

INDIAN CHRONICLE

23 March, 2026 | Monday | Volume No:11 | Issue No:37 | Pages: 12+8 | www.indianchronicle.com | Published from : Ranga Reddy (Telangana State) | ₹ 3

Action Needed on Advance Admissions

“Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 22, (Indian Chronicle): “BSP Mandal Chief Secretary Boddu Baburao has demanded that action be taken against advance admissions in schools. He spoke at a press meeting organized on Sunday at the Mandal headquarters. He urged the government to pay special attention to private educational institutions. He pointed out that some private school managements in the district are conducting advance admissions even before the current academic year ends. He called for strict regulation of school fees and suggested setting up a pre-admission board to monitor fee details. He also stated that for the 2026-27 academic year, the party will undertake a special campaign against private schools. Complaints regarding the conduct of schools will be referred to the District Collector and District Education Officer. He emphasized the urgent need to take action against advance admissions and warned that failure to act could lead to intensified protests.”

Illegal Arrests Cannot Stop People’s Movements

“Avnreddy Khammam Staff Reporter March 22, (Indian Chronicle): “IFTU District President Shake Subhan condemned the illegal demolition of homes of poor residents in Velugumatta, Khammam, by the Congress government on the 24th of last month. He said that the demolitions were carried out without prior warning or notice, displacing innocent families. In protest, the CPI(ML) New Democracy Khammam District Committee called for a town-wide bandh in Khammam, demanding that houses be rebuilt at the sites where they were demolished. During the peaceful bandh, police carried out illegal arrests of New Democracy members, allegedly following instructions from the Congress party. Among those arrested were state party leader Avunuri Madhu, district secretary Bandari Ailayya, and district leaders Kola Lakshminarayana, Prakash, Janaki, along with other activists. Shake Subhan demanded that all those arrested without any charges be released immediately. He stated that these arrests must be condemned by the public, democrats, intellectuals, students, and other political parties.”

US, Iran trade threats over energy targets; Trump sets 48-hr deadline to open Hormuz

Washington, March 22

The US and Iran have issued fresh threats against each other, with President Donald Trump “giving” Tehran 48 hours to reopen the Strait of Hormuz for shipping or face the destruction of its energy infrastructure.

Iran on Sunday launched its most destructive attack yet on Israel and responded to Trump’s threat saying all US facilities in West Asia, including desalination plants and energy infrastructure, will be destroyed in retaliation.

Trump’s ultimatum came just a day after he stated that he was considering “winding down” military operations after three weeks of war as the “five objectives” had been nearly met.

Trump wrote on Truth Social that the US would “hit and obliterate” Iranian power plants — “starting with the biggest one first” — if Tehran did not fully reopen the strait within 48 hours.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran had imposed restrictions only on vessels from countries involved in the attacks against Iran, and would assist others that stayed out of the conflict.

In response to Trump’s threat, Iran’s army said it would target energy and desalination infrastructure “belonging to the US and the regime in the region”, according to the Fars news agency.

Trump’s ultimatum coincides with the arrival of almost 2,200 US Marines and sailors, who have been pulled out of Japan and relocated to the Arabian Sea. They are on board the USS Tripoli, along with two escort ships, which has ground and aerial combat units. Earlier this



week, another 2,200 US Marines departed from San Diego along the US West Coast, speeding up the deployment of thousands of additional Marines and sailors in West Asia amid speculation that Trump could send troops into the Iranian territory.

Iran has choked the Hormuz, a vital waterway, which carries a fifth of global crude oil trade in peacetime.

The standoff has sent crude oil prices soaring, with Brent crude now trading above \$105 a barrel, indicating long-term consequences for the global economy. A joint statement from the leaders of several countries, including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, South Korea, Australia, the UAE and Bahrain, condemned the “de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz by the Iranian forces”.

On Sunday, Japan said it could consider deploying its military for minesweeping in the Strait of Hormuz, if a ceasefire was reached. Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said: “If there were to be a complete ceasefire, hypothetically speaking, then things like minesweeping could come up.”

Japan gets about 90 per cent of its oil shipments via the strait, which Tehran has largely closed during the war.

Trump’s threat came hours after two Iranian missiles struck southern Israel, injuring more than 100 people in the most destructive attack since the war began. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to retaliate “on all fronts”.

The United Arab Emirates had said on Saturday it faced aerial attacks after Iran warned it against allowing strikes from its territory on disputed islands near the Strait of Hormuz.

PM Modi chairs CCS meet on West Asia crisis, Group of Ministers to monitor impact and mitigation



New Delhi, March 22

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and directed that a Group of Ministers (GoM) and Secretaries be formed to study and manage the impact of the West Asia crisis.

After holding a high level review with top ministers and officials earlier today, Modi held a meeting of the CCS and reviewed the situation and mitigating measures in the context of prolonged conflict.

Short, medium and long term measures to ensure continued availability of essential needs were discussed in detail and it was decided to explore alternate sources of fertilizers for farmers.

“Several measures were discussed to diversify

sources of imports required by chemicals, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals and other industrial sectors. New export destinations to promote Indian goods will be developed in near future. The PM has instructed that all arms of government should work together to ensure least inconvenience to citizens,” a statement later said.

The PM also directed that a group of ministers and secretaries be created to work dedicatedly in a whole of government approach.

He asked for sectoral groups to work in consultation with all stakeholders.

“The PM has asked for proper coordination with state governments to ensure no black-marketing and hoarding of important commodities,” the official statement added.

