha, teachers, and students.

Teacher Brutally Beats Student in Tiryani, Sparks Outrage



Indian Chronicle" Jade Srinivas. February, 15. "An incident where a teacher allegedly beat a student severely has created a stir in Lingiguda School of Tiryani mandal in Komaram Bheem Asifabad district. According to reports, the teacher assaulted the student over a minor issue, leaving injuries on her back. "The matter came to light after photos related to the incident went viral on social media. Parents and villagers have expressed strong anger over the incident. They stated that it is unacceptable for a teacher, who is supposed to educate and guide students, to behave in such a violent manner. "According to the parents, the teacher reportedly lost his temper over a small mistake made by the student and beat her indiscriminately. They have demanded that the education department immediately conduct an inquiry and take strict action against those responsible. "They also stated that such incidents can have a serious psychological impact on students. The education department has earlier clarified that corporal punishment in schools is strictly prohibited and warned that it can harm the health and safety of students.

Demand to Release Pending Fee Reimbursement for Students: Nerdham Bhaskar Goud

Former TRS State Secretary Nerdham Bhaskar Goud Participates in "Fee Poru Deeksha" KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle): "Former TRS State Secretary Nerdham Bhaskar Goud participated in the "Fee Poru Deeksha" protest held near Indira Park, demanding the immediate release of pending fee reimbursements for students in Telangana. The protest was organized under the leadership of Telangana BC Association President Jajula Srinivas Goud and Youth President Vikram Goud. "Speaking on the occasion, Bhaskar Goud demanded that the Telangana State Government led by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy immediately release the pending fee reimbursement funds and ensure that every eligible student receives the financial support without delay. He warned that if the government fails to act, student organizations will intensify their protests. "He stated that they would stand firmly on behalf of the students and continue their fight until the required fee reimbursement is released. Bhaskar Goud also questioned the government, asking how it could spend thousands of crores on projects like the Musi River beautification while claiming it does not have ₹7,000 crore to clear the pending fee reimbursement dues. "He further demanded that the government release a white paper on welfare expenditure over the past two years. "The protest witnessed participation from several BC and women's organizations, along with leaders such as Malkajgiri MP Etela Rajender, former Governor Dattatreya, former Speaker Venugopala Chary, and former Minister Srinivas Goud. Protesters raised strong slogans against the government and demanded immediate resolution of students' issues.

Dawat-e-Iftar Organized Under the Leadership of Senior Congress Leader M.A. Jaleel Pasha



****KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle):****A grand Dawat-e-Iftar program was organized under the leadership of senior Congress leader M.A. Jaleel Pasha at Jaleel Manzil, Silver Fitness Gym, Srinagar Colony, Ramanthapur in the Uppal constituency. "On the occasion of the holy month of Ramzan, a large number of local residents, party leaders, and workers participated in the event and broke their fast together. The program reflected the core values upheld by the Indian National Congress — unity, harmony, and respect for all religions." Participants shared Iftar with dates and fruits and later offered Maghrib Namaz to-



gether, strengthening the spirit of brotherhood and communal harmony. "Speaking on the occasion, M.A. Jaleel Pasha said that such gatherings symbolize peace, unity, and communal harmony, and demonstrate the Congress party's commitment to building an inclusive and united India. He also conveyed advance Ramzan greetings to the Muslim community and wished that the festival be celebrated with joy, unity, and brotherhood.

Training Should Be Utilized Effectively to Conduct Census Properly: District Collector Anudeep Durishetty

*** "Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Reporter March 15 Indian Chronicle:****District Collector and District Chief Census Officer Anudeep Durishetty said that officials should make effective use of the training and conduct the Census-2027 in a systematic manner. On Sunday, the Collector inaugurated a three-day training program for officials at the Collectorate conference hall. "Speaking on the occasion, Collector Anudeep Durishetty stated that census data plays a crucial role in the formulation of various government welfare schemes, delimitation of constituencies, and the voter registration process. He instructed officials to carry out the selection of enumeration blocks carefully. "The Collector said that for the first time, the census process will be conducted digitally, and citizens will also have the opportunity to submit their details online through a web-based system. He explained that in the first phase, the house listing process will be conducted from May 11, 2026, to June 9, 2026, while the second phase of the census enumeration will take place in February 2027." Officials attending the training include charge officers such as Tahsildars, additional charge officers including Mandal Parishad Development Officers, municipal commissioners and managers from municipal areas. Training will be provided by **Joint Director of the Census Directorate Srikanth and



Master Trainer Ravikumar. "District Census Officer A. Srinivas coordinated the training program and explained the importance of the census and the role of various officials involved. "Additional Collector P. Srinivasa Reddy, District Revenue Officer A. Padmashri, District Panchayat Officer Rambabu and other officials participated in the program.

Pasumarthi Appointed AAP Khammam District Working President & Co-Convener



****Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Reporter March 15 Indian Chronicle:****As per the directions of Priyanka Kakkar, Telangana In-charge and national spokesperson of the Aam Aadmi Party, the Telangana state committee has appointed a new district leadership team for Khammam. "Under the leadership of State Convener Hema Sudarshan Jiloiu, Working President Burra Ramu Goud, and State General Secretary Sheikh Ansari, the Khammam district committee has been constituted. "Pasumarthi Srinivas, a resident of Nelakondapalli, has been appointed as the District Co-Convener and Working President of AAP in Khammam district. "Speaking on the occasion, Pasumarthi Srinivas thanked the central and state leadership for giving him the responsibility. He said he would continuously fight for public issues in the district. He alleged that despite having three ministers from the district, development has not progressed and people are facing several problems. "He further stated that the party would stand with the victims of Velugumatla and, if necessary, approach the court to seek justice for them. He also announced that committees would soon be formed in all mandals across Khammam district to strengthen the party at the grassroots level. "He shared these views while addressing the media.

INTUC Union General Body Meeting of Public Health & Medical Employees



****Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Reporter March 15 Indian Chronicle:****A general body meeting of the Public Health and Medical Employees Union (INTUC-affiliated Union No. 3194) was held in Khammam district following the call given by the state committee. "District Congress Committee President Nuthi Satyanarayana Goud, Khammam City Congress President Nagandla Deepak Chowdary, and INTUC Khammam District President Kotha Seetharamulu attended the meeting as chief guests. "Leaders of the Public Health and Medical Employees Union who participated in the meeting included State Working President Shyam Sundar, General Secretary Venkatesh Reddy, Nalgonda District President Biksham, Suryapet District President Manoj Reddy, and Kothagudem District President Srinivasa Rao. "Senior leaders K.V. Rama Rao, Konda

Murali, Appa Rao, M.D. Mohinuddin, and Anuradha attended the meeting as honorary advisors. The meeting was presided over by K.V. Rama Rao. "During the meeting, a new committee was unanimously elected. Vanam Rangadham was unanimously elected as the President of the Khammam District INTUC Public Health and Medical Employees Union.



Former Uppal Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy Inaugurates Punarvika Grameena Mela



****KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle):****Former Uppal Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy participated in the Grameena Mela organized by the Uppal Mudiraj Association. She attended the inauguration of the Punarvika Grameena Mela held on Sunday as the chief guest and formally inaugurated the event. "Speaking on the occasion, Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy said that the Punarvika Grameena Mela serves as a great platform to showcase the talents of rural communities. She stated that the event helps introduce products made by farmers, artisans, and women's self-help groups to the public, thereby contributing to rural economic development. She also emphasized that such fairs help preserve culture and traditions while guiding the path toward rural development, and called upon everyone to support and make the mela a grand success. "Lingampalli Ramakrishna, Tummala Devi Reddy, Soma Balamani, Bazaar Naveen



Goud, Rangula Shekhar, Bachcha Ram, and members of various women's groups also participated in the program.

Work Towards Achieving Political Power



Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, March 15: The 92nd birth anniversary celebrations of Kanshi Ram were organized grandly in Nacharam Division under the leadership of the Bahujan Samaj Party Uppal Constituency unit. The program was conducted under the ??????ship of Constituency President Mindrala Narsing Rao. "Medchal-Malkajgiri District In-charges Goud Sudarshan and Ragiri Gnaneshwar attended the event as chief guests. They paid floral tributes to the portrait of Kanshi Ram and remembered his contributions towards empowering the Bahujan community and strengthening social justice movements in the country. "Speaking on the occasion, the leaders said that Kanshi Ram dedicated his entire life for the upliftment of the oppressed and marginalized communities. They emphasized that Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and other Bahujan sections must unite and work collectively to achieve political power and social equality. They also highlighted that Kanshi Ram's ideology continues to inspire millions of people across the country to strive for self-respect, representation and rights in

governance. "Constituency President Mindrala Narsing Rao, while addressing the gathering, called upon party workers and supporters to follow the path shown by Kanshi Ram and strengthen the Bahujan movement at the grassroots level. He stressed that only through unity, awareness and organized efforts can Bahujan communities achieve their rightful place in political leadership. "Senior leader Goud Manjula, Mindrala Anitha, Asia Begum, Bahujan artist and leader Ramaswamy, Mindrala Navya Sri and several other party leaders and activists participated in the program and paid their respects. "Leaders Leave for Public Meeting "On the occasion of Kanshi Ram's birth anniversary, a massive public meeting was organized at Badangpet under the banner of the Bahujan Samaj Party. Party leaders and cadres from the Uppal constituency attended the meeting in large numbers. Under the leadership of Constituency President Mindrala Narsing Rao, party members departed in vehicles to participate in the grand public gathering and express their commitment to strengthening the Bahujan movement.

Vijayender Reddy Unanimously Elected President of Venkata Sai Nagar Welfare Association



****KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 15 (Indian Chronicle):****The elections for the Venkata Sai Nagar Welfare Association, located under the Ramanthapur Bhagyaath area, concluded unanimously on Sunday. The election process was conducted peacefully in the presence of colony residents. "Nominations for the Welfare Association elections were received on Sunday. Young local leader Vijayender Reddy (Chintu) filed his nomination for the post. As no other candidates submitted nominations, the election committee declared Vijayender Reddy elected unanimously. "The nomination process took place at the Beerappa Temple in the presence of colony residents. Colony elders, youth, and women participated in large numbers during the event. Residents



congratulated Vijayender Reddy and urged him to work for the development of the colony. "Speaking on the occasion, Vijayender Reddy said he would focus on improving the colony's development and infrastructure, including sanitation, roads, and drainage issues. He assured that with the support and cooperation of the residents, he would work towards further development of Venkata Sai Nagar. "Residents expressed happiness that the election process was conducted peacefully. Locals stated that the elections concluding without any contest reflected the unity among the colony residents. "On this occasion, colony elders and youth congratulated Vijayender Reddy and expressed confidence that he would work towards resolving the colony's issues. "Election Committee Chairman Ramesh Goud and committee members Ravi, Sanjeev, Ravi Sharma, Shankar, Srinivas Goud Swamy, along with colony residents, participated in the program.

Canada PM Carney denies retracting Davos comments in talk with Trump



GNS News Agency, March 15

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said he spoke to U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday (January 26, 2026) but denied he had retracted comments last week that irritated the U.S. President. U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that during the call, Mr. Carney "was very aggressively walking back" some of the remarks he made during a speech in Davos in which

he urged nations to accept the end of a rules-based global order. Mr. Carney — citing U.S. tariffs on key Canadian imports — is pushing to diversify trade away from the United States, which takes around 70% of all Canadian exports.

Mr. Trump reacted unhappily to Mr. Carney's Davos speech, saying Canada only existed because of the United States, and later said he would impose a 100% tariff on Canadian imports if Ottawa concluded a trade deal with China. "To be absolutely clear, and I said this to the President — I meant what I said in Davos," Mr. Carney told reporters. The U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade deal is due to be reviewed later this year, a process that Mr. Carney says might explain some of the comments Trump has made recently. Mr. Carney said he told Mr. Trump that "Canada was responding to the tariffs by building partnerships abroad ... (and) building at home, and we're prepared to respond positively by building that new relationship through USMCA. He understood that." As Mr. Carney walked away, reporters asked specifically whether he had walked back the Davos comments during the conversation. "No," he replied.

Trump warns Iraq against returning former PM al-Maliki to power amid worries about Iran influence

Mr. Trump made the threat days after the dominant political bloc known as the Coordination Framework, a collection of Shiite parties, announced it was backing the nomination of Mr. al-Maliki, who the U.S. administration views as too close to Iran. "Last time Maliki was in power, the Country descended into poverty and total chaos. That should not be allowed to happen again," Mr. Trump said in a social media post announcing his opposition to Mr. al-Maliki. "Because of his insane policies and ideologies, if elected, the United States of America will no longer help Iraq and, if we are not there to help, Iraq has ZERO chance of Success, Prosperity, or Freedom." Mr. Trump's intervention into Iraqi politics comes at a fraught moment for him in West Asia as he weighs carrying out new strikes on Iraq's neighbour Iran, which has maintained deep influence in Iraq's government since the U.S. ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Mr. Trump has left open the possibility of military action in response to Tehran's deadly crackdown on recent protests against the Islamic government. Al-Maliki's troubled relationship with Washington

Caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's bloc won the largest share of seats in November's parliamentary elections. But he stepped aside earlier this month after he was unable to form a government. That cleared the field for Mr. al-Maliki after the two had competed for the backing of the Coordination Framework. Mr. al-Maliki, who first served as prime minister in 2006, is the only Iraqi prime minister to serve two terms since the U.S. toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003. Mr. al-Maliki's bid for a third term failed after he was accused of monopolising power and alienating the country's sizable Sunni and Kurdish populations. When he came to power in May 2006, Mr. al-Maliki was initially embraced by President George W. Bush. Mr. al-Maliki took over as prime minister months after the bombing of the al-Askari shrine, a significant Shiite mosque. It was a moment that deepened sectarian tension in Iraq and sparked a period of intense violence in the country.

But within months, U.S. officials soured on Mr. al-Maliki. They saw his government as too often favouring Shiite factions and alienating Sunni populations, which exacerbated the security crisis. For years, concerns were frequently raised in Washington about Mr. al-Maliki's closeness to Iran and his ability to govern independently of Tehran's influence. By 2014, the Obama administration had lost confidence in al-Maliki's ability to manage the security situation, particularly the rise of the Islamic State group, which had seized large swaths of the country.

The Trump administration began publicly signalling its concerns about the political situation in Iraq in recent days, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio telling caretaker Prime Minister al-Sudani in a phone call Sunday (January 25, 2026) that the U.S. was concerned about a pro-Iran government taking root in Iraq. "The Secretary emphasised that a government controlled by Iran cannot successfully put Iraq's



own interests first, keep Iraq out of regional conflicts, or advance the mutually beneficial partnership between the United States and Iraq," said State Department principal deputy spokesperson Tommy Pigott in a statement. Hussain Abdul-Hussain, a research fellow focused on West Asia at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank, said that Mr. Trump's public opposition creates a difficult hurdle for Mr. al-Maliki to overcome. "But this is Iraq, so never say never," said Abdul-Hussain. "And this was a guy whose political life was supposed to have expired many, many years ago, and yet Maliki is still here." The U.S. also has been pushing Baghdad to disarm Iran-backed groups operating inside Iraq — a difficult proposition, given the political power that many of them hold. Trump's intervention comes at a fraught moment with Iran's not the first time that Trump has intervened in another country's politics since returning to office. He also offered strong backing last year for right-wing candidates in Argentina, Honduras, and Poland. The long-frayed relationship between the U.S. and Iran remains tense after Mr. Trump earlier this month repeatedly threatened Tehran with military action if his administration found the Islamic Republic was using deadly force against anti-government protesters.

He then said he was holding off on strikes after claiming that Iran had halted the execution of some 800 people detained in the protests — something Iran's top prosecutor, Mohammad Movahedi, has strongly denied. Mr. Trump may have been at least temporarily dissuaded from carrying out a strike because of a shift in the U.S. naval presence from the Middle East to South America. The aircraft carrier USS Gerald Ford was redirected from the Mediterranean Sea in November to support operations targeting drug smugglers in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific as well as this month's capture of former Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro. But the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and three accompanying warships have arrived in the Middle East, U.S. Central Command confirmed Monday (January 26, 2026). That's raised anew speculation that Mr. Trump could soon opt to order airstrikes on Iran for its crackdown on protesters.

Rubio warns Iraq on Iran ties as Maliki sets return



GNS News Agency, March 15

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned Iraq against a pro-Iranian government as the expected return of Nouri al-Maliki as Prime Minister stirs Washington's concern. Mr. Maliki, who left power in 2014 following heated pressure from the United States, has been chosen by Iraq's largest Shiite bloc, which would put him in line to be nominated Prime Minister. Mr. Rubio, in a telephone call with incumbent Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, voiced hope the next government will work to make Iraq "a force for stability, prosperity and security in the Middle East."

"The secretary emphasised that a government controlled by Iran cannot successfully put Iraq's own interests first, keep Iraq out of regional conflicts or advance the mutually beneficial partnership between the United States and Iraq," Mr. Rubio said, according to State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott. A pro-Iranian government in Iraq would be a rare boon for Tehran's clerical state after it suffered major setbacks at home and in the region. The Islamic republic has killed thousands of Iranians since mass protests erupted in late December. Since the October 7, 2023 attacks, Israel has hit Iran both with strikes inside the country and heavy blows against Tehran's Lebanese ally Hezbollah, while Iran lost its main Arab ally with the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. An Iraqi political source told AFP that the United States had conveyed that it "holds a negative view of previous governments led by former prime min-

ister Maliki." In a letter, U.S. representatives said that while the selection of the Prime Minister is an Iraqi decision, "the United States will make its own sovereign decisions regarding the next government in line with American interests." The United States wields key leverage over Iraq as the country's oil export revenue is largely held at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York, in an arrangement reached after the 2003 US invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

Hyderabad-based Dvara E-Registry wins Fintech for Bharat Award 2025

Hyderabad: Dvara E-Registry, an agri-fintech firm headquartered in Hyderabad, has been conferred the Fintech for Bharat Award at the Global Inclusive Finance Summit Awards 2025, instituted by ACCESS Development Services in partnership with HSBC India, under the aegis of the Department of Financial Services, Government of India. The award recognises Dvara E-Registry's contribution to strengthening agricultural finance through the use of data, technology, and climate-aligned intelligence to improve credit access for small and marginal farmers, a press release said. Dvara E-Registry leverages GIS mapping, remote sensing, and AI-driven analytics to digitise land parcels and generate granular farm-level intelligence. Doordrishti, its digital platform for farmers and FPOs, digitises farmer profiles, land records, farm activities, and market linkages, enabling better operational efficiency and data-driven decision-making. KhetScore, its AI-driven farm intelligence engine, evaluates parcel-level crop and farm risk using historical data and real-time satellite monitoring across multiple parameters, enabling alternative credit assessment and early risk signals.

Teens underwhelmed by France's social media ban for under-15s



GNS News Agency, March 15

Teens and tweens were split Tuesday over a looming ban on social media for under-15s in France, with some admitting the risks of overuse while others laughed off the measure and vowed to dodge it. France's National Assembly passed a bill in a marathon overnight session that would impose a minimum age for using social media, becoming the first country in Europe to follow Australia, which banned under-16s from TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook and other sites last year. Parents keen to curb their kids' phone use cautiously welcomed the measure, which was championed by French President Emmanuel Macron and must now pass the Senate. The legislation's targets themselves were divided, with some acknowledging the dangers social media can bring and others venting their incomprehension and plotting ways to get around a ban. Esther, a high school student in Paris, said the idea was "super" on paper.