Congress leader Jeevan Reddy to Decide on Political Future on 25 March

HYDERABAD, MARCH 22 Senior Congress leader T. Jeevan Reddy has sparked intense political speculation in Telangana after speculation that he may soon part ways with the party he has served for over four decades.

A prominent figure in the undivided Karimnagar district, Mr Reddy is regarded as one of the Congress party’s most experienced leaders in the region. However, recent remarks attributed to him have revealed deep dissatisfaction with the party leadership. He reportedly stated that he no longer receives respect within the Congress and cannot continue to endure the distress he is facing.

Mr Reddy has announced that he will take a final decision on his political future on the 25th of this month. In a formal statement, he urged party workers and long-time associates to offer their views ahead of the decision. He



also confirmed that a of his supporters will be held at Bandaru Gardens in Jagtial on that day. Reiterating his concerns, Mr Reddy said he was unable to continue in the party under the present circumstances, citing a lack of recognition and personal anguish.

Rythu Bharosa Funds Released to 7 Million Farmers in Telangana

HYDERABAD, MARCH 22

Revanth Reddy has announced the release of the first instalment of Rythu Bharosa funds, benefiting nearly 7 million farmers across Telangana. An amount of ₹3,600 crore has been allocated to farmers owning up to one acre of land, with funds expected to be credited to their bank accounts on Monday.

The remaining ₹5,400 crore will be disbursed in two further instalments of ₹2,700 crore each over the next 20 days.

On Sunday, the Chief Minister visited Narmetta in Siddipet district, where he attended the closing ceremony of the Rythu Utsavalu (Farmers’ Festival) and inaugurated a new oil palm factory. Addressing the gathering, he stated that Rythu Bharosa support has been increased compared to previous levels and reaffirmed the government’s commitment to improving farmers’ livelihoods.

Mr Reddy emphasised that alongside the Minimum Support Price (MSP), a bonus of ₹500 is being provided to farmers. Despite financial pressures, he said the government continues to implement welfare schemes effectively, spending approximately ₹5,500 crore every month on farmer welfare. Over the past 20 months, he noted, ₹1.40 lakh crore has been spent exclusively for the agricultural sector.

He also assured farmers that the government is procuring every grain produced and is working towards making agriculture a profitable enterprise. Highlighting Telangana’s strong agricultural performance, he claimed the state leads in the cultivation of major crops.



The Chief Minister revealed that the newly inaugurated palm oil factory was built at a cost of ₹750 crore and said the government is prepared to procure palm oil cultivated across up to 10 lakh acres. He also announced plans to establish another such facility in Kodangal.

Encouraging farmers to move beyond paddy cultivation, Mr Reddy stressed the importance of crop diversification and rotation. He urged a shift towards millets, leafy vegetables, and oil palm cultivation, assuring remunerative prices for diversified crops.

He concluded by expressing his vision of developing every Panchayat on the lines of Ankapur and enabling farmers to significantly increase their incomes— aspiring to a future where every farmer can afford a car.

Adilabad tribals shunning honey harvesting?



“S. Harpal Singh, Adilabad, March 22” Are the tribes in Adilabad shunning honey collection as a sport and as part of activities that result in earning supplemental income for them during the season? The answer is yes going by indications available on the ground. “For example, the Girijan Cooperative Corporation at Utnoor has not purchased the normal quantity of honey from the tribals during the last few seasons. This has also decreased the availability of beeswax with the GCC as is evident from the complaints made by the Ojha artisan tribe in old united Adilabad district. “The Ojha artisans used the beeswax to make brass items using the ancient lost wax technique. They get their beeswax supply from the GCC and from private individuals who harvest honey. “The production of honey, however, is expected to be normal this season as the flowering of the palash or modugu trees is profuse. Most of the honey produced in Adilabad is sourced to the nectar of the modugu (Butea monosperma) flowers. “There are two main types of honey that the aboriginal tribes of old Adilabad harvested. The regular type comes from the honeycombs of the bigger sized bees and the minor one from smaller sized bees. While the regular honeycombs are found on top branches of big trees, the smaller bees set up the honeycombs in the natural recesses that many tree trunks have. “Children used to harvest honey from the small bee as a sport. It constituted a healthy diet for them,” pointed out Ada Deva who was found selling freshly harvested honey filled comb at Mankapur in Gudihathnour mandal.

EDITORIAL

NavIC needs urgent reset to meet India's navigation goals

Billed as India's answer to the American GPS network, the indigenous satellite navigation system — Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) — is plagued by technical failures and ageing infrastructure. It needs an urgent reset if the ambitious goals set by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) are to be met. Experts have commented that NavIC represents a classic case of overpromising and underdelivering. It is ironic that just two years ago, the Ministry of Science and Technology had described it as "a magnificent gem in the crown of India's technological prowess" and "a beacon of self-reliance, shining brightly in the world of satellite navigation".

Despite ISRO's commendable technological achievements, persistent issues such as satellite failures, delays, and limited integration in consumer devices have restricted NavIC's effectiveness. The system's primary weakness has been the failure of onboard rubidium atomic clocks — many of which were imported. Without these precise clocks, satellites cannot provide accurate positioning data, leading to a cascade of service capability losses. The clocks have continued to malfunction, and as many as five satellites have been rendered unusable. A functional satellite navigation system requires at least four satellites to be visible simultaneously for reliable positioning. With reports indicating that the constellation has fallen below this threshold, the system's reliability for critical applications like defence, disaster management, and transportation is severely compromised. The navigation system was envisioned as a step towards self-reliance in satellite-based navigation, yet its relatively low usage in smartphones and commercial applications reflects gaps in policy execution and industry collaboration.

Immediate corrective steps can help NavIC realise its true potential. The idea of NavIC was born out of a strategic need for indigenous navigation and timing services, particularly after India was denied access to foreign GPS data during the Kargil War. The NavIC was designed to provide precise position, velocity, and timing information over India and surrounding areas. It was meant to be particularly useful in high-altitude areas where signals from global systems are sometimes unavailable.

The hybrid operation of NavIC, along with GPS and other systems, could contribute to higher accuracy and seamless operation in certain geographic areas. However, the commercial and public utilisation of NavIC has remained very low. India's mobile phone market currently has some 20 major brands and 700 phone models. To enable handsets to support the Indian navigation system, changes must be made to both hardware and software. Although some chipset manufacturers are shipping processors that support NavIC, a study by the Space Applications Centre and Vishwakarma University, Pune, found that NavIC signals on many devices remain invisible or are filtered out by low-level drivers, even though hardware support exists. Over the decades, ISRO has delivered complex scientific and operational missions, developing indigenous capability in key segments of space technology. However, it has faced huge challenges when it comes to the mass application of space technology beyond

Adivasis Denied Right to Hold Meetings in Telangana, Allegations Against Lambada Influence

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 22, (Indian chronicle):“The Adivasi Students' Union State Executive President Dr.



Sagaboyina Paparao strongly condemned the alleged illegal arrest of Tudum Debba State President Dr. Maipati Arun Kumar, who was on his way to attend a district-level meeting in Mahabubabad. In a statement, Paparao said that while the Constitution of India guarantees indigenous communities the right to live with dignity and freedom, the situation in Telangana appears to be contrary, questioning whether a parallel system dominated by Lambadas is being allowed to function. He alleged that certain groups, claiming influence over authorities, are conspiring to suppress Adivasi movements and obstruct their democratic rights. He expressed anger over the conduct of Mahabubabad police, stating that their actions reflect a denial of even basic democratic rights such as holding meetings. Paparao further condemned the arrests of Dr. Maipati Arun Kumar and another leader, Babanna, calling them unlawful and undemocratic. He demanded the immediate release of all detained Tudum Debba leaders. He warned that if the arrests are not revoked, Adivasi students from Osmania University will launch protests and intensify their agitation.

Sharp Criticism of BC Allocation at Uppal MLA Camp Office



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 22, (Indian chronicle):“Uppal: A meeting of SC, ST, and BC journalists from the Uppal constituency was held at the Uppal MLA camp office under the chairmanship of Nerdam Bhaskar Goud. The meeting was conducted as per the directions of MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy. Strong criticism was expressed over the 2026 Telangana State Budget. Speakers stated that out of the total budget of approximately Rs. 3.25 lakh crore, only Rs. 12,511 crore has been allocated to Backward Classes (BCs), who constitute around 56 percent of the state population. This amounts to just 3.8 percent of the total budget, which they termed highly inadequate. They criticized the government for failing to allocate sufficient funds for BC development and for neglecting the BC Sub-Plan. Concern was also raised over the absence of a job calendar for unemployed youth in the budget. The speakers further pointed out that



the government had promised 42 percent reservations for BCs but failed to mention it in the budget. They also stated that gurukul schools lack basic facilities and that no adequate funds have been allocated for their development. It was alleged that the welfare of farmers and agricultural labourers has been ignored. The government was also criticized for not fulfilling its promise to increase assistance under the Dalit Bandhu scheme from Rs. 10 lakh to Rs. 12 lakh. The budget was described as anti-BC, with participants stating that nearly 2.5 crore BCs, along with employees, intellectuals, and students across the state, are strongly opposing it. Participants in the meeting included Sai, Jhansi, Gollu Anjaiah, Saijain Shekhar, Prabhudas, Bannala Praveen, Jalli Mohan, Kumaraswamy, Kanakaraju, Kashipati, Manohar, Lakshminarayana, Venkatesh Goud, Nagaraju, Sagar, and Veender.

CCTV System and Shuttle Court Inaugurated in Sri Sri Nagar Colony by Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy

MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy assures continued efforts for colony development



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 22 (Indian Chronicle):“A CCTV surveillance system and a shuttle court set up for the welfare of residents in Sri Sri Nagar Colony, under Uppal constituency, were formally inaugurated on Sunday by Bandari Lakshma Reddy. “Speaking on the occasion, the MLA stated that CCTV systems play a crucial role in strengthening security in residential colonies. He also emphasized the importance of sports facilities in promoting the health and well-being of youth, adding that the establishment of the shuttle court is a positive step in that direction. “He expressed his commitment to



working collectively for the development of the colony and hoped that more such initiatives would be undertaken in the future. The MLA assured residents that the issues brought to his attention would be resolved in a phased manner. He encouraged them to directly approach him with any concerns, assuring that he would coordinate with the concerned officials to ensure prompt solutions. Colony residents, along with BRS party leaders Akula Mahender, Mekala Madhusudhan Reddy, Niranjani Chari, BSNL Raju, and other party workers, participated in the program.