"But the problem is, when (kids) turn 15, they're going to get submerged by this wave. That's the year you start high school, and you need to be focussing on other things besides social media. They should ban it for under-14s instead," she said. And not all social networks are equal, she insisted. "The ones where you scroll non-stop (should be banned), because that's what ruins your brain," she said. But other apps "are key for social life." That view is shared by 11-year-old middle-schooler Aya, also from Paris. "Social media makes some kids crazy, they stop doing anything

else. And there are disgusting things on TikTok, it's not appropriate for kids," she said. But "at the same time, it's important in an emergency. I use WhatsApp to talk to my parents. They're not going to ban WhatsApp, are they?" WhatsApp and other private messaging platforms are not covered by the ban. At a high school in Marseille, one 16-year-old said she had already imposed a ban on herself. "I deleted TikTok, it was taking up too much of my time," she said.

"I couldn't get my homework done, my head was always somewhere else... Honestly, I think it's a great idea." An August 2025 poll found 79 percent of parents and 67 percent of young people in France favoured a social media ban for under-15s. Polling firm Odoxa found 46 percent of young people said they had felt low self-esteem comparing themselves to others on social networks, and 18 percent said they had been harassed or insulted online. Parents meanwhile questioned the feasibility of the ban, while some said more attention needed to be focussed on prevention. A ban "is a start, but it's not enough", said Emmanuelle Poudreas, whose son Clement took his own life in 2024 at age 15 after being cyberbullied on WhatsApp.

"We need the state to mobilise at every level to prepare our young people to be digital citizens," she told AFP. "How can we ban digital tools in middle and high schools when regional governments are financing those tools and they are being provided to students to use?" National parents' federation PEEP raised similar concerns.

There's this impression we've solved a problem. No, We've become aware of a problem, but we haven't fixed it," the organisation's president, Emmanuel Garot, told AFP. He called for more education on the risks of social media and stricter regulation of tech companies and "their damned algorithms". "Let's not fool ourselves, kids are inventive. They'll find ways to get around the ban soon enough - VPN or other social networks we barely know about." Ylies, a third-year middle-schooler in Paris who uses Snapchat and TikTok, already has a plan. "What am I supposed to do? Stare at the wall?" he said. "I'll just open a new account and say I was born in 2004. If they ask me for ID, I'll use my brother's or one of his friends'."

EU says WhatsApp to face stricter content rules

GNS News Agency, March 15

WhatsApp is set to face greater EU scrutiny after the European Commission on Monday added the platform to its list of digital firms big enough to face stricter content rules. The Meta-owned service joined Facebook, TikTok, X and others in a list of 26 "very large online platforms" after its "channels" feature passed 45 million monthly active users in the European Union. The channels feature will face tougher obligations under the bloc's Digital Services Act (DSA) because it is considered a broadcasting feature distinct from its core messaging service. "These obligations include duly assessing and mitigating any systemic risks, such as violations of fundamental human rights and freedom of expression, electoral manipulation, the dissemination of illegal content and privacy concerns," said a commission statement. WhatsApp will have until late May to comply with the content law, which has been labelled as "sponsorship" and discriminatory by US President Donald Trump's government. The platform said in its latest DSA transparency report published last year that its channels had around 51.7 million monthly active users in the 27-nation EU.

WhatsApp is already in the EU's crosshairs over its AI features, with an antitrust probe opened in December to determine if the way Meta is rolling out the tool breaches the bloc's competition rules. The EU has stepped up regulatory enforcement against the world's biggest digital platforms, including many American platforms, despite strong US pushback and threats of retaliation. Last month, it im-



posed its first-ever DSA fine, hitting Elon Musk's X with a 120-million-euro (\$140-million) penalty for violating transparency rules, and on Monday it opened a new probe into the generation of sexualised deepfake images by X's AI tool Grok. Meta's other platforms already face the risk of heavy fines under DSA. In October 2025, the EU accused Facebook and Instagram of failing to grant researchers sufficient access to public data and not providing user-friendly ways to flag illegal content or challenge content-moderation decisions. Brussels is also investigating Facebook and Instagram over fears they are not doing enough to combat the addictive nature of the platforms for children. And under the DSA's sister competition law known as the Digital Markets Act, Brussels slapped a 200-million-euro fine on Meta, which has appealed.

'Keep dreaming': NATO chief says Europe can't defend itself without U.S.



GNS News Agency, March 15

NATO chief Mark Rutte warned that Europe cannot defend itself without the United States, in the face of calls for the continent to stand on its own feet after tensions over Greenland. U.S. President Donald Trump roiled the transatlantic alliance by threatening to seize the autonomous Danish territory — before backing off after talks with Mr. Rutte last week. The diplomatic crisis gave fresh momentum to those advocating for Europe to take a tougher line against Mr. Trump and break its military reliance on Washington. "If anyone thinks here again, that the European Union, or Europe as a whole, can defend itself without the U.S. — keep on dreaming. You can't," Mr. Rutte told lawmakers at the European Parliament.

He said that EU countries would have to double defence spending from the 5% NATO target agreed last year to 10% and spend "billions and billions" on building nuclear arms. "You would lose the ultimate guarantor of our freedom, which is the U.S. nuclear umbrella," the former Dutch Prime Minister said. "So hey, good luck."

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot hit back at the NATO chief's statements, posting on X on Monday (January 27, 2026) evening that "Europeans can and must take responsibility for their own security". Mr. Rutte insisted that U.S. commitment to NATO's Article Five mutual defence clause remained "total", but that the United States expected European countries to keep spending more on their militaries. "They need a secure Euro-Atlantic, and they also need a secure Europe. So the U.S. has every interest in NATO," he said. The NATO head reiterated his repeated praise for Mr. Trump for pressuring reluctant European al-

lies to step up defence spending. He also appeared to knock back a suggestion floated by the EU's defence commissioner Andrius Kubilius earlier this month for a possible European defence force that could replace U.S. troops on the continent. "It will make things more complicated. I think (Russian President Vladimir) Putin will love it. So think again," Mr. Rutte said. On Greenland, Rutte said he had agreed with Mr. Trump that NATO would "take more responsibility for the defence of the Arctic", but it was up to Greenlandic and Danish authorities to negotiate over U.S. presence on the island. "I have no mandate to negotiate on behalf of Denmark, so I didn't, and I will not," he said. Mr. Rutte reiterated that he had stressed to Mr. Trump the cost paid by NATO allies in Afghanistan after the U.S. leader caused outrage by playing down their contribution. "For every two American soldiers who paid the ultimate price, one soldier of an ally or a partner, a NATO ally or a partner country, did not return home," he said.

Udupi boat tragedy death toll rises to three

GNS News Agency, March 15

A woman who was in critical condition succumbed on Tuesday, raising the death toll of the Udupi boat tragedy to three. She had been on a ventilator since Monday and passed away on Tuesday, police said and gave her name as Disha, 23, daughter of Shivanna, from Jalapuri, Mysuru.

Two persons, Shankarappa, 27, and Sindhu, 23, had died on the spot after the boat, carrying 14 persons hailing from Mysuru, capsized at an estuary near the Hangarkatte ship building area on Monday.

The police have registered a case against the owner and the captain of the boat after the incident. On January 27, Udupi Deputy Commissioner T.K. Swaroopa said that all tourist boats in the district should submit the necessary documents and register with the Tourism Department within 45 days, and obtain permission to operate. Ms. Swaroopa said that tourist boats that have obtained permission should renew their permits every year.

Hark! A new health world order?



It is what we have criticised time and again in our columns, but things came to a head with the complete withdrawal of the United States from the World Health Organization. It's not the clean break as its President thought it might be when he announced the withdrawal a year earlier, as soon as he stepped into office. "The U.S. owes more than \$130 million to the global health agency," according to WHO. And the Trump administration officials acknowledge that they haven't finished working out some issues, such as lost access to data from other countries that could give America an early warning of a new pandemic. Dr. Ronald Nahass, president of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, called the U.S. withdrawal "shortsighted and misguided" and "scientifically reckless."

The U.S. has ceased official participation in WHO-sponsored committees, leadership bodies, governance structures and technical working groups. That would seem to include the WHO group that assesses what flu strains are circulating and makes critical decisions about updating flu shots. Already, the State of California has opted to join the WHO, unwilling to lose out on early pandemic, epidemic and outbreak news, which America will now no longer have access to.

Perhaps, as Canadian premier Mark Carney said at Davos, earlier this month, this will also herald a new world order in health care. Mr. Carney argued that the old system reliant on American hegemony will not return, and he urged middle powers to form new, value-driven coalitions to avoid being sidelined. While disruptions will ensue, it should be possible for the comity of nations to rally together and ensure that U.S. exiting the WHO will be a loss for the latter alone, over a period of time. We now move on to yet another sector where America remains blind - climate change. Climate change fuels disasters, but deaths don't add up argues this article. While climate change is turbocharging extreme heat events, floods and intensifying winter, the calculation of the impact on human health is rather a complex issue, the authors reason.

The math is apparently not simple. Overall, apparently, mortality from extreme weather disasters has fallen over recent decades. More than 2.3 million people died from weather-related events between 1970 and 2025, according to an AFP analysis of EM-DAT, a global disaster database run by the Belgium-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED). The death toll between 2015 and 2025 reached 305,156, down from 354,428 in the previous decade, the analysis showed. "It's not because the events haven't become more dangerous. It's because we have become a lot better at coping with them," Marina Romanello, executive director of the Lancet Countdown, a climate-health monitoring programme, has said. For more interesting insights on the subject, do hit on the link above. Further on this, the world is not ready for rise in extreme heat. As per this article, nearly 3.8 billion people could face extreme heat by 2050 and while tropical countries will bear the brunt, cooler regions will also need to adapt, scientists said. Demand for cooling will "drastically" increase in giant countries like Brazil, Indonesia and Nigeria, where hundreds

Now, fresh battle with microbes

The very best news this past week has been about something India has planned to do, should have done long ago, and more effectively at that. The Centre unveiled version 2 of the national action plan on antimicrobial resistance. For a country with a staggering burden of AMR, this can be nothing but fantastic news. The very fact that the government has decided to launch an update of its policy is indicative of the recognition that the existing policy is not working, or working in certain select segments. For one, the policy has managed to facilitate a country-wide network of testing labs, aided, in good measure by the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic too. A ban on the animal growth factor Colistin also meant there were huge benefits for the country, which we will continue to harvest. But beyond this, India's AMR stewardship had neither teeth nor tongue; it did not adequately address the multiple causes - including lack of awareness, misuse and overuse of antibiotics and contamination of natural resources.

As a result, the recent GLASS report released by the World Health Organisation on antimicrobial resistance trends globally, showed that in India, one in three people are resistant to drugs, as against the global trend of one in 6 people. Meanwhile another international study has also indicated an alarming prevalence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) among patients in India, raising concerns about the country's preparedness to deal with infections that no longer respond to standard antibiotics. The study, published in Lancet's eClinicalMedicine journal, was conducted across India, The Netherlands, Italy and the United States of America. It examined more than 1,200 patients undergoing ERCP procedures, using rectal and nasal swabs to determine the presence of harmful bacteria resistant to multiple antibiotics. According to the analysis, India recorded the highest proportion of multidrug-resistant organisms among participating countries at 83%, compared to 31% in Italy, 20% in the USA and 10% in The Netherlands.

The government of India, objected to this conclusions of the study, arguing that the extrapolations from a small sample size on to the entire population were erroneous, and while India had an issue to sort, the problem was not this huge. Bindu Shajan Perappadan reported on this angle: India's drug-resistant infection rates lower than U.S., Europe despite higher microbial colonisation.

While you are at it, do read The Hindu's editorial on the topic - Overcoming resistance: On the National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (2025-29) and check out this AMR quiz by Zubeda Hamid, on the occasion of World AMR Awareness Week (November 18-24). Yet another area of health care that is disproportionately troubled by antimicrobial resistance is TB. Here, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan brings clarity to the changes that have been happening in the field of TB care. Do read the piece to understand molecular diagnostics and how they have defined the narrative of TB eradication worldwide. The other much hyped event from the week that went past was uranium being found in the breastmilk of mothers in Bihar. On the front of it, it might seem alarmist, but let us look at the actual scenario: The study was done among 40 lactating mothers in six districts of Bihar, where groundwater contamination is an issue. The authors concluded that the overall uranium levels were below permis-

sible limits and are expected to have minimal actual health impact on both mothers and infants. Health risk assessments showed that infants are particularly vulnerable due to their limited ability to eliminate uranium from their bodies. Further studies have been commissioned in other States, and you can rest assured we will bring that to you as well. C. Maya wrote this very important story on new tests that could check the efficacy of anti rabies vaccination. There have been a number of cases where people who have been bitten by dogs have succumbed to rabies even after receiving the vaccination. What was missing in the pathology pipeline was a test that could measure how efficacious the vaccination has been for an individual, and if subsequent boosters are necessary. Headlines have been dominated by stories of Delhi's worsening air quality, and while the rest of the States might seem to breathe better, currently, there is a deterioration in air quality that is impacting on the lives of people. Dr. Ranganatha R. explains Why COPD is no longer just a smoker's disease. Athira Elssa Johnson records how not just the outdoor air quality but also the Humidity, indoor microbes and temperature swings are changing how respiratory infections spread. When smoke gets in your eyes, it is not really the small pieces of the ash that make your eyes water up. Instead, the culprits are mostly the chemicals riding along with them, says Vasudevan Mukunth. At a recent health webinar organised by The Hindu, experts urged: Masking should be a routine, not a reaction. We'll also be following up the many angles involved in this issue: Supreme Court calls for uniform national mechanism for organ transplantation, after-care. Apparently, cat stories and snake stories do very well, on the internet. So we decided to pick Sarath Babu George's long form piece in Kerala, a snakebite that sparked a change for our tailpiece segment this week. A 10-year-old girl had died of a venomous snakebite in a school in Wayanad, and people were outraged. Since then, a digital rescue network has been launched and school infrastructure upgraded. Do hit the link above to read on. In our very elaborate explainers series, we have, this week: All you need to know about: pneumonia

Moving on from climate change, but not entirely away. Remember the horrific water contamination deaths in Indore: here's a follow up. Mehul Malpani reports that even as a high-level State gov't. panel has been set up to probe the Indore water tragedy, it is a case of action without accountability. Unfortunately, again in Madhya Pradesh, there were reports last week that nine persons had fallen ill due to water contamination in Madhya Pradesh's Mhow. The borewell was found contaminated and further investigation on the pipelines continues as eight people remain in hospital drinking the contaminated water. At this juncture, it will probably be prudent to insert the latest expert call for a citizen-centric health care delivery and use of technology. Jacob Koshy reports on The Lancet commission's recent message for India: experts call for a 'citizen-centric' healthcare delivery and use of technology.

In mental health, we had Yajur Krishnamoorthy's piece on rethinking disability and mental health law in India seeking to study the gaps between legislative intent and stakeholder experience, when it comes to implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act (MHA), 2017 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016. Ideally, over the last two decades, we ought to have moved the policy from charity to rights, from institutional care to community inclusion, and yet, they remain a dream. Anirban Mukhopadhyay reports on a large genetic study that finds overlaps between schizophrenia and bone health. Compared to the general population, people with schizophrenia are more likely to have weaker bones and to suffer fractures, in part because of disruptions in metabolic processes involved in bone health. In our tail piece for the week, we decided to focus on Bacillus subtilis, simply because Kerala had declared it the State microbe. We have heard of the State animal and bird and even flora that represents a State, but this is probably the first time a microbe has found its way to such a list. Bacillus subtilis, a type of probiotic or "good" bacteria found widely in the environment and naturally in the gut of humans as well as in fermented foods, will now be the State Microbe. Long live the State Microbe! Our explainers, this week, have been more than robust, and we have possibly overdone it. Do check them out below: Athira Elssa Johnson brings clarity on the thyroid; consult your doctor before going in for tests, she says. If you have asked why your knees produce sounds here's her explanation. Dr. Sireesha Reddy talks about why regular pap smears still matter despite the fact that there is a vaccine against HPV. Dr. Kurien Thomas and Dr. Pranita Vanjare explain why Vitamin D deficiency is a real thing with Indians. Dr. Dilip Mathai stresses on the importance of immunising India's older population. At a time when we have just come past Glaucoma awareness day, Afshan Yasmeen writes on how steroid misuse has emerged as a major trigger for secondary glaucoma

In case you missed this earlier, Dr. M. Bhaskaran gives us tips on eye examination for glaucoma in this interview. Dr. Backiaraj D. and Dr. Boopesh Pugazhendhi give very good advice to keep your spine healthy. Heart attacks during pregnancy are rare, but are on the rise now due to factors such as increased age, diabetes and obesity, says Dr. P. Manokar, while Dr. Vinayak Shukla and Dr. Ray George in their article, address stress as the silent killer of the heart. Dr. Ashok Chacko and Dr. E. Rabinathan provide a primer on MASLD: a silent liver disease on the rise in India. If you have a few moments, do also read: A total of 167 drug samples flagged as 'not of standard quality' in December 2025: Health Ministry Researchers develop tool to simplify nutritional tracking of Indian meals Shingles vaccine may also slow down biological ageing in older adults, study finds



sible limits and are expected to have minimal actual health impact on both mothers and infants. Health risk assessments showed that infants are particularly vulnerable due to their limited ability to eliminate uranium from their bodies. Further studies have been commissioned in other States, and you can rest assured we will bring that to you as well. C. Maya wrote this very important story on new tests that could check the efficacy of anti rabies vaccination. There have been a number of cases where people who have been bitten by dogs have succumbed to rabies even after receiving the vaccination. What was missing in the pathology pipeline was a test that could measure how efficacious the vaccination has been for an individual, and if subsequent boosters are necessary. Headlines have been dominated by stories of Delhi's worsening air quality, and while the rest of the States might seem to breathe better, currently, there is a deterioration in air quality that is impacting on the lives of people. Dr. Ranganatha R. explains Why COPD is no longer just a smoker's disease. Athira Elssa Johnson records how not just the outdoor air quality but also the Humidity, indoor microbes and temperature swings are changing how respiratory infections spread. When smoke gets in your eyes, it is not really the small pieces of the ash that make your eyes water up. Instead, the culprits are mostly the chemicals riding along with them, says Vasudevan Mukunth. At a recent health webinar organised by The Hindu, experts urged: Masking should be a routine, not a reaction. We'll also be following up the many angles involved in this issue: Supreme Court calls for uniform national mechanism for organ transplantation, after-care. Apparently, cat stories and snake stories do very well, on the internet. So we decided to pick Sarath Babu George's long form piece in Kerala, a snakebite that sparked a change for our tailpiece segment this week. A 10-year-old girl had died of a venomous snakebite in a school in Wayanad, and people were outraged. Since then, a digital rescue network has been launched and school infrastructure upgraded. Do hit the link above to read on. In our very elaborate explainers series, we have, this week: All you need to know about: pneumonia

Dr. C. Aravinda does a primer on what your lab report really means?

Shambhavi Naik explains about precision biotherapeutics and how they can help India

Prevention: The beating heart of cardiac care



All these stories we hear, of youngsters collapsing and dying while dancing, cycling, gymming, singing or just being, are they an indication of a rising number of extreme cardiac events in the country, or is it because we now have access, through social media, to the daily lives of men and women, in a manner that we never had before? Were there as many sudden cardiac deaths in the past, and we had not heard of them? Is it even possible that the actual numbers have increased as a result of our lifestyle choices, or is there a certain medical vulnerability that we are as yet unaware of? This World Heart Day (September 29), it was time to ask experts what they thought the actual situation was. Cardiologists indicated that there was indeed a rising number, above and beyond the social media glut, and pointed out to ways in which we can protect ourselves and keep our precious hearts beating.

Senior cardiologist and founder of Apollo Hospitals Dr. Prathap C. Reddy, who gave up a lucrative career abroad to stay back in India and treat heart diseases, lays it bare: Going beyond the metaphor 'young at heart'. He argues that in a country where more than half the population is under the age of 35, India should ideally be seen as a land of vitality, vigour, and youthful promise. Yet, the reality is quite disconcerting. Cardiovascular diseases, once considered to be primarily old age-related afflictions, are now increasingly affecting the younger generations. The metaphor 'young at heart' that we would often use to compliment the middle-aged or elderly for their youthfulness and energy is no longer just an expression; it has taken on a serious health connotation.

He writes: Data from hospitals across India between 2020 and 2023 affirms this rising health crisis, showing 50% of heart attack patients to be under 40 years. The conveniences of modern life, long working hours, sedentary routines, and dietary compromises have gradually contributed to a growing epidemic that threatens the very heart of our society. There is an immediate need for young India to understand that taking care of your heart starts today, regardless of whether you are 18 or 60. Dr. Priya Chockalingam also takes the bull by its horns: Why we are losing young lives to heart disease. In this article, she acknowledges the rising burden of cardiac diseases in the country, and presents the good news that smart action can indeed keep these at bay.

She explains that a heart attack is a truly multifactorial disease with behavioural, environmental, metabolic, and genetic factors at play, drawing up a list of factors that one has to watch out for. The three silent killers - hypertension, diabetes, abnormal cholesterol levels; the three behavioural factors - unhealthy diets, inadequate exercise, poor emotional wellbeing including lack of sleep; the four addictions - tobacco, alcohol, recreational drugs, gadgets; obesity, environmental pollution, inflammation and genetic aberrations - a combination of one or more of these risk factors is responsible for the causation of coronary artery disease, heart attacks and sudden cardiac deaths. Are you aware that it is possible to prevent and control every one of them by smart action? When the building blocks of health are in place, lifestyle diseases such as heart attacks, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, obesity and even some cancers, stay away.

Yes, hypertension. Did you know a recent study showed high BP in childhood is linked to an increased death risk from heart disease in your mid 50s? The authors of the study stressed the importance of checking children's blood pressure regularly, which is scarcely done, presently, and inculcating heart-healthy habits in them at a very young age. "Having hypertension or elevated blood pressure as a child may increase the risk of death by 40% to 50% over the next five decades of an individual's life," said lead author of the study, Alexa Freedman, an assistant professor at the Northwestern University's school of medicine, U.S.

In addition to unusually high blood pressure, a government report recently estimated that one-third of India's children age 5-9 have high triglycerides. The report, Children in India 2025 was released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on September 25, and provides

Reserve Bank of India flags Telangana's fiscal stress

Hyderabad: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has flagged concerns over Telangana's fiscal trajectory, warning that the State's deficit and debt burdens are rising amid slowing revenue growth. While the economy remains relatively stable at present, the RBI cautioned that the fiscal situation could become vulnerable if corrective steps are not taken in time.

According to the RBI's latest State Finances - A Study of Budgets report, Telangana has become increasingly dependent on market borrowings. Open market loans rose from Rs.49,618 crore in 2023-24 to Rs.56,209 crore in 2024-25, highlighting growing reliance on debt to bridge resource gaps. By the end of December in the current fiscal (2025-26), the Congress government raised Rs.66,000 crore through State securities auction.

The central bank observed that although the Union government has extended interest-free loans for capital expenditure, several States, including Telangana, continue to witness rising overall debt levels, partly due to additional borrowings outside regular budgetary channels. The RBI noted that long-term borrowing, while easing short-term pressure, shifts repayment risks to future generations. The report analysed the maturity profile of State borrowings, showing a significant portion of Telangana's liabilities are structured for long-term repayment. While this provides immediate fiscal space, the RBI underlined that such a strategy defers rather than reduces debt stress. The observation comes as the Congress government has rescheduled existing loan repayments to increase its borrowing capacity. Low safety cushion in sinking fund

A key area of concern highlighted by the RBI is the Consolidated Sinking Fund (CSF), which is meant to act as a buffer for debt repayment. The CSF corpus stands at just 1.8 per cent (Rs.8,019 crore) of outstanding liabilities, lower

than that of several large States. This limited reserve reduces the State's ability to absorb future repayment shocks. Deficit pressures persist. Telangana's fiscal deficit stood at Rs.49,963 crore in 2023-24, moderated to Rs.46,764 crore in 2024-25, but is projected to rise again to Rs.54,009 crore in 2025-26 as per budget estimates. However, by the end of December, the fiscal deficit had reached Rs.65,930.31 crore, signalling rising fiscal strain. The RBI attributed widening deficits in several States to a mismatch between revenue growth and rising expenditure commitments, particularly in welfare and capital sectors.

Dr. Suresh Kumar K.'s article also underlines the need to Understand and prioritise heart health in India and Dr. Vid Karmarkar and Jitendra Chouksey highlight another important intervention that works: Muscle matters: rethinking obesity with resistance training. With the most astounding statement yet, coming out of America, and from its President, no less, this time, people rushed to fact check and counter the completely unscientific, unproven statement that taking tylenol during pregnancy causes autism. U.S. President Donald Trump linked autism to childhood vaccine use and the taking of popular pain medication Tylenol by women when pregnant. The World Health Organisation, in a statement, said: there is currently no conclusive scientific evidence confirming a possible link between autism and the use of paracetamol during pregnancy. For more details on this deluded campaign to villainise the safe drug: acetaminophen, do read this profile by Vasudevan Mukunth: Acetaminophen | Spectacle of blame. In a similar context, this piece by Jeffrey Morris in The Conversation argues Why a study claiming vaccines cause chronic illness is severely flawed. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, Halal concerns drive vaccine hesitancy during a measles outbreak.

Moving on to cancer, a couple of studies published last week expressed a grim future with regards the disease. While one study projected cancer deaths to rise by 75% in next 25 years; with ageing among driving factors; another projected kidney cancer cases could double in next 25 years globally. There is no looking past the fact that lifestyle choices play a huge role, as do genetics and environmental factors, but being aware is the first step to prevention, and if necessary, course correction. A Harvard Business School working paper found that multiple AI chatbots that serve as "companions" used emotional manipulation tactics to keep users engaged for longer when they tried to say good-bye. It is relevant to point out here that Character.AI was sued over the 2024 suicide of a teenager boy in the U.S. who interacted frequently with AI personas via the app. The boy's mother alleged that the child was sexually abused on the platform. In this study, researchers showed that such systems frequently use emotionally manipulative messages at key moments of disengagement, and that these tactics meaningfully increase user engagement. They added: "As emotionally intelligent technologies continue to scale, both designers and regulators must grapple with the tradeoff between engagement and manipulation, especially when the tactics at play remain hidden in plain sight" Our tail piece this week is our in house video podcast, HealthWrap, in it's 10th edition. In this, we discuss Post-COVID heart risks, men's health, and what the new WHO update on essential meds means for India? Do watch at the link above. This week, in our explainers section, it can get pretty overwhelming, so here is a selection that you can pick and choose from:

Zubeda Hamid in the In Focus Podcast, discusses Why C-section rates are rising in India? Do read along with this: G.V.R. Subba Rao says High Caesarean deliveries in A.P. a concern, mulhartham or auspicious surgeries not right, says Chandrababu Naidu Everyone is talking about this new personality type. Meenakshy S. tell you all you need to know about: oetrovers Athira Elssa Johnson asks: What the options are for non-hormonal contraception and why they are not widely used in India? N.K. Arora and M.K. Das point out Lessons from India's vaccination drive Children growing up in the digital era have more to worry about posture than ever before, Dr. Paneendra S. writes In the context of World Lung Day, Dr. Ifran Ismail Ayub facilitates an understanding common respiratory diseases and their effective management. Dr. Suja Ramanathan tells you What your child's platelet count and haemoglobin levels could be telling you Geetha Srimathi explains Why eco-restoration alone won't help residents of the heavily industrialised Manali-Ennore region in North Chennai? Did you think, 'Only a nail infection'? Dr. Reshma T. Vishnani points out the unwise wisdom of that, here. Read to know how the nail could be an index of the body? How can an allergic reaction in the throat feel like a throat infection? Lancet study outlines trends in HMPV outbreak early this year, children most affected Healthcare reforms required globally to match progress in diagnosis, treatment of Alzheimer's disease: researchers

The solution to the falling rupee lies in diplomacy



The sudden decline in the value of the rupee has somewhat shaken the people and the markets. They wonder why this is happening when the economy is doing well, characterised by a good growth rate, low inflation, and a modest current account deficit. India's growth rate in the current year is estimated at 7.4%. Inflation has been subdued with CPI inflation ending the year 2025 at 1.33%, below the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s lower target band for the fourth consecutive month. The current account deficit as a percentage of GDP in the first half of 2025-26 is only 0.76 compared to 1.35 in the previous year. The fall in the value of rupee since April 2025 is about 6%.

The villain of the piece Since the trade deficit (merchandise and services), which was \$96.58 billion in April-December 2025 compared to \$88.43 billion in the same period last year, is not that large, the main villain in the piece is capital outflows. There has been a steady outflow of capital since U.S. President Donald Trump took an adverse view on India and imposed 50% import duty on Indian exports. Initially, the U.S. imposed a 25% tariff on 'reciprocal' basis and then another 25% because India was importing crude oil from Russia. Now, it is threatening to impose an additional 25% tariff on countries that are doing business with Iran. This includes India, although trade with Iran is only 0.15% of the country's total trade. Net capital inflows in April-December 2024 were \$10,615 million. In the same period in 2025, they turned negative, with a net outflow of \$3,900 million. Despite months of negotiations with the U.S., no agreement has been reached yet. There seem to have been issues that could not be resolved easily. If this stalemate continues, the rupee will continue to fall.

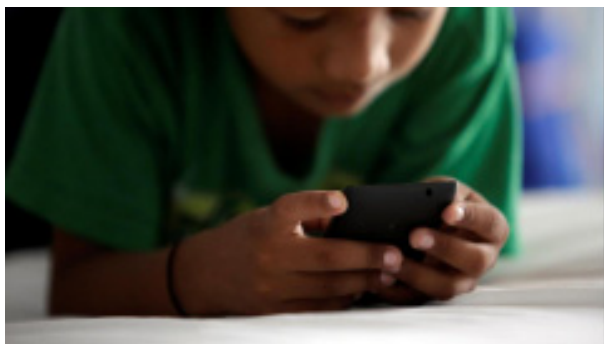
We have to note that in the changed context, capital outflows are caused not by strict economic factors but by fears generated by the 'hostile' attitude of the U.S. In 2022, the rupee depreciated by almost 10%. That had some economic explanation, such as the Federal Reserve's sharp hikes in interest rates. But this time, there is no clear economic explanation. Thus, the situation has shifted from the economic arena to the diplomatic platform. When tariffs are getting weaponised for geopolitical reasons, diplomacy is the major route for a solution.

RBI intervention India's exchange rate regime under-

went a change in 1993 when it moved to a market-determined exchange rate regime. But the new system did not rule out the RBI's intervention in the foreign exchange market. Since 1993, all RBI Governors have made it clear that the intention is not to use intervention to peg the value of the rupee, but to reduce its volatility. However, the word 'volatility' was never defined. We can deduce from the actions of the RBI that reducing volatility means not only reducing fluctuations around a prevailing level, but also 'moderating' the fall in the value of the rupee when it happens. Shocks from rupee fluctuations have a cost. It is only to minimise the impact of such sudden shocks that there is intervention. Even then, it is not the intention of the RBI to prevent the fall, but to let it slide smoothly to whatever level it has to fall. It may be best for the RBI to clarify that reducing volatility also includes moderating the fall in the value of the rupee. After all, intervention, especially if it is asymmetric, does affect the level of exchange rate while minimising its volatility. The present situation adds another element — non-economic pressures acting on the value of the rupee. In fact, if India and the U.S. come to an understanding, the rupee will appreciate.

Why devaluation is not the remedy Will a fall in the value of the rupee have any beneficial effects? The import content of India's exports is rising. As a result, the stimulus to exports provided by devaluation will be moderated in the changed context. Further, given the high tariffs in the U.S. market, India's exporters are unlikely to gain significant access there. On the import side, most of India's imports are essential goods, with crude oil alone accounting for about 25% of total merchandise imports. A fall in the rupee would raise their prices, fuelling inflation. India's inflation is not higher than the inflation in developed countries in the West. Devaluation is called for when there is wide disparity in inflation. That is when we need to focus on Real Effective Exchange Rate (weighted average of a country's currency relative to a basket of major trading partners, adjusted for inflation). It is true that some countries such as China have tried to keep the value of the currency undervalued. But this is currency manipulation, which is controversial. The fall in the value of the rupee in the last one month has been caused by the fears engendered by the imposition of 50% tariff on Indian exports by the U.S. There is a possibility that the tariffs may even go up because of new legislation in the U.S. The full impact of the tariffs will be felt only in 2026-27. What is hitting the rupee as of now are capital outflows. These outflows will continue to take place until India and the U.S. come to an understanding. We cannot ignore the fall in the value of the rupee. Capital outflows will get accelerated with every fall in the value of the rupee. The required earning in rupee terms will rise to attract investors in such a situation. When capital outflows happen because of the sale of stocks, they have a direct impact on the stock market. Our trade negotiators must reach an early understanding with the U.S. Meanwhile, the RBI can only smoothen the fall in the value of the rupee.

Meta, TikTok, YouTube to stand trial on youth addiction claims



Meta Platforms, TikTok and YouTube will face court-room scrutiny this week over allegations that their platforms are fuelling a youth mental health crisis, as the national debate about 'kids' screen time enters a new phase. The trial in California Superior Court, Los Angeles County is a test case for thousands of other lawsuits seeking damages for social media harms, in a legal onslaught that could erode Big Tech's longstanding legal defence.

The plaintiff is a 19-year-old woman from California, identified as K.G.M., who says she became addicted to the companies' platforms at a young age because of their attention-grabbing design, according to court filings. She alleges the apps fuelled her depression and suicidal thoughts and is seeking to hold the companies liable. Jury selection in the case begins on Tuesday. Her lawsuit is the first of several cases expected to go to trial this year that center on what the plaintiffs call "social media addiction" among children. It will be the first time the tech giants must defend themselves at trial over alleged harm caused by their products, the plaintiff's attorney Matthew Bergman said. A factor in the case is a federal law that largely exempts platforms such as Instagram and TikTok from legal liability for the material their users post. The tech companies have argued the law shields them in K.G.M.'s case. A verdict against the social media companies would put a crack in that defence, which has protected them from lawsuits for decades. It would show that juries are willing to hold the platforms themselves liable. The issue is likely to reach the Supreme Court, whether through K.G.M.'s case or another, Bergman said.

"We are writing on a legal tabula rasa," he told Reuters. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, is expected to take the witness stand. The company will argue in court that its products did not lead to K.G.M.'s mental health challenges, Meta's lawyers told Reuters ahead of the trial. Snap CEO Evan Spiegel was also expected to testify, as his company was named a defendant in the lawsuit. Snap agreed on January 20 to settle K.G.M.'s lawsuit. A company spokesperson declined to comment on the specifics of the deal. YouTube will argue that the company's platforms are fundamentally different from social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, and should not be lumped together in court, a YouTube executive said ahead of the trial. TikTok declined to comment about the company's planned arguments in court. As the trial begins, the same tech companies are mounting a nationwide effort to convince critics that their products are safe for teens. They've launched tools they say give parents more control over how their kids use the platforms and have spent millions of dollars promoting those features.

Since at least 2018, Meta has sponsored parent workshops about teen online safety at dozens of high schools across the U.S. The company hosted one of those workshops, dubbed Screen Smart, in 2024 in Los Angeles, alongside National PTA President Yvonne Johnson and Meta safety chief Antigone Davis. National PTA is a nonprofit that

advocates for child welfare. TikTok also sponsored similar gatherings led by 100 local and regional PTAs, calling it Create with Kindness, according to the company's website. The program included tutorials on TikTok's features for parents, including the option to limit screen time at night, according to the curriculum. YouTube's parent company Google in recent years has turned to Girl Scouts to convince the public it is invested in kids' online safety. Girls can earn a patch, which features Google's logo, to affix to their uniform after completing lessons about strong passwords, being kind online and digital privacy, according to the Girl Scouts website. The companies have also hired lawyers who have represented corporations in high-profile litigation involving addiction. Meta has hired Covington & Burling attorneys who represented McKesson in sprawling litigation related to the opioid epidemic, according to public biographies of the attorneys. TikTok's counsel, meanwhile, represented Activision Blizzard and Microsoft in a dispute about video game design and addiction. "These companies are using every lever of influence that you can imagine," said Julie Scelfo, founder of Mothers Against Media Addiction, a group that supports smartphone bans in schools. "It can be very confusing for parents who to trust."

Govt notifies norms to skip test licences for drug R&D to boost ease of doing business

New Delhi: Pharma companies will no longer be required to seek a test licence and may proceed with pharmaceutical development upon submitting an online intimation to CDSCO, except in certain cases, as part of broad simplification notified by the Union Health Ministry.

Union Health Ministry has notified key amendments to the New Drugs and Clinical Trials (NDCT) Rules, 2019, aimed at simplifying regulatory processes, reducing approval timelines, and enabling faster conduct of clinical research and pharmaceutical development in the country.

The amendment is in line with the directions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reduce regulatory burden and promote Ease of Doing Business, the ministry said. Under the existing regulatory framework, pharmaceutical companies are required to obtain a test licence from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) for the manufacture of small quantities of drugs intended for examination, research, or analysis purposes.

Through the notified amendments, this licensing requirement for non-commercial manufacture has been replaced with a prior-intimation mechanism. As a result, the industry will no longer be required to seek a test licence and may proceed with pharmaceutical development upon submitting an online intimation to CDSCO, except in the case of a limited category of high-risk drugs, including cytotoxic drugs, narcotic drugs, and psychotropic substances.

This reform is expected to lead to a minimum saving of 90 days in the drug development life cycle, providing a significant boost to pharmaceutical research and innovation.

Furthermore, for categories where test licences continue to be applicable, the statutory processing timeline has been reduced from 90 days to 45 days.