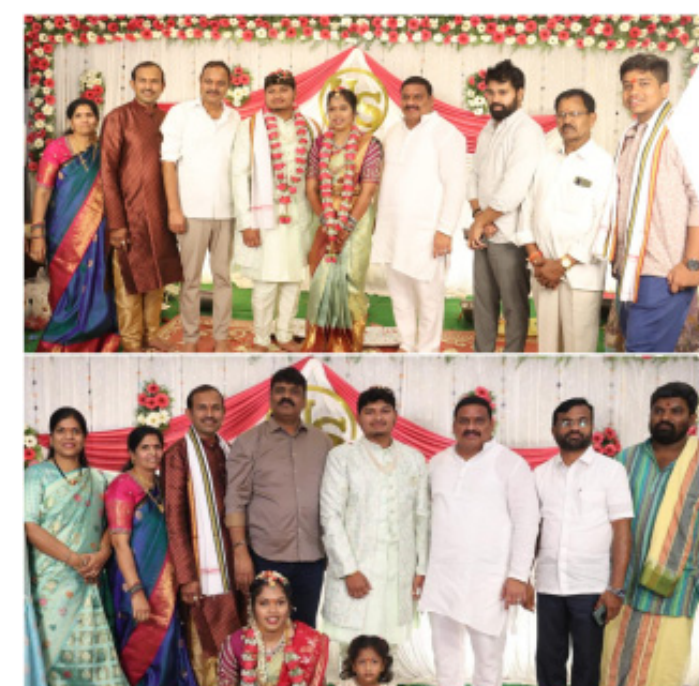
Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Inaugurates Gautam Motors Multi-Brand Two-Wheeler Showroom



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 22 (Indian Chronicle):“A newly established Gautam Motors multi-brand two-wheeler showroom was inaugurated with grandeur near KKR Garden in Uppal constituency. Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy attended the event as the chief guest and formally opened the showroom. “Speaking on the occasion, the MLA expressed ??? over the establishment of such business ventures that create employment opportunities for youth. He noted that having mul-



iple leading two-wheeler brands available under one roof is highly beneficial for customers. The showroom offers vehicles from major brands including Honda, Royal Enfield, Hero, Yamaha, Bajaj, TVS, and Suzuki. The management informed that customers can also avail services such as spot finance, instant approval, and spot delivery. “BRS party leaders Mekala Madhusudhan Reddy, Pilli Nagaraju, Anya Balakrishna, Jitender Reddy, Panga Mahender Reddy, Chilukuri Srikanth, BSNL Raju, along with other leaders and party workers, participated in the event.



Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy attended the engagement ceremony of Nalla Uday Kumar Reddy and Shruvanthi, nephew of Regalla Sathish Reddy, and conveyed his best wishes to the couple. “On this occasion, former Mayor of Hyderabad Bonthu Rammohan, former Cherlapally Corporator Bonthu Sridevi Rammohan, and former Meerpet Housing Board Corporator Golluri Anjana also attended the ceremony and blessed the couple. — Regalla Sathish Reddy

Discrimination against Madigas in the Congress party - MRPS is deeply angry MRPS District Vice President Bachchalakura Lakshman

“Wanaparthi Correspondent Indian Chronicle”“Speaking at a press conference organized in Kolhapur town center, MRPS District Vice President Bachala Kura Laxman strongly criticized the Nagarkurnool DCC District Committee announced by the Congress Party. He said that giving only one person from the Madiga community, which has a large population in the district, in this 32-member committee is an insult to the Madiga community. He said that although there are about 15 lakh Madigas in the joint Palamuru district, it is unfair to keep them aside in terms of leadership positions. He directly questioned that this is not a democratic rule, but a method of suppressing the Madigas. Referring to the comments made by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy in the past, “We are just laborers and laborers. A perspective that only sees them as themselves. They criticized it as inappropriate. Also qualified to lead there are leaders who have won with their hard work. Now in giving them opportunities He said that it is inappropriate to take a step back. MP and MLAs of Nagarkurnool district Our leadership is intentional. They accused him of being oppressive. The upper castes The party is running under the dominance of the social Expressing concern that justice is deteriorating Done. Nagarkurnool DCC immediately The committee was abolished and based on population Appropriate representation for the masses Demanded to provide. District Madiga leaders as presidents In addition to appointing, the Lok Sabha, They also asked for adequate opportunities in the Rajya Sabha. They warned that if the Congress party does not change its stance, the protests starting from Achchampet will spread across the state. They made it clear that the struggle for our rights will continue and not be played with. District MRPS leaders and taluka MRPS leaders participated in this program.



NREGS, CC road works begin in Lakshmipalli village from today

The village sarpanch, Itikyala Pentamma Former ZPTC Itikyala Krishna Prasad Yadav

“Wanaparthi Correspondent Indian Chronicle”“Development works in Lakshmipalli village with the support of Telangana State Excise and Tourism Minister Jupally Krishna Rao. CC road works sanctioned from NREGS funds in Lakshmipalli village with the support of Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, under the leadership of our



village's former ZPTC Krishna Prasad Yadav, under the leadership of the village's mother, Lakshmipalli village sarpanch Itikyala Pentamma, under the leadership of village sub-sarpanch Govula Murali, Congress party leaders, Activists, CC road works land The ceremony was started by performing puja. Ministers Under the leadership of Jupally Krishna Rao Our village sarpanch is Itikyala Pentamma. Under the leadership of Lakshmipalli village, They informed that they will develop it. This Gram CC road works in the program Contractors, Palusa Ravinder Goud, Itikyala Bhaskar Yadav, Pati Mini Srisaillam Yadav, Itikyala Shekhar Yadav, Madhugam Mahesh Yadav, tractor driver and village Congress party leaders and workers Others are also in this program participated.

Don't neglect dental problems

Dental Doctor Vanitha Free Dental Camp at Mallannapeta

“Jagtila Correspondent, March 22 (Indian Chronicle) : Neglecting dental problems can lead to heart-related diseases, warned Dr. Vanitha, a dentist at Srujana Dental Hospital, Jagtila. A free dental camp was organized at Mallannapeta village in Gollapalli mandal, Jagtila district, where Vanitha conducted dental check-ups and created awareness about oral hygiene. Around 100 people attended the camp and received free medical services. Vanitha advised people to maintain daily dental hygiene and regular dental check-ups. The organizers expressed their commitment to conduct more such health camps in rural areas. Sarpanch Siddhenki Laxmi-Mallareddy, leaders Avari Chandu, Kadamanda Venkat, villagers, and Mankind representative Dasari Praveen participated in the event.