TikTok settles as social media giants face landmark trial over youth addiction claims



TikTok agreed to settle a landmark social media addiction lawsuit just before the trial kicked off, the plaintiff's attorneys confirmed. The social video platform was one of three companies — along with Meta's Instagram and Google's YouTube — facing claims that their platforms deliberately addict and harm children. A fourth company named in the lawsuit, Snapchat parent company Snap Inc, settled the case last week for an undisclosed sum. Details of the settlement with TikTok were not disclosed, and the company did not immediately respond to a request for comment. At the core of the case is a 19-year-old identified only by the initials "KGM," whose case could determine how thousands of other, similar lawsuits against social media companies will play out. She and two other plaintiffs have been selected for bellwether trials — essentially test cases for both sides to see how their arguments play out before a jury and what damages, if any, may be awarded, said Clay Calvert, a non-resident senior fellow of technology policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

A lawyer for the plaintiff said in a statement on Tuesday (January 27, 2026) that TikTok remains a defendant in the other personal injury cases, and that the trial will proceed as scheduled against Meta and YouTube. Jury selection starts this week in the Los Angeles County Superior Court. It's the first time the companies will argue their case before a jury, and the outcome could have profound effects on their businesses and how they will handle children using their platforms. The selection process is expected to take at least a few days, with 75 potential jurors questioned each day through at least Thursday (January 29). A fourth company named in the lawsuit, Snapchat parent company Snap Inc, settled the case last week for an undisclosed sum. KGM claims that her use of social media from an early age addicted her to the technology and exacerbated depression and suicidal thoughts. Importantly, the lawsuit claims that this was done through deliberate design choices made by companies that sought to make their platforms more addictive to children to boost profits. This argument, if successful, could sidestep the companies' First Amendment shield and Section 230, which protects tech companies from liability for material posted on their platforms. "Borrowing

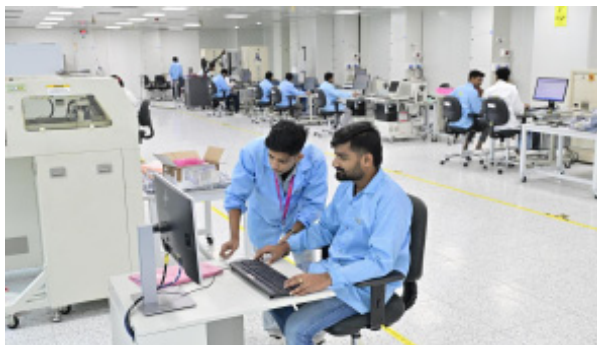
heavily from the behavioural and neurobiological techniques used by slot machines and exploited by the cigarette industry, Defendants deliberately embedded in their products an array of design features aimed at maximising youth engagement to drive advertising revenue," the lawsuit says. Executives, including Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, are expected to testify at the trial, which will last six to eight weeks. Experts have drawn similarities to the Big Tobacco trials that led to a 1998 settlement requiring cigarette companies to pay billions in health care costs and restrict marketing targeting minors.

"Plaintiffs are not merely the collateral damage of Defendants' products," the lawsuit says. "They are the direct victims of the intentional product design choices made by each Defendant. They are the intended targets of the harmful features that pushed them into self-destructive feedback loops," it said. The tech companies dispute the claims that their products deliberately harm children, citing a bevy of safeguards they have added over the years and arguing that they are not liable for content posted on their sites by third parties. "Recently, a number of lawsuits have attempted to place the blame for teen mental health struggles squarely on social media companies," Meta said in a recent blog post.

"But this oversimplifies a serious issue. Clinicians and researchers find that mental health is a deeply complex and multifaceted issue, and trends regarding teens' well-being aren't clear-cut or universal. Narrowing the challenges faced by teens to a single factor ignores the scientific research and the many stressors impacting young people today, like academic pressure, school safety, socio-economic challenges and substance abuse," it said. A Meta spokesperson said in a statement on Monday (January 26) the company strongly disagrees with the allegations outlined in the lawsuit and that its "confident evidence will show our longstanding commitment to supporting young people."

Jose Castaneda, a Google Spokesperson, said on Monday (January 26) that the allegations against YouTube are "simply not true." In a statement, he said "Providing young people with a safer, healthier experience has always been core to our work." TikTok did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Monday (January 26). The case will be the first in a slew of cases beginning this year that seek to hold social media companies responsible for harming children's mental well-being. A federal bellwether trial beginning in June in Oakland, California, will be the first to represent school districts that have sued social media platforms over harms to children. In addition, more than 40 State attorneys general have filed lawsuits against Meta, claiming it is harming young people and contributing to the youth mental health crisis by deliberately designing features on Instagram and Facebook that addict children to its platforms. The majority of cases filed their lawsuits in federal court, but some sued in their respective states.

The impact of India-EU FTA on AI and semiconductor tech



In a milestone, India and the European Union (EU) have hailed the conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) while launching a 'Comprehensive Strategic Agenda' for 2030. Among other measures, the pact moves beyond supply chains to operationalise joint R&D in advanced semiconductor "heterogeneous integration" and chip design. It also formally links the European AI Office with India's National AI Mission to jointly develop safe, human-centric AI and take advantage of what the agreement called India's vast "multilingual datasets" and Europe's research infrastructure to secure strategic autonomy in critical technologies.

The AI and semiconductor aspects represent the maturation of three diplomatic phases. The first phase began with the 'India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025'. At this stage, discussions on "technology" were largely confined to general matters of cybersecurity, 5G networks, and data protection and there was no specific mechanism for a more concrete collaboration between the bloc and India on hardware such as semiconductors, or specific AI model development. In the second phase, around 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and EU President Ursula von der Leyen launched the India-EU Trade and Technology Council. This body in turn created the Working Group 1 on Strategic Technologies, which moved the relationship from diplomacy to involving technical experts. In fact the new deal has explicitly credited this group with managing its "technology and innovation" aspect.

In the third and final phase, in 2023, India and EU signed the Semiconductor Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This MoU was primarily defensive in the sense that it focused on improving the resilience of supply chains and on providing early warnings of shortages. Between 2023 and the present deal announced on January 27, the MoU evolved into a more 'offensive' partnership, so to speak, with a focus on creating new technologies, including through designing and prototyping, in addition to monitoring existing supply chains. 'Heterogeneous integration' Perhaps the most significant technical detail in the document is "heterogeneous integration" (1.2.4 because it recognises that India is years away from building cutting-edge logic fabrication facilities, for example, those that manufacture chips with nodes of 2-3 nm, and thus pivots to "advanced packaging". Heterogeneous integration involves stacking different types of chips, such as logic, memory, and sensors, into a single package. Such combinations are critical for AI. Contemporary AI accelerators like Nvidia's Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) bank more on how memory is packaged next to the processor instead of only the raw transistor size. By targeting this, the EU and India are trying to capture the value-added segment of the supply chain that is also less capital-intensive than a fabrication facility but which is just as critical for performance. The agenda also explicitly connects semiconductor manufacturing to AI utility as the text says the deal will focus "on design and prototyping for AI applications", thus creating a vertical market. While in 2023 the focus was on "making chips for cars", following a crisis in their availability, the new goal is to make chips that AI

models require. India possesses roughly 20% of the world's chip design talent (on the flip side most of them work for U.S.-based firms like Intel and Qualcomm). The EU has the research infrastructure, such as IMEC in Belgium and Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft in Germany, but lacks the design scale. And the deal effectively creates a mechanism to unify India's designer capital with the EU's physical capital, to create indigenous AI hardware and reduce their reliance on US intellectual property. Finally, the operational vehicles for the deal's semiconductor strategy are the so-called Blue Valleys — a regulatory exclave that aligns Indian with European standards, allowing component manufacturers in India to flow directly into European supply chains without new certification requirements. In other words, the Blue Valleys will effectively extend the EU Single Market technical standards to Indian soil. Common market for AI Likewise, the AI section of the new deal also sets up a "common market" for AI where Indian data can flow into European models while having European regulations govern Indian AI companies (this is an example of the Brussels effect, whereby the EU exports its laws outside its borders through market mechanisms instead of direct force). Previously, if the EU had a technical question about Indian AI policy, it would go through diplomatic channels (specifically, the External Action Service to the Ministry of External Affairs). The deal (2.1.7) now indicates a direct line: the European AI Office, which is the EU's regulator, can interact directly with the India AI Safety Institute, India's technical auditor. As a result, the technical staff at these agencies could have a formal mandate to coordinate without requiring political permissions for every interaction.

Further, perhaps the most concrete part of the AI section of the deal is the point about "testing and evaluation". Currently, the world doesn't have a common definition of what constitutes safe AI. The EU's priority might be gender bias while India's might be political neutrality — which means a developer will have to make their model pass two tests ahead of clearance. But now, by collaborating on testing, the two agencies will likely co-author and rationalise the checklists for the models. So if the European AI Office develops a specific mathematical test to measure the rate or scope of hallucinations in a large language model, it can share that test with the India AI Safety Institute for India to adopt. In fact, the point of linking these agencies is to eventually reach a point where one accepts a safety certificate issued by the other. Going ahead this will require the agencies to align their audit procedures and staff training. For Indians this could be a civil liberties backdoor of sorts. That is, because European audit manuals are strongly rooted in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, Indian users might unknowingly gain digital protections that the domestic political climate currently sidelines. EU safety benchmarks aggressively penalise algorithmic bias against minorities and restrict invasive biometric surveillance. If Indian developers must clear these hurdles to ensure their models can be exported to Europe, the AI products deployed domestically will be embedded with European regulatory attitudes. Thus Indian users could interact with AI agents that are technically constrained from reinforcing majoritarian narratives or profiling of vulnerable communities. However, there is also the possibility of this opportunity devolving into a stratified ecosystem akin to India's pharmaceutical sector, where some manufacturers rigorously adhere to safety protocols for exports to U.S. and European markets while cutting corners for domestic supply. That is, Indian firms might engineer 'clean' and more bias-free algorithms specifically for the EU market to secure lucrative contracts while deploying invasive or unrestricted versions at home, where enforcement remains lax. Financial instruments In order to fuel all these ambitions, the agenda musters two financial instruments.

S Africa says not to hand over G20 baton to 'junior official' amid spat with US



GNS News Agency, March 15

Johannesburg: South Africa has decided not to hand over the annual G20 Presidency to a "junior" US official at the end of the leaders' summit, even as a White House official cautions Cyril Ramaphosa over "running his mouth" against the US and President Donald Trump. South African President Ramaphosa adopted a conciliatory approach on Thursday evening after the US requested accreditation for an eight-member team led by US chargé d'affaires, Marc Dillard, to receive the baton on Sunday. However, late on Thursday evening, Ramaphosa's spokesman, Vincent Magwenya, posted a message on social media, saying the president will not hand over the G20 Presidency to a junior official. "The President will not hand over to a chargé d'affaires. It's a breach of established protocol. No head

of state and government anywhere in the world would do it," Magwenya told local media. There was also anger in South Africa about remarks by White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, which analysts said was a breach of protocol in insulting the President. "I saw the South African president running his mouth a little bit against the United States and Donald Trump earlier today, and that language is not appreciated by the president or his team," Leavitt said in a media briefing on Thursday after Ramaphosa had taken a hard line at the US absence without naming Trump directly. There is also dissatisfaction in South Africa about Trump continuing his claims of alleged genocide against white farmers in South Africa, which have been disproved by both the South African government and local white leaders. "I'm not going to South Africa for the G20 because I think their policies on the extermination of people are unacceptable. So I'm not going. South Africa has behaved extremely badly," Trump said after a meeting with Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia at the White House on Tuesday. Leavitt confirmed in her briefing on Thursday that the delegation would be present only to receive the G20 Presidency from South Africa at the end of the summit. She also reaffirmed that the US would not be participating in the deliberations at the G20. But the South African view now is that the US is trying to save face to avoid Ramaphosa's earlier suggestion that, in the absence of any US representative, he would hand over the Presidency to an empty chair. Many world leaders have started arriving in South Africa since yesterday to attend the two-day Summit.

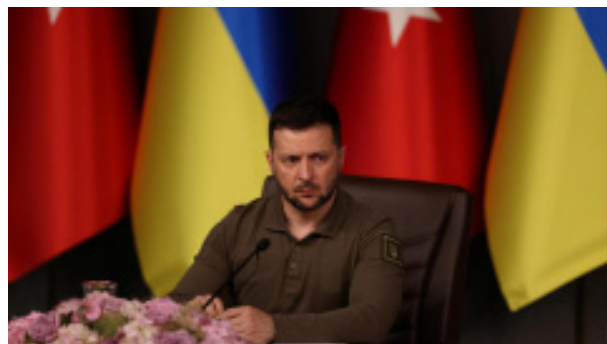
Here are five things to know why Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is under growing pressure

GNS News Agency, March 15

The Ukraine President is facing a confluence of crises testing his ability to lead an increasingly weary nation nearly four years into a devastating full-scale invasion by Russia. For more than a week, Volodymyr Zelenskyy has struggled to contain the fallout from a \$100 million corruption scandal implicating top officials and other associates. The pressure on Mr. Zelenskyy has ratcheted up as the United States pushes a proposal it drew up with Russia that would require major concessions from Ukraine — and seemingly few from Russia — to bring an end to the war. All this is playing out as Russia makes slow but steady advances across parts of the 1,000-kilometre front line and relentlessly bombs Ukraine's power plants, causing severe electricity shortages as colder weather sets in. Here are 5 things to know about the growing pressures confronting Mr. Zelenskyy: Facing a rebellion Mr. Zelenskyy has been facing a rebellion from lawmakers in his own party since the country's corruption watchdogs revealed that \$100 million had been embezzled from the energy sector through kickbacks paid by contractors.

After investigators publicised their findings, Mr. Zelenskyy dismissed two top officials and imposed sanctions on close associates. One Mr. Zelenskyy associate implicated in the scheme, Tymur Mindich, has reportedly fled the country. Mindich is a partner in a media production company that Mr. Zelenskyy was a co-owner of before he became president. Some Ukrainian lawmakers and activists are calling on the president to sack his powerful chief of staff, Andrii Yermak. Neither Mr. Zelenskyy nor Mr. Yermak have been accused of wrongdoing by investigators. But because Yermak is widely believed to decide key government appointments and to have sway in top political affairs, lawmakers believe he should take responsibility as a way to help restore the public's trust.

The Servant of the People party that Mr. Zelenskyy leads won over two-thirds of parliamentary seats in 2019. But some politicians warn Zelenskyy could lose his parliamentary majority, or face a split in his party, if he doesn't part ways with Yermak. Many of Mr. Zelenskyy's political allies feel something has to change, even if they have not gone public with their concerns, said Mykola Davidiuk, an independent political expert. One of the chief criticisms of Mr. Zelenskyy's government is that too much power is concentrated in the hands of Mr. Yermak and his advisers, Mr. Davidiuk said. "The management style of Zelenskyy is not working," he said. How decisively Mr. Zelenskyy responds to the corruption scandal could determine whether the fallout damages Ukraine's standing with allies, said Mr. Davidiuk. Zelenskyy's hold on power is not at risk. Russia's invasion triggered martial law in Ukraine, indefinitely postponing presidential and parliamentary elections. So even if Mr. Zelenskyy's grip on parliament weakens and his popularity plummets, he is highly unlikely to be unseated while the war is still going on — unless he voluntarily resigns. Ukraine's presidential term is normally five years, and, before the war, the next elections had been scheduled for the spring of 2024. The growing political headwinds Mr. Zelenskyy faces could challenge his ability to push through parliament any potential peace deal being negotiated with Russia. And if he were to seek reelection after the war, his chances could be hurt if Yermak is still in the picture, politi-



cal analysts say. A former general is seen as a rival, but denies political aspirations. No elected Ukrainian opposition figures pose a viable threat to Mr. Zelenskyy. One potential challenger could be Ukraine's former army chief, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, who oversaw several successful counteroffensives in the first year of the war and was sacked by the Ukrainian president in late 2023. Mr. Zaluzhnyi now serves as Ukraine's ambassador to the UK. Mr. Zaluzhnyi denies any intention to enter politics, but polls in Ukraine show him as theoretically competitive with Zelenskyy, keeping speculation alive that he could be convinced to run in the next election. The U.S. and Russia design a plan to end the war in Ukraine. The U.S. and Russia have drawn up a plan aimed at ending the war in Ukraine that calls for major concessions from Kyiv, according to a person briefed on the plan, including granting some demands the Kremlin has made repeatedly since it invaded early in 2022. The plan calls in part for Ukraine to cede territory to Russia and to abandon certain weaponry, according to the person, who was not authorised to comment on the plan publicly. It would also include the rollback of some critical U.S. military assistance. Russia, as part of the proposal, would be given effective control of the entire eastern Donbas region — an area Moscow has long sought — even though Ukraine is still in control of part of it. Mr. Zelenskyy has previously rejected the same conditions, describing them as unconstitutional and unjust. Zelenskyy has yet to comment on the new U.S. plan. Reports about the plan came out just as Zelenskyy was facing increased unrest over the corruption scandal. "The timing is very damaging for Ukraine," said Orysia Lutsevych, a Ukraine expert at Chatham House. "Zelenskyy is vulnerable. Both the US and Russia saw the domestic scandal and decided to put more pressure on him to concede to a Russian plan," Lutsevych said. But the effort may not work out as envisioned, she said, noting that European allies are coming to Ukraine's defence and speaking out against the plan. Pressure on the front and across the country. Against this backdrop, Russia's better-equipped army has scaled up attacks along the front line and against energy facilities in the rear, putting further strain on Ukraine. The Russian army continues to steadily advance in multiple areas. In the northeastern Kharkiv region, Russian forces are pushing on the cities of Kupiansk and Lyman, which Ukraine wrested back from Russia in the first year of the war. But the fiercest battles are around the besieged Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk, a key logistics hub in the eastern Donetsk region. Russian attacks on Ukraine's power plants in November have resulted in some of the worst electricity shortages since the war began.

Miss Universe 2025 finale: Mexico's Fatima Bosch wins the crown after host insult drama

GNS News Agency, March 15

Miss Mexico was crowned Miss Universe in Thailand on Friday (November 21, 2025), strutting to victory after the beauty pageant's host had publicly chastised her, among several dramatic missteps in the run-up to the final stage. Contestants from Ivory Coast, the Philippines, Thailand and Venezuela also made it to the final round, selected from more than 120 women vying for the title of Miss Universe in a contest considered one of the "big four" of global beauty pageants. But before Miss Mexico Fatima Bosch was ultimately crowned, chaos reigned — from allegations of an insult to her intellect, to judges quitting and participants taking flops on and off the stage. Bosch staged a dramatic walkout earlier this month — in an evening gown and high heels — from a meeting where she was lambasted by Thai organiser Nawat Itsaragrisil. In a livestream of the event, Nawat seemed to single out Miss Mexico during a dispute over her apparent failure to post promotional content on her social media. After Nawat called for security to intervene, Bosch staged a walkout flanked by Miss Iraq. Other beauty queens appeared to rise in solidarity with Bosch, before freezing as Nawat warned those still wanting to participate should "sit down". "What your director did is not respectful: he called me dumb," Bosch told reporters at the time. "The world needs to see this because we are empowered women

and this is a platform for our voice." After the incident, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum called Bosch an "example of how we women should speak out" in the face of aggression. Nawat later apologised. Other drama in the run-up to the final round included two judges quitting this week, with one alleging the contest was rigged by a "secret and illegitimate vote" held without the official jury. "This vote was conducted by individuals who are not recognised members of the official judging panel," French composer Omar Harfouch wrote in a statement posted on Instagram. The Miss Universe Organization has denied Harfouch's claims, stating that "no impromptu jury has been created". Former professional footballer Claude Makelele also withdrew as a jurist, citing "unforeseen personal reasons" in a statement on social media. During the costume round on Wednesday (November 19, 2025), Miss Britain Danielle Latimer tripped and fell flat on the stage while wearing an outfit inspired by the Cockney character Eliza Doolittle. And Miss Jamaica Gabrielle Henry was hospitalised after she fell off the main stage during an evening gown showcase, president of the Miss Universe Organization Raul Rocha said in a statement. Miss Universe Jamaica public relations director Shannon-Dale Reid told AFP late on Wednesday that Henry was "resting under medical observation" and had not suffered serious injuries. He declined to comment on Thursday (November 20, 2025) about her condition and the cause of her fall.

U.S. sanctions Indian entities, individuals involved in Iranian petroleum and petroleum products sales



GNS News Agency, March 15

The Trump administration has sanctioned entities and individuals from India involved in sales of Iran's petroleum and petroleum products, saying the funds from this trade support Tehran's regional terrorist proxies and procure weapons systems that are "a direct threat" to the U.S. The Departments of State and Treasury sanctioned shipping networks responsible for funding the Iranian regime's "malign activities" through illicit oil sales, as well as an airline and its affiliates that arm and supply Iran-backed terrorist groups.

Among those added to the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control Specially Designated Nationals List are Indian nationals Zair Husain Iqbal Husain Sayed, Zulfikar Hussain Rizvi Sayed, Maharashtra-based RN Ship Management Private Limited and Pune-based TR6 Petro India LLP. The State Department is designating 17 entities, individuals, and vessels in several countries, including, but not limited to India, Panama, and the Seychelles, involved in Iran's petroleum and petroleum products sales, the administration said.

Concurrently, the Department of the Treasury is de-

ignating 41 entities, individuals, vessels, and aircraft, intensifying its efforts against Iran's petroleum and petrochemical exports and disrupting financial streams and commercial operatives that support Iran's malign activities. The funds generated by this oil trade are used to support Iran's regional terrorist proxies and procure weapons systems that pose a direct threat to U.S. forces and American allies, the State Department said on Thursday (November 20, 2025). The administration said TR6 Petro is an India-based petroleum products trader, which between October 2024 and June 2025, imported over \$8 million worth of Iranian-origin bitumen from multiple companies. It is being designated for knowingly engaging in a significant transaction for the purchase, acquisition, sale, transport, or marketing of petroleum or petroleum products from Iran, the State Department said. The Iranian regime continues to fuel conflict in the Middle East to fund its destabilising activities, the State Department said. This behaviour enables Iran to fund its nuclear escalations, support terrorist groups, and disrupt the flow of trade and freedom of navigation in waterways that are crucial to global prosperity and economic growth. The United States will continue to act against the network of maritime service providers, dark fleet operators, and petroleum products traders involved in the transport of Iranian crude oil and petroleum products, it said. The State Department said the U.S. will continue to act in support of National Security Presidential Memorandum 2 (NSPM-2), which directs the imposition of maximum pressure on the Iranian regime to deny it access to resources needed to sustain its destabilising activities. "The United States remains committed to disrupting the illicit funding streams that finance all aspects of Iran's malign activities. As long as Iran devotes revenue to funding attacks against the United States and our allies, supporting terrorism around the world, and pursuing other destabilising actions, we will use all the tools at our disposal to hold the regime accountable," it said.

To deter migration, U.K. proposes new rules for settlement

GNS News Agency, March 15

Days after announcing a shake-up of U.K. asylum law, the country's Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, released proposed changes to the routes for settling in the U.K. (also known as 'settlement', 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' or ILR). Under the proposed changes, high earners and entrepreneurs would qualify in three years, some in five years, while the default would be ten years, with some individuals having to wait 20 or even 30 years to settle. Changes to the law, along the proposed lines, will impact tens of thousands of Indians who have been the largest group of non-EU long-term migrants to the U.K. since at least 2019.

The Labour government of Keir Starmer had already announced that it would run a public consultation on a new contributions based system for ILR at the heart of which is a doubling of the default qualifying period from five to 10 years. The consultation, which began on Thursday (November 20) is open until February 12. The government called it the "biggest shake-up of the legal migration system in nearly half a century". High earners who make more than GBP 125,140 and entrepreneurs on the Global Talent and Innovator Founder visas would be eligible to settle in three years under the proposals. Those who earn at least GBP 50,270 per year will be eligible in five years. All applicants will have to meet minimum salary standards (at least GBP 12,750 per year for 3-5 years subject to the outcome of the consultation). They will also have to have minimum standards of English and have no tax or other government debt. Those who receive public funds could face up to 20 years for settlement and visa overstayers up to 30 years. The adult dependents of an economic migrant (a spouse for instance) will



no longer qualify based on their partner's earnings as per the proposed rules. They will instead have their own qualifying period and criteria based on their circumstances. The 616,000 health and social care visa workers and their dependents who came to the U.K. between 2022 and 2024 will now have to wait 15 years for ILR. This visa route was closed earlier this year after the U.K. government said individual workers were being exploited and abused. The UK government intends to apply the new rules retrospectively although it states that transitional arrangements will be finalised following the consultation process. In 2008 and 2009, when the government changed the qualifying period for settlement for certain highly skilled migrants from four to five years, the UK High Court overruled it based on a principle of administrative law called "legitimate expectation". Parliament is supreme in the U.K. and courts cannot overturn primary legislation but immigration rule changes are often made via a statement of changes rather than Acts of Parliament, making them subject to judicial review.

Will Modi, MEA object to U.S. panel's 'Pakistan success' claim in Operation Sindoor, asks Congress



GNS News Agency, March 15

Pointing out that a report of the U.S. Commission claimed "Pakistan's military success over India in a four-day clash," the Congress on Thursday (November 20, 2025) termed it yet another "diplomatic setback" and asked whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Ministry of External Affairs would register their objections to it. In a series of posts on social media platform X, Congress general secretary (communication) Jairam Ramesh said the report was "unacceptable". He also took a swipe at the Narendra Modi government by saying that U.S. President Donald Trump repeated his claim about stopping the India-Pakistan conflict. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission has just submitted its annual report to the US Congress. The Commission set up jointly by the US Senate and House of Representatives has twelve independent members. "Hours after an independent commission set up by the U.S. Congress issued a report claiming that Pakistan achieved 'military success over India' during Operation Sindoor, the President of the U.S. has once again trumpeted for the 61st time the claim that he brought an end to Operation Sindoor by threatening to impose tariffs of 350% on India," Mr. Ramesh said on X, adding, "He did this yesterday as well, during a U.S.-Saudi Arabia conclave in which the Saudi Crown Prince was also present".

Mr. Ramesh also shared a short video clip of Mr. Trump speaking at the U.S.-Saudi Arabia conclave. Earlier, the party's communications chief highlighted the annual report of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission to the U.S. Congress. The Commission — set up jointly by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives — has 12 independent members, he added. "The 2025 Annual Report is almost 800 pages long. The sections on pages 108 and 109 are simply astonishing and beyond understanding. It describes the Pahalgam terror attack of April 2025, orchestrated by Pakistan as an 'insurgent attack'. It

speaks of 'Pakistan's military success over India' in the four-day clash," Mr. Ramesh said on X. "President Trump has claimed 60 times (so far) that he had halted Operation Sindoor. The PM has kept completely quiet. Now comes this report of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Commission of the U.S. Congress that is simply unacceptable to India. Will the PM and the MEA register their objections and protest? Our diplomacy has suffered yet another severe setback," the Congress communication chief added.

Mr. Ramesh also shared relevant portions of the commission's report. "China's role in the May 7-10, 2025 clash between Pakistan's and India's militaries drew global attention as Pakistan's military relied upon Chinese weaponry and reportedly leveraged Chinese intelligence. During the clash, triggered by India's response to a deadly insurgent attack that killed 26 civilians, both countries attacked targets farther into one another's territories than at any time in 50 years," the report said. "Pakistan's military success over India in its four-day clash showcased Chinese weaponry. While characterisation of this conflict as a 'proxy war' may overstate China's role as an instigator, Beijing opportunistically leveraged the conflict to test and advertise the sophistication of its weapons, useful in the contexts of its ongoing border tensions with India and its expanding defence industry goals," the report added.

Tejas fighter jet crashes during demo flight at Dubai Air Show

Dubai: An Indian combat plane crashed on Friday during a demonstration at the Dubai Air Show.

The Indian HAL Tejas, a combat aircraft used in the Indian Air Force, crashed around 2:10 p.m. local time while flying a demonstration flight for a crowd. It wasn't immediately clear if the pilot ejected, or if anyone was injured in the incident. Black smoke rose over the Al Maktoum International Airport at Dubai World Central as a crowd of spectators watched, and sirens sounded after the crash.

The city-state's second airport was hosting the biennial Dubai Air Show, which has seen major aircraft orders by both the long-haul carrier Emirates and its lower-cost sister airline FlyDubai.

How Haryana turned around sex ratio at birth, now close to national average



Behind Haryana's best sex ratio in five years lies a decade-long campaign, involving law-enforcement measures, inter-state raids and roping in of medical officers to monitor ultrasound centres. In the 2011 Census, the state ranked among the worst performers in terms of sex ratio at birth, at 834 girls per 1,000 boys. In 2025, this stood at 923, close to the national average of 933 (as per a reply in Parliament by the government in 2023), and a big jump from 910 in 2024. The 2024 numbers, which marked an eight-year dip, had set alarm bells ringing.

More than 65,000 girls have been "saved" on account of the push to improve sex ratio since 2015, officials say (an estimation of the number of girls who may have been killed due to foeticide otherwise). Says Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Sudhir Rajpal: "It was a concerted and focused approach, with strategies refined as needed. We monitored the initiatives weekly, and involved departments across the board, including police, shifting our approach from just the implementation of the PNDDT and MTP Act. We had full support of the government, from the Chief Minister to the Health Minister and everybody else."

One measure of the efforts made by the state, which was chosen by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to launch his 'Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao' campaign in 2015, are the number of FIRs filed under the PNDDT (Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques) and MTP (Medical Termination of Pregnancy) Acts. Between 2015 and 2025, Haryana registered 1,375 FIRs, against medical practitioners and ultrasound centre owners, under the two laws, with records showing a sustained campaign even during the Covid-hit year of 2020. If around 100 FIRs were registered in that period, the number stood at 142 in 2021. There was a dip in 2023-24, but in 2025, Haryana officials filed 154 cases. Action has been spread across districts, including urbanised districts such as Faridabad (126 FIRs over the decade, the highest in the state), followed closely by Sonapat with 115 and Gurugram with 112, and Tier II ones such as Ambala, Hisar, Rohtak, Sirsa, Karnal and Kurukshetra. Faridabad, Sonapat and Gurugram, incidentally, continue to have sex ratios below the state average, at 916, 894 and 901, respectively. The top three districts as regards sex ratio at birth are Panchkula (971), Fatehabad (961) and Panipat (951). With Haryana residents who want sex determination tests visiting cen-

tres in bordering states, raids were also conducted by the Haryana administration in these areas. Haryana shares borders with four states: Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, and Rajasthan. In 2025, 218 inter-state PNDDT raids were conducted in Uttar Pradesh, the highest, followed by 89 in Delhi, 83 in Punjab and 26 in Rajasthan. "There were times when raiding teams faced challenges, including leaks about the action and logistics issues. But our counterparts in other states have been very receptive and cooperative," a senior officer told.

Explaining the coordination within the state at the ground level, Dr Arun, a nodal officer for the PNDDT in Panchkula, says, "There are around 57 ultrasound centres in Panchkula. All are part of our WhatsApp group. We hold regular inspections, quarterly meetings. Last year, we also introduced 'RCHID' or 'Reproductive and Child Health Identity', a 12-digit unique ID issued to every pregnant woman who is examined at any private or government healthcare institute. That resulted in a 37 percentage point increase in registration of pregnant women. Each and every abortion was tracked, recording reasons, from hospitals to MTP centres to ultrasound centres." Another project, Saheli, launched in April 2025, roped in anganwadi or ASHA workers to specifically monitor pregnant women who have at least one daughter, says Dr Arun. "That resulted in a 57 percentage point drop in trimester abortion rate in one year."

The monitoring measures also led to the cancellation of licences of ultrasound centres found to be violating rules, as well as seizure of equipment and prosecution of doctors. Special task forces were empowered to track illegal medical termination kits. District officials were made directly accountable for any sudden dips in local sex ratios. Dr G L Singhal, a PhD in Generic Medicines who is a consultant for coordinating the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' programme, says the Haryana government's offer of Rs 1 lakh for tips on illegal sex-determination centres or illegal abortions also proved decisive. "So far, we have given out around Rs 5 crore to such informers in approximately the last 10 years," Dr Singhal says. One of the measures police use are decoys, who visit such centres pretending to be in need of abortion. They often involve women police constables, but also others. A Sonapat-based widow and mother of four who has been working as a decoy with the state government says: "I have been associated with the Sonapat team for eight-nine years and been part of at least a dozen raids. Because I have four daughters, I realise the importance of a girl child, which is why I voluntarily joined this programme." Officials are worried now of challenges such as portable ultrasound machines available online. "An MTP kit that costs Rs 50-60 is now being sold in the black market for as high as Rs 2,000-2500," Dr Singhal says, adding that operators also try to escape the noose by frequently changing location or doing sex-determination tests in places other than registered centres. "We have been able to curb these malpractices to a large extent. Of course, there is much more to be done."

No red lines, and a political free-for-all in Maharashtra civic polls



The BJP is in alliance with the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena in city A, while the two parties are rivals in neighbouring city B, where Ajit Pawar's NCP has joined hands with rival Sharad Pawar's faction to challenge the BJP. Such is the political picture in Maharashtra ahead of elections to 29 municipal corporations to be held on January 15. This is the second round of polls after smaller municipal councils elected their local representatives about two weeks ago. The current round will be followed by elections to zila parishads. Rightly dubbed "mini assembly elections", the urban body polls have revealed the ugly, unsavoury and unscrupulous aspects of Indian politics today. The absence of local elected bodies for the last six-seven years has also made the ongoing elections particularly appealing. The process has all the hallmarks of a third-grade Bollywood thriller. While elections are never simple due to the number of aspirants, what's happening in Maharashtra is simply unprecedented.

It's a free-for-all, literally. Except for the Congress, which has little stake in any of the battles, and the BJP, which aims to secure every election it participates in, every other party has partnered with every other party. It's political promiscuity at its best. Or, rather, at its worst. Maharashtra's three-party alliance government — comprising the BJP, Shinde's Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP — hasn't prevented any of its constituents from seeking partners outside the alliance. It will require an exceptional exercise of intelligence and memory to remember which parties are allied and which are against each other. For example, Ajit Pawar's NCP is challenging the BJP's hegemony in Pune, though both parties are part of the ruling alliance. It was the BJP that helped Ajit step out of NCP founder Sharad Pawar's shadow. Ajit and his illustrious uncle were at loggerheads. Despite this, Ajit has sought Pawar Senior's help in challenging the BJP, which has publicly expressed regret for having an alliance with "Ajit dada". On the other hand, Ajit dada came out all guns blazing against the BJP for its "corrupt rule". Put simply, if A plus B equals C, in Maharashtra politics, B plus A could yield different results.

The equation between the BJP and its handpicked, home-grown Shiv Sena chief Shinde is similar. His party has allied with the BJP in Mumbai but is fighting against it in many other municipal bodies. In some municipal corporations, the SS-BJP are projecting themselves as the Mahayuti (mega alliance) while elsewhere, they are at loggerheads. This has triggered unprecedented political infidelity. Party-hopping became so rampant that some candidates changed parties three times in one day. A case from Nashik in north Maharashtra is worth mentioning in this regard. Two local satraps loyal to the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena celebrated the reunion of the Thackeray brothers by publicly vowing to "drown the BJP in the Ganga". However, the very next day, they were found in the BJP camp promising supporters that they would finish the Sena. The candidates are like their parties. No party has demon-

strated any courage in rejecting such political promiscuity.

The BJP, which once flaunted the tagline "party with a difference", has been exceptionally welcoming. Its leadership in Maharashtra went overboard in accepting anyone from any party, depending on their winnability. In the bargain, it preferred strong local satraps from other parties while ignoring aspirants from within its ranks. Out of 29 municipal corporations going to the polls on the 15th, the BJP has fielded 337 candidates imported from other parties in 19 bodies. As a result of its leadership's eagerness to embrace defectors, the BJP faced unprecedented anger from its own cadres. In several cities, BJP offices were attacked and ransacked, and ministers' vehicles were blackened. At one point, party officials responsible for distributing formal letters to official candidates had to flee as a large number of nomination hopefuls chased their vehicles. It's worth noting that there are history-sheeters, habitual defectors and many with questionable reputations in the fray. Equally, if not more concerning and shocking, is the complete absence of civic issues in the political conversation around the municipal elections in one of the most urbanised states in the country. No single party or leader worth his/her salt is seen raising local issues that affect urban life. This is especially painful when haphazard, unplanned urbanisation has created cities with extremely poor living conditions. Even cities such as Mumbai, which had a touch of planning in the past, are showing signs of decay. This does not find mention in the high-voltage political drama being played out there. The current election campaign also brings out another facet of Maharashtra's current political picture. In a quest to record electoral victories, parties are happy to welcome lumpen and undesirable elements bereft of any political ideology and basic civility. The tradition of nurturing constituencies and building local connections appears to have been set aside for local lords who claim captive support. These satraps get political patronage in return for their support, which, in turn, results in the establishment legitimising their activities. Their idea of development is a one-point agenda: Converting open spaces for "development" that further strengthens the builder-politician nexus. This renders the entire urban governance model obsolete. Politics has always been known for making strange bedfellows — but it never looked so perverse. The current elections in Maharashtra demonstrate the spectacularly flawed nature of the system.

Food adulteration will be treated as attempt to murder: Hyderabad CP Sajjanar

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad police will maintain a zero-tolerance policy towards food adulteration and treat it on par with an attempt to murder, said Hyderabad Commissioner of Police VC Sajjanar.

The Hyderabad CP on Wednesday held a high-level coordination meeting to discuss and evolve ways to combat the adulteration mafia. He said specialised joint task force teams comprising police and food safety officials would be formed soon to deal with the issue. "We do not see this merely as a violation of safety norms; we will treat it on par with an attempt to murder as it directly endangers public health," said VC Sajjanar.

He emphasised that enforcement would not be limited to street vendors but would also target large-scale manufacturing and processing units.

Did Vijay, summoned by CBI, walk into a trap of his own making?



For weeks after 41 people lost their lives in a deadly stampede at actor-politician Vijay's rally in Karur in September, the Tamil Nadu government appeared to choose restraint. The Tamil superstar was not named in the FIR, his senior aides were not arrested, and the MK Stalin government held back from making moves that could be read as political retaliation. Behind the scenes, according to senior figures within Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), emissaries assured Vijay that the state police would not trouble him. However, it is the CBI that has summoned the actor-politician to New Delhi on January 12 in connection with its investigation into the Karur stampede, an inquiry that quite ironically he himself had sought. What began as an attempt, driven by his campaign strategist Aadhav Arjun, to place the probe beyond the reach of the state police has instead placed Vijay before the central agency and in the orbit of the BJP-led Centre's influence, TVK insiders fear. This comes at a bad time for Vijay since his much-anticipated movie Jana Nayagan remains stalled before the Censor Board amid a legal battle in the Madras High Court.

The CBI took over the investigation after the Supreme Court, on October 13, ordered it to probe the tragedy, saying it had "shaken the national conscience." The court said entrusting the investigation to the state police, whose senior officials had publicly defended their actions, risked "undermining public confidence." The CBI has since questioned more than 200 people, including victims' families, ambulance drivers, district officials, police officers, and TVK organisers. Senior functionaries of Vijay's parties were summoned twice, once in Karur and later to Delhi, where they were questioned for nearly nine hours on permissions sought, crowd management, security arrangements, and the party's chain of command.

Only one figure remained absent from the process: Vijay himself. That changed this week. Multiple TVK sources said the summons illustrates that Vijay's post-stampede strategy has backfired. According to two senior party figures involved in negotiations after the tragedy, Vijay was personally informed that neither he nor his senior leadership would be booked by the state police. But those assurances failed to calm his inner circle. "It was fear, not pressure," said a senior TVK leader. "There were conflicting opinions. Vijay didn't trust the message from the DMK government's emissary."