Government focusing on vegetable cultivation

Rs 5,000 crore allocated for maize procurement



“Jagtial MLA Sanjay Kumar” “Jagtial Representative, March 22 (Indian Chronicle): Telangana State Government, led by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, is focusing on vegetable cultivation, said Jagtial MLA Dr. Sanjay Kumar. As part of the 99-day ‘Prajapala Pragathi’ program, the district horticulture department distributed vegetable mini-kits to farmers at the MLA’s camp office. “Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said the government is encouraging farmers to cultivate vegetables on 23,000 acres. Jagtial Farmer’s Market has become a brand, with farmers and traders from neighboring districts visiting it.” “The Oil Farm factory, inaugurated by the

Chief Minister in Siddipeta district’s Narmetta, will benefit farmers. The MLA flagged off a bus taking farmers to the event.” “Sanjay Kumar said farmers will get ₹21,000 per ton for Oil Farm produce, reducing the country’s import bill. He urged farmers to cultivate Oil Farm, which is resistant to monkey menace. The MLA announced plans to cultivate Oil Farm on his own farm land. “The government has allocated ₹5,000 crore for maize procurement, with Jagtial cultivating maize on 35,000 acres. The MLA highlighted the ₹10,000 crore loss incurred by Markfed and advised farmers to cultivate in-demand crops. A ₹9 crore veg-non-veg market will soon open in Jagtial town.

Khammam Congress Leader Meets Minister’s Camp Office In-charge



“Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 22, (Indian Chronicle): “Khammam DCC official spokesperson Bacchalakuri Nagaraju paid a courtesy visit to Thoomburi Dayakar Reddy, Camp Office In-charge of Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy. On the occasion of his appointment as the official spokesperson of the Khammam Congress Party, Nagaraju met Dayakar Reddy and expressed his gratitude by felicitating him with a shawl. “Several Congress leaders and Youth Con-

gress members attended the meeting, including State Youth Congress Secretary Jerripothula Anjani, Kothapalli Subbaiah, Nelakondapalli Mandal Youth Congress President Yadavalli Nagaraju, Baja Srinu, Constituency Youth Congress Vice Presidents Guttigundla Vijay and Marthi Venkataramaiah, along with Kothapalli Venkat, Shaik Pasha, Shaik Lalu, Saida, Gadipalli Naveen, Shaik Nazeer, and Bacchalakuri Pratap, among others

Injustice to BCs in Telangana 2026–27 Budget

Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, BRS State Leader

Out of the Rs 3.24 lakh crore state budget, only Rs 12,511 crore allocated to BCs...??

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 22 (Indian Chronicle): “Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, BRS State Leader, expressed serious concern over what he termed as grave injustice to Backward Classes (BCs) in the Telangana state budget presented in the Assembly on Friday. Speaking to the Indian Chronicle Uppal correspondent after a press conference held at the BRS Party MLA camp office, organized under the directions of Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy along with BC, SC, and ST leaders of the constituency, he criticized the state government for allocating only ₹12,511 crore to BCs out of the total ₹3.24 lakh crore budget. “He alleged that despite pre-election promises of allocating ₹20,000 crore annually for BC welfare, the Revanth Reddy-led government has failed to fulfill its commitment, thereby betraying the BC community. He questioned how such a minimal allocation could be justified for a community that constitutes more than half of the population, asking, “Where is the social justice in this?” He further expressed anger over the absence of key initiatives such as the BC Sub-Plan, BC Declaration, and support for BC corporations in the budget. He also criticized the Congress government for making numerous promises before the elections but failing to deliver after coming to power. Mudiraj warned that not only BCs, but also unemployed youth, women, farmers, senior citizens, government employees, and retired employees would collectively respond in the upcoming elections. Former corporator Jaripothula Prabhudas, BRS leaders Saijan Shekhar, Golluri Anjaiah, Nerdam Bhaskar, former councillor Kailasapathi Goud, Lakshminarayana, Jalli Mohan, OU JAC unemployed convener Jhansi, and several SC, ST, and BC leaders from the constituency participated in the program.



local resident had occupied government land and set up a fence around it. This led to a dispute in the village. The Panchayat Secretary visited the site and advised the individual not to proceed with the fencing. However, the warning was ignored. “Subsequently, Sarpanch Boyina Velu and Panchayat Secretary Hanumanthu lodged a complaint with the Tahsildar. Officials conducted multiple surveys over the past few days. On Saturday, Tahsildar V. Venkateswarlu and Mandal Revenue Inspector Alasya Madhusudhan Rao carried out a field inspection. After conducting a formal panchnama (spot inspection report), they confirmed the encroachment. Following this, revenue and panchayat staff removed the illegal fence and took back possession of the government land. “Speaking on the occasion, Tahsildar Venkateswarlu warned that encroachments on government lands would not be tolerated. “Panchayat Secretary P. Hanumanthu and other officials were also present during the operation.

Strict Action Against Negligence, Warns District Collector Anudeep Durishetty

“Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 22, (Indian Chronicle): “District Collector Anudeep Durishetty has warned that strict action will be taken against staff who show negligence in their duties. “On Sunday, the Collector conducted a surprise inspection of the Government Area Hospital in Madhira. He visited various sections including the casualty ward, LDR room, dialysis center, labor room, emergency ward, radiology block, and OP room. During the inspection, he interacted with patients to understand the quality of services being provided. “The Collector reviewed medical services, staff performance, daily case records, key registers, monthly reports, availability of medicines, and overall cleanliness of the hospital. He directed medical to take steps to further improve the quality of healthcare services. “During the visit, Anudeep Durishetty instructed officials to issue show-cause notices to doctors and staff who were absent from duty. He also ordered that regular attendance reports of medical staff be submitted to him. “He examined outpatient (OP) data and emphasized that if doctors and staff are available on time and provide better treatment, more patients will prefer government hospitals. The



Collector also stressed the need to encourage normal deliveries and advised against unnecessary C-section operations. He reviewed case sheets in the emergency ward and enquired about the treatment being provided to patients. He also interacted with patients to assess the quality of food being served regularly at the hospital. “Madhira Tahsildar Rambabu, along with other and medical staff, accompanied the Collector during the inspection.

Encroached Land Reclaimed; Revenue Officials Remove Fence



“Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 22, (Indian Chronicle): “Government land that had been illegally encroached upon was reclaimed after authorities removed a fence erected by a local. “According to reports, in Rayagudem village under Nelakondapalli mandal, a

local resident had occupied government land and set up a fence around it. This led to a dispute in the village. The Panchayat Secretary visited the site and advised the individual not to proceed with the fencing. However, the warning was ignored. “Subsequently, Sarpanch Boyina Velu and Panchayat Secretary Hanumanthu lodged a complaint with the Tahsildar. Officials conducted multiple surveys over the past few days. On Saturday, Tahsildar V. Venkateswarlu and Mandal Revenue Inspector Alasya Madhusudhan Rao carried out a field inspection. After conducting a formal panchnama (spot inspection report), they confirmed the encroachment. Following this, revenue and panchayat staff removed the illegal fence and took back possession of the government land. “Speaking on the occasion, Tahsildar Venkateswarlu warned that encroachments on government lands would not be tolerated. “Panchayat Secretary P. Hanumanthu and other officials were also present during the operation.

Mayabazar Play Impresses at Uppal Mini Shilparamam

Surabhi Drama Festival-2026 concludes grandly after three days



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 22 (Indian Chronicle): “The three-day Surabhi Drama Festival-2026 held at Uppal Mini Shilparamam concluded on a grand note on Sunday. On the final day, the Surabhi Drama Theatre troupe, under the direction of Surabhi Jayanand, staged the popular mythological play ‘Mayabazar.’ “The play is based on the story of Shashirekha Parinayam. It portrays the love story of

Abhimanyu and Shashirekha, and how Lord Krishna, through his clever strategies, ensures their marriage with the help of Ghatotkacha, while foiling the conspiracies of the Kauravas. “Filled with humor and magical elements, the performance captivated the audience and received wide appreciation. “In addition, a Kuchipudi dance performance by the disciples of Radha Saugandhi added cultural charm to the event and entertained the spectators.

Integrated Residential Schools as Temples of Knowledge

“Deputy CM Batti Vikramarka Orders to Speed Up Work at Lakshimpuram School

“Avnreddy Khammam Staff Reporter March 22, (Indian Chronicle): “Deputy Chief Minister Batti Vikramarka, while inspecting the buildings under construction in Lakshimpuram in the Madhira constituency of the district, reiterated that the Indiramma government is giving the highest priority to education. He described every rupee spent on education as an investment in building future generations. On Sunday, during his visit to the Madhira constituency, Deputy CM Batti Vikramarka inspected the construction progress of the Integrated Residential School being built in Lakshimpuram village of Bonakal mandal. He toured the under-construction building complex and reviewed the ongoing work. The Deputy CM instructed officials and contractors to accelerate the construction work. “During the inspection, he reviewed the construction of the junior hostel, junior and senior buildings, and administrative buildings. Additionally, he checked the construction of facilities for mechanical, science, mathematics, and computer labs. He emphasized that quality should never be compromised. “He described these buildings not merely as structures but as ‘temples of knowledge’ that will shape the future generations.”



Indian Chronicle's Hyderabad IT/Software-Job Bulletin 23 March 2026

“To support job seekers in Hyderabad’s rapidly growing IT sector, this column presents a curated list of job opportunities posted during the past week on well-known job portals such as LinkedIn and Naukri. The listings have been compiled to help software professionals and IT employees stay informed about current openings across leading companies in the city. By bringing together key details such as company name, required skills, experience, and application contacts, this column aims to make the job search process easier and more accessible for aspiring candidates.

Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka Inspects Construction of Government College and ITI Buildings in Siripuram

“Avnreddy Khammam Staff Reporter March 22, (Indian Chronicle): “As part of his Madhira constituency tour, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka on Sunday inspected the under-construction Government Junior College and ITI buildings in Siripuram village of Madhira mandal. “During the visit, he directed officials to ensure that all construction works are completed within the stipulated time. He made it clear that delays in execution would not be tolerated. The Deputy CM reviewed the progress of the works on the spot with concerned and emphasized that there should be no compromise on quality. He also instructed that all construction materials must strictly adhere to prescribed standards. “He further urged officials to speed up the construction process and ensure timely completion of the projects.



Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka stated that justice will be ensured for farmers who suffered losses in the fire accident.