Several TVK leaders said Aadhav Arjun, the son-in-law of "lottery king" Santiago Martin and the party's general secretary for election campaign management, amplified those fears, warning of an imminent crackdown by the Stalin government and pushed Vijay to demand a CBI probe as a protective shield. But that plan has boomeranged. Arjun is learnt to have now advised Vijay to ignore the summons and skip appearing before the CBI. "He is asking the leader to demand questioning in Chennai. This will only deepen

the trouble. Ignoring a CBI summons is not the same as sparring with state police," said a senior leader. "Underestimated what CBI means" A close friend of Vijay, who was involved in reaching out to leaders across parties after the stampede, described the summons as a political trap Vijay walked into because he did not trust the DMK. "He underestimated what a CBI inquiry really means. The Tamil Nadu government told him he wouldn't be troubled. But he didn't trust that and now he's dealing with Delhi," said the person close to the superstar. He drew parallels with other regional leaders who joined CBI investigations only to find exit routes narrowing. "Look at Anbumani Ramadoss, who was booked by the CBI in 2013-14. Look at T T V Dhinakaran, whom the CBI booked in 2016-17. Both are still unable to come out of the NDA alliance. Look at Jagannathan Reddy. Once you're in this system, you don't walk out easily." The timing, the friend said, was fraught with dangers for Vijay. "Arjuna should not have pressed him when the DMK wasn't in a provocative mode. Vijay should not have fallen into the irrational fear sold by Arjuna," he said.

While the DMK has been careful about not publicly targeting Vijay, behind the scenes, its leaders have criticised the TVK leader for training his guns on their party and avoiding ruffling the feathers of the BJP and the RSS. In the BJP, however, several defections from the AIADMK to the TVK in recent weeks appear to have unsettled leaders. Asked if there was pressure on Vijay to join the NDA alliance before the Assembly polls, a senior TVK leader said the fledgling party had two options. "Confront the BJP directly and stand alone. Or align with them in the name of a common enemy: DMK. The second option will destroy Vijay's political claims." According to CBI officials, Vijay will be questioned mainly about the material already gathered: the permissions obtained for the Karur rally, safety protocols, coordination with district authorities, and the TVK's decision-making hierarchy. Investigators are also scrutinising digital evidence and communications related to crowd control and emergency response. The probe cannot be completed without Vijay's statement, agency officials said.

Another concern for the actor-politician is that Jana Nayagan, set to release on January 9, has not yet received a final censor certificate. The Madras High Court on Wednesday took up a petition by the film's producers challenging the Central Board of Film Certification's decision to refer the movie to a revising committee. The producers say the examining committee has already recommended a U/ A 16+ certificate, subject to modifications that were carried out. The sudden referral, they say, is based on anonymous complaints alleging harm to religious sentiments and portrayal of the Armed Forces, complaints whose authors and specifics remain undisclosed. Senior counsel for the producers warned the court that entertaining such vague objections would "set a dangerous precedent" and open the door to motivated obstruction of film releases. The coincidence has not gone unnoticed in Vijay's circle: a CBI investigation on one side and a stalled censor clearance on the other. For now, Vijay's party says it will decide its response to the summons after consulting legal advisers. The CBI is also moving methodically under the watch of a three-member monitoring committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Ajay Rastogi. For now, Vijay remains squarely before the country's most powerful investigative agency. "He was told it was meant to protect him. Instead, it has brought the door to Delhi wide open," said a TVK leader. Whether Vijay chooses to walk through that door or challenge it may define this crucial phase of his political career.

Stabilisation of Venezuela's oil sector could help India's complex refineries, crude sourcing strategy in medium to long term



The potential stabilisation of Venezuela's oil sector with American intervention could lead to some volumes of Caracas's discounted crude oil making their way into India's oil import mix over the medium to long term to the benefit to the more complex refineries in India, even as any material impact in the near term appears highly unlikely, according to industry experts. After US forces captured Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro on Saturday, US President Donald Trump said that Washington would take control of Caracas's oil sector and that American majors would pump in billions of dollars to revive the struggling Venezuelan oil industry and fix its broken oil infrastructure.

Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves, but accounts for less than 1 per cent of global production. If Trump can get Caracas to agree to his terms going forward, it could potentially make the Venezuelan oil industry sanctions-free and open for business, bringing more Venezuelan oil to the international market. Meaningfully increasing Venezuela's oil production, however, would take years and billions of dollars in investment. "Venezuelan crude is predominantly heavy to extra-heavy and can be processed on a sustained basis by only a handful of Indian refineries, constraining system-wide intake. Any impact is likely to be incremental and dependent on sanctions policy and the pace of production recovery," commodity market analytics firm Kpler said in a note on Monday.

"The US intervention in Venezuela on 3 January 2026 does not materially alter India's oil market dynamics in the near term. Still, it introduces a potential inflexion point for medium- to long-term crude supply, refining, and upstream considerations. Venezuelan crude had already been largely excluded from India's import mix due to sanctions and logistics, and initial U.S. oversight has not disrupted existing flows. However, the change in control increases the likelihood of sanctions recalibration and a gradual reintegration of Venezuelan barrels into global markets," it added. Any recovery in Venezuelan oil exports would be positive for India. But Venezuelan heavy and extra-heavy crude oil grades are not suitable for all Indian refineries, and can be processed at only the most complex and advanced units. Heavy crudes are a lot more viscous, or thick, as com-

pared to light crude grades. Heavier crudes are a lot more difficult to process than light crudes, and require complex and more capital-intensive refineries. This is one of the reasons why heavy crudes usually trade at a discount to lighter grades. In India, private sector behemoth Reliance Industries (RIL) and Nayara Energy (NEL) have been the biggest processors of heavy crudes. Limited heavy crude volumes are also processed occasionally by a few public sector refineries like Indian Oil's Paradip refinery and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals (MRPL) unit in Mangalore. HPCL-Mittal Energy (HMEL), a joint venture of public sector refiner Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) and Mittal Energy, also processes heavy crudes from time to time. According to Kpler, planned investments aimed at increasing refinery complexity—such as upgrades at HPCL's Visakhapatnam and a few other refineries—could expand India's ability to process Venezuelan heavy crudes, gradually broadening system-wide intake capacity. Till then, any Venezuelan supply coming to India would largely support only a few Indian refineries, "constraining aggregate intake potential despite improved availability". India — specifically private sector refining giant Reliance Industries (RIL) — was a regular buyer of Venezuelan crude prior to the imposition of US sanctions on Caracas in 2019. Following the sanctions, oil imports from Venezuela stopped within a few months. As per India's official trade data, Caracas was New Delhi's fifth-largest supplier of oil in 2019, providing close to 16 million tonnes of crude to Indian refiners. In October 2023, the US eased sanctions on Venezuela's petroleum sector, authorising oil exports without limitation for six months. This led to RIL and a few other Indian refiners restarting oil imports from Venezuela. But imports then stopped as the sanction waiver was not extended by Washington after its understanding with Caracas on the conduct of free and fair presidential elections in Venezuela broke down. A few months later, RIL was able to restart Venezuelan oil imports after obtaining a sanctions waiver from the US. But in the summer of 2025, the company halted oil imports from Venezuela after the Trump administration threatened higher tariffs on countries buying Venezuelan crude. No Venezuelan oil has been imported into India for months now. How the situation evolves over the next few weeks and months would be crucial from India's perspective as well. If the US and Venezuela's new leadership can negotiate an easing or suspension of sanctions, it could open the doors for Venezuelan oil to flow more freely in the international market, including to India. "While Indian refiners can substitute barrels from the Middle East and the Americas, such alternatives often carry higher delivered costs and tighter economics. As a result, Venezuelan crude is expected to re-enter the market at a discount, reinforcing its attractiveness for compatible refineries. Renewed access would improve feedstock optionality, enhance procurement flexibility, and strengthen India's negotiating leverage with other suppliers, even if total volumes remain concentrated among a few players," Kpler said.

India's trade deficit with FTA countries widening; electronics exports stand out performer: Niti Aayog



At a time when India is accelerating free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations to diversify exports and soften the impact of US tariffs, a Niti Aayog report has said that India's trade deficit with its FTA partner countries is rising sharply, but exports from sunrise industries such as electronics are growing their foothold globally.

The Niti Aayog's 'Trade Watch Quarterly' report released Tuesday said India's trade deficit with FTA partners rose 59.2 per cent between April and June last year compared to the previous year as imports jumped by 10 per cent to \$65.3 billion and exports declined by 9 per cent to \$38.7 billion. India has concluded FTAs with Oman, New Zealand and the UK in 2025 and is in active negotiations with the EU, the US, Australia, Bahrain, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Canada and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU). New Delhi is also considering a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Brazil and Israel.

However, the report said that India's export performance during the period shows clear structural divergence, with a sharp decline in petroleum exports but a strong surge in electronics exports. Electronics emerged as the standout performer, rising 47 per cent year-on-year, increasing its share to over 11 per cent of total exports, reflecting deeper integration into global electronics supply chains, the Niti Aayog said. The widening of the trade deficit was driven by

a contraction in exports to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region.

India has been in talks with ASEAN to re-negotiate the terms of the trade agreement; however, India and ASEAN missed the end of 2025 deadline. However, in October last year, ASEAN and China signed an upgraded free-trade agreement. India's shipments to FTA countries contracted as exports to ASEAN, the largest FTA export partners fell by 16.9 per cent, while Malaysia (-39.7 per cent), Singapore (-13.2 per cent), and Australia (-10.9 per cent) also witnessed sharp declines. UAE, India's second-largest FTA export destination, saw a modest 2.1 per cent dip, whereas exports to South Korea (15.6 per cent), Japan (2.8 per cent), Thailand (2.9 per cent), and Bhutan (10.2 per cent) recorded marginal gains, the report said.

Meanwhile, India's share of imports from its top seven markets — China, UAE, Russia, USA increased, contributing around 43 per cent of total imports in Q1 FY26 from 39 per cent in Q1 FY25, amounting to \$76.7 bn. In Q1 FY26, India recorded significant y-o-y import growth, with notable increases from the UAE (28.7 per cent), China (16.3 per cent), the USA (16.9 per cent) and Singapore (14 per cent). However, import growth declined with Iraq (-13.3 per cent), Russia (-8.7 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (-8.50 per cent). The report pointed out that gold compounds and petroleum primarily drove rising imports from the UAE. Gold compounds, which were previously not imported from the UAE, have now made the UAE one of the top import sources, surpassing Japan, which was previously the leading supplier. Imports of petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals have also increased sharply. "From China, the surge was concentrated in the 'other' subcategories under HS 85, particularly codes 851779 (circuit boards-parts) and 854239 (electronic integrated circuits-other). In the case of Iraq, while imports of petroleum oils declined, imports of mineral fuels in gaseous form and petroleum bitumen rose. Notably, crude soybean oil sourcing from Iraq has also begun. Imports from Russia, however, declined due to lower petroleum oil inflows," the report said.

Institutional investments in Indian real estate hit all-time high of \$8.47 bn in 2025: Report



Institutional investments in the Indian real estate sector surged to an all-time high of \$8.47 billion (around Rs 76,000 crore) in 2025, registering a 29 per cent year-on-year growth from \$6.56 billion (Rs 59,000 crore) in 2024, according to a report by property consultancy Colliers India. The record inflows come at a time when the global economy is holding up better amid geopolitical tensions, with emerging signs of trade normalcy despite ongoing tariff negotiations. India's strong growth outlook and expanding investment horizons continue to reinforce its stature as a key destination for global capital across sectors, including real estate.

Led by large office transactions, Bengaluru and Mumbai together attracted nearly half of total investments — around 47 per cent — during the year, with inflows of about \$2.2 billion and \$1.8 billion, respectively. Of the \$4 billion invested in these two cities, office assets accounted for nearly three-fourths of the activity. Overall, five of the seven major Indian cities recorded a year-on-year rise in capital inflows in 2025. Domestic institutional capital emerged as the primary driver of investments, with inflows more than doubling to \$4.8 billion, accounting for 57 per cent of total investment volume. "The strong growth in domestic investor participation underscores rising confidence among Indian institutional investors, supported by improving asset quality, stable returns and greater market transparency," Colliers said. Foreign capital deployment moderated by 16 per cent year-on-year to \$3.7 billion, though cross-border investments showed signs of recovery in the final quarter, pointing to a gradual improvement in global investor sentiment. Private equity investments reached a new peak in 2025, supported by record capital deployment in the last quarter. The October-December quarter of 2025 alone wit-

nessed investments of \$4.2 billion, the highest ever recorded in any quarter, indicating strong tailwinds for the sector. Office assets continued to attract the bulk of investments, accounting for 54 per cent of annual inflows. The Indian office market drew \$4.5 billion in 2025, nearly double the level seen in 2024, backed by strong Grade A space uptake across major markets. The final quarter alone contributed nearly two-thirds of annual office investments. The residential segment followed with \$1.6 billion in inflows, posting a 36 per cent year-on-year growth and accounting for 18 per cent of total investments. Colliers attributed the momentum to favourable demographics, rising income levels and increased developer expansion into Tier II cities through joint-venture platforms, attracting both domestic and foreign investors.

Mixed-use, retail and alternative assets also saw healthy traction, collectively attracting about \$1.5 billion, or nearly 17 per cent of total investments in 2025. Investor appetite in these segments continues to be driven by portfolio diversification and rising focus on demand-led assets such as data centres, co-living spaces and second homes.

"Investment traction is supported by strong operational performance and consecutive record-breaking Grade A office space uptake over the past three to four years. With over 370 million sq ft of existing office stock having the potential to be included in future REITs, we expect a greater degree of institutionalisation and consolidation, supported by cross-border capital flows in the coming years," Colliers said. Of the \$2.3 billion invested through multi-city transactions in 2025, over 40 per cent was directed towards residential assets, reflecting growing investor interest in early-stage residential projects and expansion into newer markets, including emerging Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. Looking ahead, institutional investments are expected to strengthen further, supported by expanding domestic capital, improving global risk appetite and India's strong economic fundamentals. "Core income-generating assets — particularly offices, industrial and logistics parks, and the residential segment — will remain priority areas for investors in 2026," said Badal Yagnik, CEO and MD, Colliers India. The institutional investment data includes capital deployed by family offices, foreign corporate groups, foreign banks, pension funds, private equity players, REITs, sovereign wealth funds and foreign-funded NBFCs, compiled from publicly available information.

Gold, silver prices surge as US-Venezuela conflict boosts safe-haven appeal

Gold and silver prices rose over 1 per cent on Monday as escalating geopolitical tensions following a US strike in Venezuela that led to the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, drove investors towards safe-haven precious metals. Spot gold prices rose 1.03 per cent while silver climbed nearly 1.07 per cent. The gold (999 purity) ended at Rs 1,36,168 per 10 gram on Monday, compared to the previous closing of Rs 1,34,782 per 10 gram, according to the India Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA). Silver (999 purity) closed at Rs 2,37,063 per kilogram on Monday, compared to a close of Rs 2,34,550 per kg on January 2, as per IBJA. On Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold price for February futures rose 1.28 per cent to Rs 1,37,499 per 10 gram. Silver for March futures jumped 2.83 per cent to Rs 2,43,000 per kg compared to previous close to Rs 2,36,316 a kg. It surged around 6 per cent in intraday trades. In global markets, spot gold advanced 2 per cent to around \$4,415 per ounce, while spot silver surged \$75.19 per ounce. "Venezuela is now the hotbed of disruption and given the developments over the weekend it is interesting to conjecture what can happen in the markets. Gold and silver have gained which is again expected as they tend to react to any disturbance," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda. Venezuela's share in total oil supplies is less than 1 per cent and there are sanctions here too though some exports are channelled to China. Out of a total of around 105 mn barrels a day, their production is less than a million. However, known reserves are the highest in the world which can be the attraction for the USA, he said. "The US's increasingly assertive foreign policy, even



if designed to encourage 'peace through strength', will heighten geopolitical risk in 2026," according to a report by BMI, a unit of Fitch Solutions.

The ousting of Maduro will heighten concerns in Iran in particular, given that Trump has threatened strikes in defence of Iranian protestors — a threat we regard as credible; the governments of Cuba and Nicaragua are also likely to come under greater pressure," the report said. "Silver prices are trading close to all-time highs due to strong industrial and investment demand, ongoing supply concerns, and global geopolitical tensions," said Satish Dondapati, VP & fund manager, Kotak Mutual Fund. "Recent price swings in silver were mainly caused by higher margin requirements announced by the CME and China's silver export restrictions by January 1," he said. Last month, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange Inc (CME) Group raised the initial margin requirement for precious metal futures.

Meet the recently discovered superbug named after an iconic Star Wars villain



The deep sea, with its strange and unusual animals, never stops amazing scientists. One of the latest discoveries is a giant sea bug called *Bathynomus vaderi*, found in the cold waters near the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. The marine creature has been particularly popular among the fans of the Star Wars franchise, because of its iconic colloquial name! The angular-headed bug is being called the Darth Vader superbug, thanks to its striking similarity to the iconic villain's helmet. Its large, triangular, and widely spaced compound eyes, as well as the facial features, further add to the resemblance.

The superbug belongs to a genus of giant isopods called *Bathynomus*, which live in deep, chilly waters. This new species is impressively large, weighing over 2.2 pounds

(1 kilogram) and growing up to 12.8 inches (32.5 centimetres) long. Besides its Darth Vader-like appearance, the species has a unique narrowing and slight backward curve at the last segment of its back legs, which distinguishes it from typical isopods. It was first identified in 2022, when a group of scientists examined samples collected by local fishers in Vietnam from the South China Sea. The fishermen fetched these bottom feeders from extremely dark depths of the sea. The researchers noted several features that set it apart from other giant isopods, including a distinct hip bone depression and a specialised bony ridge on its coracoid. These differences confirmed it as a completely new species.

Studying supergiant isopods like *B. vaderi* is challenging because they live in deep-sea environments that are hard to reach. Most discoveries happen when fishers bring specimens up or through special deep-sea expeditions. Every new find, however, helps scientists understand deep-sea life and the unique adaptations of these remarkable creatures. Unfortunately, *Bathynomus* species have recently become a popular delicacy in Vietnam, beating the original seafood staple, lobster, which is usually very pricy. While this growing demand is turning these sea bugs into a valuable seafood product, it also increases fishing pressures, which could threaten the species. This calls for a conscious effort to keep the species protected. May the force be with them!

As Deepinder Goyal generates buzz with 'Temple' device on forehead, experts advice caution: 'The biggest worry is that...'



Deepinder Goyal's recent appearance on a podcast drew public attention and sparked curiosity, as he was seen wearing a small device — named Temple — fixed near the temple region of the head. According to several reports, the experimental wearable health gadget, developed by a private research initiative backed by the Zomato founder and CEO, continuously measures brain oxygenation, which indirectly reflects blood flow to the brain when the person is upright and moving, or sitting for long durations. According to Goyal, the core idea is "Gravity Ageing Hypothesis", which aims to track minute fluctuations in cerebral blood flow and oxygenation, generating real-time data that could help researchers understand how posture, activity and lifestyle affect brain health over time.

Goyal has mentioned previously that he has been wearing the device for nearly a year as part of ongoing testing. Notably, the device is not currently available for sale; it is only positioned as a research prototype, not a medical product. Given the ongoing research, experts on social media have cautioned against relying on what you see.