He directed officials to make sure that compensation is provided through insurance companies to the affected farmers

“Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 22, (Indian Chronicle): “In Khammam, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka assured justice to farmers who suffered losses due to a recent fire accident. He directed officials to ensure that affected farmers receive compensation through insurance companies as per the rules. “On Sunday, the Deputy CM conducted a whirlwind tour of the Madhira constituency. As part of his visit, he inspected the fire-affected Sri Sai Balaji Cold Storage located in Atkur village of Madhira mandal. “During the visit, he reviewed the situation at the accident site and inquired with officials about the measures being taken to control the fire. He also interacted with farmers who lost their stored chili produce in the incident. “Bhatti Vikramarka instructed officials to ensure that farmers whose chili stocks were recorded in the cold storage receive compensation through insurance as per guidelines. He also suggested that chili trading in Madhira market should be organized on the lines of Khammam market. “Additionally, he directed officials to take all necessary precautions to prevent the fire from reigniting in the affected area. “Several officials and leaders, including District Collector Anudeep Durishetty and Police Commissioner Sunil Dutt, were present during the visit.



Padmashalis Should Grow Educationally, Medically, Economically, and Politically



Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 22, (Indian Chronicle): "The 4th annual celebration of the Padmashali Retired Employees' Association was held under the leadership of Retired Employees' Division President Dussa Satyanarayana at the IMA Hall. The chief guest for the event was Telangana Region Padmashali Sangh State President Kamarthapu Murali, who addressed the gathering. Murali urged the Padmashali com-

munity to remain united and grow not only in education, healthcare, and employment but also economically and politically. District Chief Secretary Chilakamarri Srinivas Babu and Retired Employees' Chief Secretary Pillalamarri Kondal Rao detailed the social service initiatives carried out by the Padmashali Sangh. The program featured an eye camp, health camp, magic show, and musical performances by retired employees and singer Sri Lakshmi. Through the Ashtalakshmi program, eight women received prizes via a lucky draw. Recently retired employees were also honored during the event. Financial aid of ₹8,000 was provided to the family of Rambayamma, a deceased member of a financially weak Padmashali family. The program was attended by Khammam constituency chief secretaries Pendem Janardhan and Bandaru Sheenu, youth wing secretaries Sampath and Veerabhadram, women's wing president Gaddam Sunitha, working president Vijayalakshmi, and retired employees' executive members Kandula Satyanarayana, Nageswara Rao, Apparao, Parupalli Satyanarayana, Devarasetti Satyanarayana, Musunuru Ramarao, Venkateswarlu, Srinivasarao, Ramesh Babu, and others.

Sharp Criticism of Telangana Budget at Shapur Nagar Press Meet

NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 22, (Indian Chronicle): "Strong criticism was expressed against the recently presented Telangana State Budget during a press meet held at Shapur Nagar on Sunday. The meeting was organized at the office of GHMC Division BRS President Puppala Bhaskar. Speaking at the press conference, Puppala Bhaskar described the budget as "completely deceptive" and alleged that it would push Telangana into regression. He criticized the government for failing to implement its promised six guarantees and eleven declarations, stating that the budget was not just a manipulation of numbers but an attempt to mislead the public. He said the budget failed to deliver justice to key sections such as the poor, farmers, and women. He pointed out the lack of clarity on the enhancement of Rythu Bharosa and the continued uncertainty over the ₹12,000 assistance promise. Bhaskar also criticized the government for not fulfilling its promise of providing ₹2,500 per month to women and accused it of misleading people in the name of schemes like "Tulam Gold." He further alleged that the promise of providing two lakh jobs to youth had not been fulfilled. He expressed concern that the ₹12 lakh assistance promised to Dalits under the Ambedkar Abhaya Hastham scheme had been completely ignored, with no allocation made in the budget. Constituency Youth President Somesh Yadav also spoke at the meeting and alleged that Backward Classes (BCs) were severely neglected in the budget. He said that allocating only ₹12,511 crore to BCs was inadequate and accused the government of failing to keep its promise of



allocating ₹20,000 crore annually. He further stated that the government had neglected employees and pensioners, highlighting the absence of any mention of PRC, pending DA payments, and lack of clarity on pension arrears. The speakers also criticized the lack of clarity on key issues such as employment for the unemployed, fee reimbursement, and housing. They pointed out that Hyderabad had not received adequate allocations and that the budget failed to address drinking water issues. Overall, the leaders termed the budget as a "hollow and misleading" document that has failed women, farmers, youth, and weaker sections of society. They concluded by strongly condemning the budget and stated that they would continue their fight for the rights of the people. Tati Ravikumar, Mukund Rao, David, and Vinay were also present at the press meet.

BJP Launches Fight for Velugumatla Land Victims

Congress Accused of Injustice for Demolishing Poor People's Houses
Three Ministers Labeled as Land Grabbers
- Devaki Vasudeva Rao's Sharp Criticism



Avnreddy Khammam Staff Reporter March 22, (Indian Chronicle): "BJP State Treasurer Devaki Vasudeva Rao strongly reacted to the issues faced by people who lost their homes on the Velugumatla land. He made it clear that the fight will continue until full justice is delivered to the victims. Speaking at a crucial meeting held at