Taking a dig at the device's "0 scientific standing", Dr Suvranik Datta, an AI researcher and radiologist from AIIMS Delhi, wrote on X, "As a physician-scientist and one of the earliest researchers in India in Arterial Stiffness and Pulse Wave Velocity (2017) which predicts cardiovascular mortality, I can assure you that this device currently has 0 scientific standing as a useful device and do not waste your hard earned money to buy fancy toys billionaires can afford to waste money on. If you are one, then go ahead." Celebrity nutritionist Ryan Fernando had a more watered-down response to many of the queries he received about the gadget's viability. "Some say it is still based on hypothesis, some say there are no large-scale reviews yet. What I think is that any brain health tech must grow through serious credibility checks and testing before strong claims are made. But if it is safe and time-tested, then I genuinely do welcome innovation in the brain health space," he said in a post on Instagram.

Taking a cue from the varied responses, we turned to neurological experts for a better understanding. Dr Sudhir Kumar, a consultant neurologist at Apollo Hospitals, Hyderabad, explained that the device worn on Goyal's temple is based on near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS). "It uses light to estimate changes in brain oxygenation, which indirectly reflects cerebral blood flow, but does not measure blood flow directly. There is some scientific backing,

mainly in research, anaesthesia, and ICU settings. However, in real-world use, readings are influenced by scalp blood flow and motion, limiting accuracy. These devices are not diagnostic," said Dr Kumar. Dr Sheetal Goyal, consultant neurologist at Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central, said that in clinical neurology, changes in blood flow are studied in conditions such as stroke, dementia, and traumatic brain injury, always using validated imaging tools in controlled settings.

According to Dr Kumar, in clinical neurology, there are "robust and validated tools, such as Transcranial Doppler, CT perfusion, and MRI angiogram, that provide far more accurate and actionable information on cerebral blood flow". "For healthy individuals, there is no current medical need to monitor cerebral blood flow. The brain has strong autoregulation, and routine monitoring does not improve health outcomes. At present, such wearables are better viewed as experimental or wellness gadgets, not medical devices," said Dr Kumar. Concurring, Dr Goyal said that even if some data is collected, there is currently no evidence that monitoring blood flow through a consumer device improves cognition, mental clarity, or emotional regulation. "The biggest worry is that people may misunderstand the information. They might think the device is diagnosing or improving brain health, but it hasn't been tested for medical use," emphasised Dr Dipesh Pimpale, consultant neurologist, KIMS Hospitals, Thane. They may find future niche roles in research or high-risk environments, but they do not add value to routine clinical practice today, Dr Kumar said. Simple, proven methods enough sleep, regular exercise, mental stimulation, managing stress, and getting timely medical advice are much more effective than relying on unverified devices, said Dr Pimpale.

Why your blood pressure may be normal at home but high at the doctor's clinic



Is it common for blood pressure (BP) to be normal at home but high when checked at a clinic? Yes, said Dr Rahul Gupta, director and cardiologist at Geneagles Hospital, Parel, adding that it is called 'white coat hypertension'. Adding that it usually happens because people feel anxious, stressed, or nervous during a hospital visit, Dr Gupta continued: "Even the fear of medical tests, waiting rooms, or seeing a doctor can temporarily raise BP levels. In some cases, rushing to the clinic, climbing stairs, lack of sleep, caffeine intake, or talking during the BP check can also cause higher readings." Agreeing, Dr Parin Sangoi, consultant interventional cardiologist at Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central, said that unrecognised high blood pressure can quietly harm the heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes over time, but that unnecessary treatment can be avoided when readings are understood correctly.

Why does it happen?

Stress hormones released during anxiety make the heart beat faster and narrow blood vessels, leading to a sudden rise in BP. "At home, people are relaxed, so readings often come out normal. While white coat hypertension is not always dangerous, it should not be ignored, as some people may later develop true high BP," stressed Dr Gupta. Worrying about test results, dealing with unfamiliar surroundings, or recalling past health experiences can activate stress hormones, elucidated Dr Sangoi. "These hormones temporarily narrow blood vessels and increase heart rate, leading to a short-term spike in blood pressure," he told indianexpress.com.

What should you do?

Stress can influence BP readings. "Check BP at home regularly using a reliable digital monitor. Sit calmly for 5 minutes before taking the measurements and note the readings. Avoid tea, coffee, smoking, or exercise 30 minutes before a BP check. Sharing home BP records with your doctor helps in the correct diagnosis," said Dr Gupta. In some cases, doctors may suggest 24-hour ambulatory BP monitoring. Managing stress, exercising regularly, eating less salt, and sleeping well also help keep BP under con-

trol. Dr Gupta advised keeping track of the readings and showing them to the doctor, who will decide on the appropriate treatment and avoid prescribing unnecessary medication. "Follow the guidelines given by the doctor and keep the BP within the normal range," said Dr Gupta.

Centre plans Aadhaar-style ID for EV batteries for traceability

New Delhi: The road transport ministry has proposed a new system to give electric vehicle batteries a unique identification number, similar to Aadhaar, to improve tracking, safety and recycling. The move is aimed at ensuring complete traceability of batteries from manufacturing to final disposal. Under the draft guidelines issued by the ministry, every battery producer or importer will be required to assign a 21-character Battery Pack Aadhaar Number, or BPAN, to each battery introduced in the market or used for self-consumption. Companies will also have to upload all relevant battery data on an official BPAN portal. The guidelines state that the BPAN must be placed in a clearly visible and accessible location on the battery.

Sanju Samson faces final audition – India's leap of faith ahead of World Cup



GNS News Agency, March 15

The sun beat down on the ACA-VDCA stadium at Vizag as Sanju Samson strode out for what could be described as the most scrutinized net session of his career. With head coach Gautam Gambhir positioned behind the stumps at the bowler's end, eyes locked on every movement, every shot, every twitch of hesitation, the wicketkeeper-batsman knew the weight of expectation resting on his shoulders.

For the next 20-odd minutes on the eve of the fourth T20I against New Zealand, Samson faced the full arsenal – Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakaravathy, Ravi Bishnoi, and three throw-down specialists. The coaching staff watched intently as he went aerial, creamed drives through covers, and produced one particularly eye-catching scoop over point off a fuller delivery from Arshdeep. Bar one no-look swipe that took the top edge, he looked every bit the elegant stroke-maker who has bewitched Indian cricket with glimpses of brilliance. Yet one telling detail betrayed the purpose of this session. Time and again, as short balls were directed at his body, Samson appeared unconvincing with the pull shot, opting to keep them out rather than attack with force.

The numbers tell a damning story. Since his 56 against Oman in the Asia Cup – batting in the middle order before his promotion to opener – Samson's scores read like a batsman in freefall: 13, 39, 24, 2, 37, 10, 6, and 0. Eight innings, zero substantial contributions, and the T20 World Cup just days away on February 7. This lean patch carries added weight. Samson was handed the opener's slot ahead of the

gifted Shubman Gill, a decision that saw finisher Jitesh Sharma make way for Ishan Kishan in the squad. Now, with Ishan in sparkling form and Samson misfiring, the team management faces its most delicate balancing act.

That India have swept New Zealand 3-0 despite Samson's struggles only underscores the team's depth. But can they afford to carry an out-of-form opener into cricket's biggest carnival? Bowling coach Morne Morkel certainly thinks so. "Sanju is just one match away from finding the form back," he insisted. "He's training well, hitting the ball very well, so I think it's just a matter of time. We all know the cliché word, but for us building up to the World Cup, it's important for the guys to find that peak performance at the right time. We're 3-0 up in the series at the moment, the boys are playing some very good cricket, and we've got a couple of games now before the start of the World Cup and I have no doubt that Sanju will find his form," he added. The extended net session validated Morkel's faith. After the main squad completed their routines, Samson returned for a second stint, this time facing only throw-down specialists.

What happened after the session was equally revealing. Captain Suryakumar Yadav engaged in lengthy discussions with Gambhir, both men's eyes following Samson's movements. The head coach then huddled with batting coach Sitanshu Kotak and team analyst Hari Prasad Mohan. These weren't brief exchanges but seemingly extended strategy sessions, signalling that India aren't ready to abandon their faith in the Abhishek Sharma-Samson opening combination. The team's philosophy has been shaped by recent experience. Suryakumar himself struggled for form before rediscovering his touch in this very series, reinforcing the management's belief in backing players through rough patches. With two matches remaining before the World Cup and warm-up fixtures still available, they possess the luxury of patience. But luxury has limits. As Ishan Kishan's conspicuous absence from the optional nets suggested, Plan B is ready and waiting. The next two matches represent Samson's final audition. The rope has been long, perhaps longer than most would receive. Now it's time for him to climb back up – or let go. In cricket, form is temporary but class is permanent, they say. India is betting everything that Samson's class will resurface when it matters most. The clock, however, is ticking.

Magnus Carlsen checkmated by 2200-rated player; can you find move that made world no 1 applaud

GNS News Agency, March 15

It's not everyday that Magnus Carlsen loses an online game by getting checkmated. And it's definitely not everyday that the game ends in such dazzling fashion that even Carlsen applauds his opponent. But that's precisely what happened in a recent Titled Tuesday game when the world no 1 was beaten by an untitled American player, Jacorey Bynum, who holds a classical rating of 2175 as per FIDE's published ratings. Carlsen was playing a five-minute blitz game against Bynum on Tuesday in round 1 of Titled Tuesday, which is an online event organised by Chess.com. Before we get to the move that made Carlsen applaud, here's a test to see if you can find the move.

The ill-advised move from Magnus Carlsen just before his opponent, Jacorey Bynum, moved in for the kill with a piece sacrifice. (screengrab via Chess.com) The ill-advised move from Magnus Carlsen just before his opponent, Jacorey Bynum, moved in for the kill with a piece sacrifice. (screengrab via Chess.com) This is what the board looked like after the Norwegian, playing with black pieces, played bishop to d4 (34...Bd4). What do you think Bynum played here? Here's a little hint: Bynum offered a sacrifice that the world no 1 could not refuse. But it was a poisoned chalice of a move that opened the door to a checkmate on the next move itself. Can you find it? The answer is the queen.

Jacorey Bynum offered his queen up as a sacrifice, which Carlsen could not avoid. The rook would then move in for the kill. (Screengrab via Chess.com) Jacorey Bynum offered his queen up as a sacrifice, which Carlsen could not avoid. The rook would then move in for the kill. (Screengrab via Chess.com) Bynum moved his queen to h5 leaving the World No 1 no option but to capture with the king. This would mean that the rook on b7 would swing on h7 to deliver a crushing checkmate. Carlsen could have resigned after the queen sac, but he allowed checkmate. Here is what followed:



35. Qxh5+ Kxh5 36. Rh7# Just minutes before the checkmate, the Norwegian was in a much superior position on the board, with an advantage of 40 seconds on the clock as well. "Magnus has dark-square domination. His king is super safe next to the knight here at the edge of the board (on the h6 square)," British grandmaster David Howell was saying on the Take Take app's live commentary for the game. Just then, Carlsen played 34...Bd4 which opened the door for Bynum to sac his queen. "Oh my God! Magnus has blundered. Magnus has blundered checkmate! What a way to play your first game against the former world champion," Howell said. "That came out of nowhere! We were just saying how safe Magnus' king was." On his video, Carlsen could be seen doubling over in laughter as he realised what he had done. He then applauded his opponent, who barely reacted to the impending victory. "This was his first time playing Magnus. And he played that spectacular queen sacrifice, what a heroic way to start the tournament," Norwegian grandmaster Jon Ludvig Hammer, who has been Carlsen's second in the past, said on Take Take's live stream. Hammer then called it an "epic queen sacrifice". Last year, a nine-year-old Indian boy Aarit Kapil had almost defeated the Norwegian in an online blitz game.

Novak Djokovic gets huge slice of luck in Australian Open quarterfinal: 'Was on my way home tonight but...'



GNS News Agency, March 15

Outplayed for the better part of two hours and looking both physically and mentally jaded, Novak Djokovic took the microphone after becoming the oldest player to reach the Australian Open semifinals in 60 years and acknowledged just how lucky he got. His opponent, the Italian fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti, had his number throughout the sultry evening on Melbourne Park, popping big backhands and playing attack-first tennis with perfect point construction. He had deservedly gone into a two-set lead before inexplicably suffering a groin injury out of nowhere. There had been neither any excessive jerks nor a bad fall but Musetti instantly felt something at the start of the third set. The trainer was called and he received intense treatment, but his expression told the tale. After trying to carry on, the Italian eventually threw in the towel to lose 6-3, 6-4, 1-3 RET and hand Djokovic a place in the final four.

Don't know what to say except that I feel sorry for him. He was the far better player, I was on my way home tonight," Djokovic said during his on-court interview after the win. "But these kind of things happen in sport. It happened to me a few times." The 24-time Major winner commiserated with his opponent further: "Being in quarterfinals of a

Grand Slam, two sets to love up and being in full control. I mean, so unfortunate. I don't know what else to say. I wish him a speedy recovery and he should've been the winner today, no doubt." Djokovic expressed some gratitude for his fortune in Melbourne Park this year, where he will play Jannik Sinner or Ben Shelton in the semifinal. Not only was the Serb being outplayed on Wednesday, but he also received a walkover in the fourth round, meaning he will go into Friday's semifinal without winning a single set in the second week of the Major. "I will double my prayers tonight," he said. The scenes were reminiscent of last year's Wimbledon, when Jannik Sinner received a huge slice of luck in the fourth round, as Grigor Dimitrov retired from a two-set lead with an injury. Sinner went on to win the title. Is this the sort of luck Djokovic needed to win his record-extending 25th?

stuns Gauff, Sabalenka and Alcaraz advance

Melbourne: A searing hot day turned into a sweltering night at the Australian Open, and eventually Coco Gauff let off steam, smashing her racket after a lopsided loss to Elina Svitolina that cost her a place in the semifinals.

Day 10 of the season-opening major began with top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka beating 18-year-old Iva Jovic 6-3, 6-0 on Tuesday before the Extreme Heat Policy was activated and the roof was closed on Rod Laver Arena.

The center court was still under cover when No 12 seed Svitolina stunned third-seeded Gauff 6-1, 6-2 in just 59 minutes to earn a semifinal against Sabalenka.

The men's quarterfinals were split into day and night sessions, with one played under a roof and the other under the stars.

Why is India's Test record dipping? Former India head coach Rahul Dravid explains



GNS News Agency, March 15

India are on the top of the ICC men's T20I rankings, dominating the world stage heading into the T20 World Cup title defence at home in under 10 days. Gautam Gambhir's men are on a roll in the format, having not tasted defeat in any series since he took over from Rahul Dravid as head coach, post June 2024. However, India's Test team has experienced a drastic slide in quality, with their home fortress being breached twice in under a year by New Zealand and South Africa. India are yet to win a Test series against a top-ranked nation under Gambhir, with their solitary series win coming over the West Indies at home in October 2025.

Having led India to the 2023 World Test Championship final, Dravid opened up on the challenge for India's long-format batters who also consistently switch across for ODI and T20I commitments. Speaking at a book launch event in Bengaluru on Wednesday, Dravid opened up on the challenge of allotting preparatory time for India's all-format batters, a concern that Test skipper Shubman Gill too had recently echoed. "One of the things I understood as a coach, especially the guys that play all three formats, they keep

moving from one format to the other," said Dravid. "There were times when we would get to a Test match three to four days before the match, and then when we start practising for the Test match, [and] when you look back at the last time that some of these guys had actually hit a red ball, it might have been four months ago or five months ago.

"That's become really a challenge, how do you almost find the time to be able to develop some of the skills that are hard. To play on turning tracks, or play on seaming wickets, doing that for hours and hours in a Test match is not easy. It requires skill," the former India captain added. Dravid recounted his days with the India side where players had ample time to switch between the Test and the ODI format before the raging advent of T20Is after 2007. "Now, one of the things that has become a bit tougher in red-ball cricket is a lot of our guys who play all the three formats, or who play the amount of cricket that they are playing, sometimes don't have the time to be able to practise red-ball cricket as much." "I think Shubman has kind of alluded to it a little bit, just recently, because I think he's one who experienced that. He's one who actually played recently for us in all of the three formats so I think he would have realised how difficult it is for him to actually gear up for the Test format," Dravid added. The legendary India No. 3 also put India's relentless T20I batting down to the constant white-ball practice the batters are involved in. "You look at the hitting part, and the way people are hitting today in white-ball cricket, it's because they are able to practise it a lot more. A lot of these boys who spend two-and-a-half months in the IPL, all they are doing is practising how many sixes they can hit, so they are getting much better at it." India are currently sixth in the ICC World Test Championship 2025-27 cycle, with their next red-ball series marked only during the Indian off-season in August, in Sri Lanka.

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Ian Nepomniachtchi names Praggnanandhaa among 2 favourites to win Candidates in his tier list

GNS News Agency, March 15

Two-time world championship contender Ian Nepomniachtchi has named India's R Praggnanandhaa as one of the two favourites to win the upcoming Candidates tournament in Cyprus. The winner of the Candidates will earn a shot to challenge world champion Gukesh later this year. "I would say there are two main favorites (at this year's Candidates). They are Praggnanandhaa and Fabiano Caruana. It seems to me that Praggnanandhaa, who plays very well in general, he's a very good player, he is quite versatile, he has a large choice of openings. That is, he is not an opening specialist, but he has lots of options what to play. I think he will have a good team," Nepomniachtchi said in an interview on the Chess with Mustrader YouTube channel. India's R Praggnanandhaa thinks about his next move during a game in Tata Steel Chess India in Kolkata. (Express photo by Partha Paul) India's R Praggnanandhaa thinks about his next move during a game in Tata Steel Chess India in Kolkata.

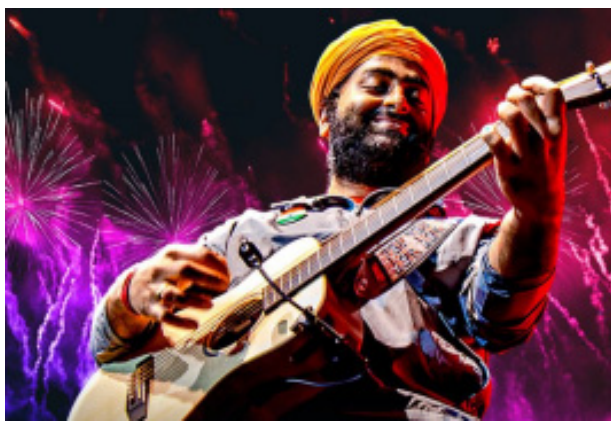
"The same can be said about Fabiano (Caruana), who is just a very strong chess player. Caruana says there is definitely one more cycle (in him) when he will definitely try to do his best there. He says, of course, I will try very hard. In the 2024 Circuit, he already qualified for the 2026 Candidates. That is, he achieved this goal in advance. And it would seem that 2025 for him should have been so-so; it would seem that in 2025 he would not try to push himself too hard. But he again played very well. That is, he practically did not lose any rating. Maybe he even added a little. Also, he became, I don't know, for the 5th or 10th time, the US champion. That is, he won a pretty strong round-robin event again. And he has, let's say, there is a whole group of like-minded people around him. In St. Louis, all the conditions for his training are provided. And, of course, he will be very seriously preparing for this tournament." The American grandmaster has qualified for the world championship once, where Magnus Carlsen prevailed to retain his title. At the last Candidates, Caruana came close, but it was a final round draw with Nepo that helped Gukesh secure a ticket to the world championship against Ding Liren. Nepomniachtchi pointed out what might hamper Caruana's bid to win the Candidates.

"The only problem is that Caruana, as we have seen several times previously, can burn out. It obviously happened to him in Madrid Candidates. He was trailing me behind by half a point. I had a plus-4, he had a plus-3 score. But, apparently, he did not take the words of Magnus Carlsen seriously enough about Magnus not intending to defend his title. And, as a result, I think the second place was taken by a

person who scored plus 2. I think Ding Liren scored plus 2. Hikaru Nakamura had plus 2 before the last round. Ding had plus 1. And they played against each other. Caruana finished the tournament even in the minus zone. He lost a few games at the finish line. That's it. Unfortunately, some kind of tilt got him. In the same way, he had all the chances in Toronto. That is, in the last round. I was very ashamed that I finished that game in a draw. Very ashamed, because he played a great game. And somewhere, only before time control, he made a mistake for the first time. And after the control, he could no longer use his chances. That's it. And, of course, I would have liked him to qualify for the world championship match. For me, personally. Because he has definitely been the second best player, let's say, over the last 10 years after Magnus. Maybe even over a longer period. To be honest, Fabiano has been at this job for a long time. And, of course, yes, I would like him to become the World Champion personally." R Praggnanandhaa, Anish Giri, and Fabiano Caruana will be fighting it out in the eight-man Candidates tournament from March 28 to April 16. (Picture Credit: GCL) R Praggnanandhaa, Anish Giri, and Fabiano Caruana will be fighting it out in the eight-man Candidates tournament from March 28 to April 16. (Picture Credit: GCL) Nepomniachtchi then graded the rest of the Candidates contenders in a "tier list" with Grade A reserved for players with the best chances of winning the Candidates, players in Grade B having lesser chances and so on.

"My top 2 favorites include Fabiano, probably to a slightly bigger extent, and Pragg, to a slightly lesser extent. I would put them in Tier A, right? In tier B I would put Wei Yi, Hikaru Nakamura and Anish Giri. Giri to a slightly lesser extent. But, again, I think he's still a very strong chess player. And, of course, I will prepare for the tournament very seriously. Tier C will probably be Javokhir Sindarov and Andrey Esipenko." And Tier D, unfortunately, is Matthias Bluebaum. Everyone, I think, expected to see a German grandmaster in the Candidates. I think if it were Vincent Keymer, he would be one of the main contenders for the victory. Because he has shown very steady progress in chess, I have rarely seen such a thing. And, of course, it is clear that Peter Leko deserves much of the credit for this. But, in principle, Vincent himself is also a very thorough young man. But, well, as they say, not this time. As for Bluebaum, he can surprise someone. Yes, he can play a great game, I think, if they come at him too aggressively. That is, if they try to take

'You're killing an artist': What Arijit Singh said about Bollywood's 'unfair' payment structure for singers, banned his songs to be played at home



Arijit Singh's sudden retirement from playback singing has come as a massive shock to fans and the film industry alike. Known as the voice of a generation, the singer consistently sold out concerts and featured in almost every major Bollywood film. Yet, at the peak of his career, Arijit decided to step away to pursue something closer to his heart — Indian classical music. While the announcement surprised many, the decision was not entirely unexpected. Over the years, Arijit had hinted at his inner struggles through multiple interviews. In one such conversation, he spoke candidly about feeling disconnected from his own identity and voice, even admitting that his name had begun to irritate him. In a 2023 interview with The Music Podcast, Arijit recalled a phase when fame started weighing heavily on him. Arijit Singh banned his songs to be played at home

"There was a time when I used to associate with my name — Arijit Singh. But as I grew up, there came a point when hearing my name would annoy me. There would be a crowd calling out my name. Initially, it felt overwhelming, but eventually I realised that my name is not me anymore. It's a perception people have created about me. Now nobody at home or at work addresses me by that name. It has become a joke. I get irritated hearing it. There was a time when I even got irritated listening to my own songs. Now I don't feel irritated — I simply ignore it. Earlier, I was very strict about not hearing my songs. The situation was such that nobody would play a song when I was at home. Then I became a little easy around it. 'Bollywood is 'killing artists'

He also addressed the issue of unfair payments in the

music industry, stating that such practices slowly "kill an artist." Despite being one of the highest-paid singers of his generation, Arijit firmly believed that many artists are underpaid and often not compensated according to their efforts. "They are fair in their own game. This entire business is conducted on the back of artists. An artist is not as practical as a businessman. But since the business depends on the artist's work, if everyone feels it's not fair, then something is wrong. People should think about it." Speaking about music labels, he added: "They should be clear about certain things. Either pay fairly for the work being done or don't assign work at all. There are many people who don't get paid in proportion to the work they put in. Everything is negotiated at the end of the day." Explaining how the process often becomes exploitative, Arijit said: "Because it's mostly a verbal discussion. One thing is discussed, the work becomes something else, and the payment turns into something entirely different." He further revealed how the struggle begins at a basic level — simply trying to earn a living through art — and gradually leads to exploitation. The stress of being an artist keeps wondering whether they've earned enough for the month or year. That stress is always there. All they have is their art. So they use it to survive. They negotiate an amount and agree to work. But during the process, they forget how much they should be working for that money."

Highlighting the emotional side of creative work, he added: "Some artists are extremely passionate. They get so involved in their work that they stop thinking about money. They just want to do a better job. After the final output, they realise how much effort they put in. When the payment turns out to be less than promised, that's when you kill an artist. Their selfless relationship with art gets manipulated." Arijit concluded by stressing that fairness is essential for a healthy creative ecosystem. "Everyone should feel like it's their own space. There shouldn't be a struggle. People come to work for art. So many great personalities are involved — everyone deserves to feel happy." Arijit's retirement from playback singing on Tuesday, Arijit Singh officially announced his retirement from playback singing through Instagram and X. While he confirmed that he would honour commitments for already signed projects, he also revealed plans to focus on Indian classical music, create independent gigs, and reconnect with what he truly loves. He wrote on Instagram: "Hello, Happy new year to all. I want to thank you all for giving me so much love all these years as listeners. I am happy to announce that I am not gonna be taking any new assignments as a playback vocalist from now on. I am calling it off. It was a wonderful journey."

'Mera business main naam nahi aega': Aman Gupta's condition before signing Rs 2 cr deal with Shark Tank India pitcher

On the latest episode of Shark Tank India 5, Aman Gupta danced on the beats of the dhol after he locked a deal with a budget destination wedding brand, Awayddings. While Aman was the only shark to make an offer in this 'op-heavy' business, he also kept one important condition for the founders before handing over the cheque to them. During the pitch from Awayddings, Aman Gupta told the Shark Tank India pitchers that his name shouldn't come up in the business anywhere. He said that he has already burnt his hands at a similar business. The pitcher were in front of a panel including Anupam Mittal, Namita Thapar, Mohit Yadav and

What is Awayddings?

Awayddings is a brand for affordable destination weddings. It was the brainchild of Pune's Ashish Godghate, who partnered with Goa's Vijay Kumar in 2021 to kickstart this brand. Ashish, who initially worked with OYO's Weddingz. In, was living in Goa when he met Vijay. A casual exchange of ideas between them led to the beginning of Awayddings after Vijay offered to invest Rs 40 lakhs in the business. Bringing this brand to Shark Tank India, with a vision to scale, Ashish and Vijay asked for an investment of Rs 2 crores in return for 5 percent equity, placing their company's valuation at Rs 40 crores. While their baaraat-like entry into the tank cheered up the Sharks, they soon also spotted the technical challenges that would come with the project. During the pitch, the founders revealed that both take a Rs 1.5 lakh salary each. They further went on to share that, in 2023, Kesari Tours invested Rs 1.23 crores for 50 percent equity. learning about the equity split, a shocked Aman Gupta asked, "You'll give 50 percent of your company to them for Rs 1.5 crores?" Anupam added, "Paise ke saath saath unhone identity bhi leli. (They took away your identity along with the money)." The founders later said they restructured the equity division from 50-50 to 75-25 because they got pushback from other investors.

Sharing details about their revenue, founders say, in 2024-25, they made a revenue of Rs 1.95 crores, with 10-12 percent EBITDA. In 2025-26, year-to-date revenue was Rs 1.17 crores, and they projected to make Rs 3.6 crore revenue. Founders revealed their last wedding was called off after the bride and groom had issues. Pointing out several operational challenges with these kinds of businesses, Anupam Mittal jokingly asked the founders what they do if they don't get paid after the wedding. "Kya baaraat ko gate par rok lete ho?" Anupam asked. Responding to this, Vijay shared that twice or thrice they faced issues with payments. Once during a wedding, they switched off the light in the saangeet function until payment was cleared. Later, Namita asked if any of the weddings organised by them was canceled? Vijay said their last wedding got canceled after there was an issue between the bride and groom. Later, Anupam questioned the founder, "In that case, do you refund the advance?" Aman quickly questioned Anupam, "Do you give a refund if someone's wedding doesn't materialize through Shaadi.com?" Anupam says, "We never take guarantees." Anupam also went on to point out how this industry has a lot of leakage in terms of profitability. He reveals that they had thought about adding this service to Shaadi.com, but scalability is a problem. "OYO ne haath pair jodhkar exit kar liya from weddingz. In because it's a thankless job, it's difficult to standardize," Anupam said, stating that one puts in the hard work and the other walks away with the profit. 'Mera naam nahi aega,' Aman Gupta makes a conditional offer

Citing several problems in terms of scaling, all Sharks except for Aman opted out of the deal. Kunal Bahl said, "We have also launched city by city, and it wasn't easy. The complexity is 10x, it takes lots of physical effort, and it will also take a lot of time to expand, so this business is not for me to



Shark Tank India 5: Aman Gupta locked a deal worth 2 crores with budget-friendly wedding planners from Pune and Goa, but on one condition -- his name will not feature anywhere in the business.

invest in today. I am out." Namita Thapar also added, "I agree with Kunal, there is too much 'khit-pit' in this. As you scale, many weddings in different cities might come on the same date, so you'll have to create multiple versions of yourself. I am not getting that confident in scale, so today I am out." Mohit Yadav gave his inputs and shared, "Category is very interesting, people want to go beyond traditional, challenge is scale and operations, it's a very ops-heavy business. It's too early now, so I am out." Anupam Mittal also opted out and said, "One thing is clear, based on my experience, you cannot make this business through VC money. But it can be good for you. Once you narrow your focus, you can start dominating the market. It's a great business for you, but not for me." Before making an offer, Aman recalled a deal he had signed in season one or two and said, "If someone's maid ran away, I would get an email. Yahan kisi ki towel nahi aayi woh hamari baja dega." He went on to add, "A lot of times, VCs break into investible businesses. I am not thinking like a VC, but like a consumer. But before giving an offer, I have a condition: Mera naam nahi aana chahiye isme (my name shouldn't come up in this). If someone doesn't get their towels, I shouldn't get a WhatsApp. Mera business main naam nahi aega." Aman Gupta offered Rs 1 crore for 10 percent equity and Rs 1 crore debt at 10 percent for 2 years. As the deal got locked, the former BoAt CMO danced on the beats of dhol and said, "Hum shaadi mein drones ke saath jaaenge." Later, Anupam made him sit on a dhol, as Namita said, "Begaani shaadi mein Aman deewana."

Orry calls Ibrahim Ali Khan 'Bollywood's most besharam', says he got 'fed up' while visiting Pataudi Palace with Sara Ali Khan



Content creator Orhan Awatramani, popularly known as Orry, has been making waves on social media with his ongoing fallout with Sara Ali Khan and her family. From taking subtle digs at Sara and her mother, Amrita Singh, to commenting on Sara's career, Orry has kept the drama alive. The content creator has now added fuel to the fire by calling Sara's brother, Ibrahim Ali Khan, "besharam" during an appearance on Elvish Yadav's podcast. In the same conversation, Orry also talked about a holiday at Pataudi Palace with Sara and opened up about how their friendship first began.

Orry calls Ibrahim Ali Khan "besharam"

During the podcast Elvish asked Orry, "Industry main besharam kaun hai? (Who is shameless in the industry?)" To which Orry replied, "Ibrahim Ali Khan," adding, "Call him to your podcast." Orry shares how his friendship with Sara Ali Khan started. Orry also opened up about how his friendship with Sara Ali Khan began. "There was an app called AskFM where people used to ask me a lot of questions about Sara. One day, I messaged her on Facebook saying that people were asking so much about her and that I was even answering them. I became popular on AskFM. At that time, I hadn't even met Sara. We first met when she was in New

York, and I was there too. A friend of ours had arranged a dinner, he fell asleep, but Sara came... We went and had dinner, and kept meeting again and again. Eventually, we became good friends." When Orry went to Pataudi Palace with Sara Ali Khan, Orry also recalled a holiday to Pataudi Palace with Sara, joking, "I went on a holiday to Pataudi Palace with Sara Ali Khan, and for three days straight, all she fed me was chhole bhature. I was completely fed up. I can't stand chhole bhature! I think she just enjoys feeding me chhole bhature repeatedly." Rumors of a fallout between Orry and Sara Ali Khan first surfaced when he posted a reel titled "3 worst names," seemingly pointing to Sara, her mother Amrita Singh, and Palak Tiwary, without mentioning their surnames. For context, Palak Tiwary is reportedly dating Sara's brother, Ibrahim Ali Khan. The clip was later deleted.

Following the reel, Sara and Ibrahim unfollowed Orry on Instagram. When fans asked if he had done the same, Orry replied, "Long ago, bro. They just caught up." On January 26, Orry shared a video, and a fan's comment about his outfit quickly escalated the buzz. When asked what the printed bra outline on his top was "holding together," he cheekily replied, "Sara Ali Khan's hits." In an interview with Hindustan Times, Orry opened up about the strain in their relationship. "I unfollowed Sara a while ago... and I haven't followed Ibrahim in years... Pretending to be friends with Sara means pretending to be ok with the trauma her mother put me through, and I just don't think I can do that anymore.... If Amrita Singh were to apologise, I could maybe see myself letting it go in the future." When asked if reconciliation with Sara and Ibrahim is possible, Orry replied, "If Amrita Singh were to apologise, I could maybe see myself letting it go in the future."

Orry on taking a dig at Sara's career He also addressed the viral jab at Sara's career, saying, "I don't really think I said anything wrong about her. I just made a small joke taking a dig at her career. I highly doubt she even felt bad about it. The whole internet makes fun of Sara's movies all the time. Her biggest body of work is a series of memes that she's delivered via movies, people make fun of me being jobless all the time, it's not that deep."

'I got bored': Arijit Singh reveals the real reasons behind quitting Bollywood playback singing, explains what's next

Arijit Singh took fans and the music industry by surprise on Tuesday with the announcement that he is retiring from playback singing. The news, shared via his social media accounts, comes soon after the release of his latest track Maatrubhumi from Salman Khan's Battle Of Galwan. "Hello, Happy new year to all. I want to thank you all for giving me so much of love all these years as listeners. I am happy to announce that I am not gonna be taking any new assignments as a playback vocalist from now on. I am calling it off. It was a wonderful journey," the singer said in a post, later clarifying that he is only stepping away from playback singing and will continue to focus on classical singing and concerts. He shared many of them on his personal Twitter handle. Arijit Singh says there are several reasons behind his decision. Now, fans are sharing posts from what is reportedly his personal Twitter account, where the 38-year-old singer opened up about the reasons behind his decision in reply to fans. Arijit explained that his choice was neither sudden nor the result of a single incident. "There is not one reason behind this, there are several reasons plus I have been trying to do this since a long time. Finally I have gathered the right courage," he wrote.

Opening up about his creative restlessness, the singer added, "One of the reasons is simple, I get bored pretty quick, that's why I keep changing arrangements of the same songs and perform them on stage. So here is the thing, I got bored. I need to do some other music to live." Arijit further revealed his desire to make space for new talent in the industry. "Another reason is I am excited to hear some singer come up and give me real motivation," he added. While confirming the end of his playback singing career, Arijit reassured fans on Tuesday that music will remain a central part of his life. "I will make my own music. Will come up with my music whenever I am ready," he said. The singer also expressed his desires to go back to his roots. "I am going back to Indian Classical Music. I wanna go back to making music. I wanna start again," he wrote. Arijit Singh Arijit Singh announces retirement from playback singing.

He also clarified that he would honour all existing commitments. "I still have to finish some pending commitments. So, you might get some releases this year." Arijit Singh Arijit Singh announces retirement from playback singing. Reactions to Arijit Singh's announcement The an-



nouncement sparked an outpouring of reactions online, with fans and fellow artists expressing shock and admiration. Veteran singer Udit Narayan spoke to SCREEN and said, "Arijit did great work in very little time. From awards, rewards, fame, money, and stage craze, he saw all of it in its best form. It's his decision if he wishes to retire, but he won't leave music. It's his choice, but his work is etched in people's heart and it will forever be there." Singer Armaan Malik took to social media to share his admiration for the singer. He wrote, "Love and respect, always. Thank you for giving your everything to the craft!" Singer and composer Amaal Malik, who was seen in Bigg Boss 19, wrote, "So lost after hearing this... I don't get it, but I respect your decision! Just know that I was, I am, and will always remain an Arijit Singh fan." Arijit Singh began his professional music career in 2010, working as an assistant to composer Pritam. Soon after, he emerged as one of Bollywood's most celebrated voices, delivering chart-topping hits like Phir Le Aayaa Dil, Tum Hi Ho, Kabira, Channa Mereya, Kesariya, Phir Bhi Tumko Chahunga, Jaan Nisaar, and the title track of Kalank. Over the years, Arijit's extraordinary talent has earned him two National Film Awards for Binte Dil and Kesariya, making him one of the most influential playback singers of his generation.

Karan Wahi reacts to engagement reports with Jennifer Winget: 'Don't know where this came from'

Actors Karan Wahi and Jennifer Winget have been in the news since Wednesday morning. According to several media reports, the Dill Mill Gaye co-stars have gotten engaged and are rumored to take the plunge very soon. While there has never been a buzz around them having a romantic relationship, Jennifer and Karan have always been very good friends. Following these reports, SCREEN reached out to Karan Wahi and Jennifer Winget to confirm the news. Reacting to the rumors, Karan denied them, while Jennifer has yet to respond.

Commenting on his rumored engagement with Jennifer Winget, Karan Wahi said, "Thank you for checking with me. Don't know where this came from, but it's not true." Karan also wrote on his Instagram stories, "Free ki PR ke liye Shukriya." Jennifer and Karan had last shared screen space in the web series Raisinghani VS Raisinghani, where they played each other's love interest. However, Karan and Jennifer have been quite a hit couple since their Dill Mill Gaye days in 2007.

Last year, in an exclusive interview with SCREEN, Karan and Jennifer spoke about working together once again after many years. Karan said, "We were very excited. I was like shukar hai." Jennifer said, "14 saal ka vanwaas khatam

hua." Karan added, "We are just glad that we have gotten to work together. I have realized this after such a long time because I haven't been able to work with people I know. It makes so much of a difference when you work with friends; that energy resonates. Screen time or weightage of role doesn't come in that."

Karan Wahi and Jennifer Winget on relationships In an interview during the promotions of their show, Raisinghani VS Raisinghani, Karan had also shared his take on modern relationships and said, "In today's time, partnerships should be based on trust and for me on equality and equity. It's a very big difference that a lot of people don't know about. In a relationship, we just label the man as toxic; in real life, everyone is scarred or has a reason to be a particular way." Jennifer had said, "A lot of times, there are people who keep going back in a relationship; they should stop doing that." Jennifer was previously married to actor Karan Singh Grover, and the two got divorced in 2014. Recently, Jennifer Winget also posted a throwback picture from 2016 and called it a year when her path shifted. While Karan has reacted to these latest reports, Jennifer has yet to react to her engagement news. Nawaz Javed Kochra is a seasoned entertainment journalist at Online, bringing nearly a decade of expertise to the forefront of cultural reporting.