his residence today, he gave a firm assurance of support. The affected people present at the meeting directly brought their grievances to his attention. "Devaki Vasudeva Rao strongly condemned the demolition of poor people's houses in Velugumatla. He criticized the government for allotting houses to only a few people while ignoring the rest, calling it unjust. He asserted that BJP will continue its fight until houses are reconstructed at the exact locations where they were demolished. He accused the Congress government of continuing political moves that mislead the public. He also made strong allegations regarding land encroachment in the state. He said that while the wealthy are grabbing land worth hundreds of crores, the government is treating landless poor harshly, which is inhumane. The issue has become a topic of discussion across the state, and he vowed that the fight will continue by all means until justice is delivered to the victims. He emphasized that there will be no compromise in delivering justice to the poor. A comprehensive survey of the victims who have not yet received houses will be conducted, and if necessary, legal action will be strengthened. He mentioned that the meeting extensively discussed the problems of the land victims and made key decisions regarding future action plans. "The BJP will continue its fight across the state until the encroached Bhudan lands are reclaimed. "District presidents Nelluri Koteswara Rao, state leaders Sanne Uday Pratap, lawyer Nerella Srinivas, district vice presidents Nakirikanti Veerabhadram, senior leaders Vakkalanka Subrahmanyam, Dokuperthi Ravinder, Rudra Pradeep, Maruti Veerabhadra Prasad, Shasanala Sayiram, Pillalamari Venkat, Boyinapalli Chandrashekhar, Koteswara Rao, Vallala Ramesh, Manikantha, Anjaneyulu, Shyam, and others participated in the meeting.

Education Fair Organized by Telangana Vidya Samithi Chief Guest: City Mayor Punnakollu Neeraj



Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 22, (Indian Chronicle): "An Education Fair was organized by Telangana Vidya Samithi at Swarnabharati Function Hall, with City Mayor Punnakollu Neeraj as the chief guest. The event was inaugurated by him. He stated that the participation of prominent universities from across the country on a single platform is very beneficial for students and parents, providing a great opportunity to gather all necessary information. He also emphasized that students should carefully choose courses in line with the changing times. "Universities that participated in the event included ICFAI Mallareddy, KL University, AMITY PPPS University, NIMS University, and several other institutions. The event saw the participation of Telangana Vidya Samithi President Tarak Goud, Corporator Vaishnavi Prasanna Kumar, Amaragani Venkat Goud, Nagaraju Goud, Ganesh Nayak, Venki Naidu, Murali, Srinivas Goud, Shyam Reddy, Vattikonda Srinivas, along with numerous stu-

dents, parents, and educators.

Adivasis Rally Against Delay in Land Rights



Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), March 22, "Tribal Issues Take Centre Stage in Nirmal" Tension Mounts at Collectorate Amid Tribal Protest "The issues of Adivasis in Nirmal district have once again come into sharp focus. In an effort to safeguard their rights—particularly forest

rights and the delay in distribution of land titles for podu lands—tribal organisations launched a 'Chalo Collectorate' padayatra. A large number of Adivasis from various villages converged on Nirmal town, turning it into a sea of people. Heavy police deployment at the Collectorate led to a tense situation in the area.

Kodakandla Ramagiri Sharma Receives State Government's Ugadi Award



(Mandava Srisailem | Hyderabad | Indian Chronicle | March 22):— Kodakandla Ramagiri Sharma—the hereditary priest of the renowned pilgrimage site of Sri Siddha Rameshwara Swamy (a Swayambhu Lingam) in Bikkunuru, Kamareddy district—was grandly honored on the morning of Ugadi at Ravindra Bharathi in Hyderabad. He received this distinction during the official Ugadi celebrations marking the advent of the 'Parabhava Nama



Samvatsaram' (the new year), an annual event organized under the aegis of the Telangana State Government's Department of Language and Culture and the Department of Endowments. The award was presented to him by State Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, State Minister for Endowments Konda Surekha, and the Director/Commissioner of the Endowments Department, M. Hanumantha Rao. The event was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, State PCC President B. Mahesh Kumar Goud, State Ministers Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy and Jupally Krishna Rao, as well as Additional Commissioners of the Endowments Department Srinivasa Rao and Krishnaveni, Regional Joint Commissioner M. Ramakrishna Rao, and Deputy Commissioner Vinod Reddy. Also present were numerous Vedic scholars and priests who had gathered from various districts across the state.

All India Forward Bloc invites Jeevan Reddy

Will give Jeevan Reddy a fitting position

AIFB state secretary Ambati Joji Reddy

Jagitial representative, March 22 (Indian Chronicle) : Ambati Joji Reddy, state secretary of the All India Forward Bloc, said that Tatiparthi Jeevan Reddy, who has four decades of political experience, has all the qualifications to become the Chief Minister. He said that their party doors are always open to leaders with integrity like him who fight relentlessly on people's issues. "Joji Reddy said that he had called Jeevan Reddy on Sunday and invited him to join their party amidst the changing political scenario in the state. He told Jeevan Reddy that they would give him a fitting position and respect in the party. Jeevan Reddy said he has not taken any decision yet and will think and let them know, Joji Reddy added.

CM Revanth did injustice to me... Former Minister Jeevan Reddy's sensational comments

Jagitial Representative, March 22 (Indian Chronicle) : Former Minister Tatiparthi Jeevan Reddy made sensational comments in Jagityal on Sunday, saying that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy was one of those who did injustice to him. He expressed anger that his dignity was hurt because of Revanth Reddy. "I have been in the Congress party for over 42 years, and both the Jagityal MLA and the CM have done injustice to me," he lamented. "I have respect for Revanth, but there's no solution to my problem with him." Jeevan Reddy questioned the Congress party's high command, asking if they could keep 10 MLAs away from party affairs. "He said he's unsure about his future in politics and doesn't know how much longer he'll tolerate insults in the party. He blamed the Jagityal MLA Sanjay for the situation, saying he's unsure which party Sanjay belongs to, but wonders why he's being asked to work with him." Jeevan Reddy's comments have created a stir in Telangana politics."



Fly Axis Office Inaugurated by Uppal Congress In-Charge Parameshwar Reddy

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 22 (Indian Chronicle): "Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-Charge, Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy, inaugurated the Fly Axis Abroad Education Consultants office established on the Uppal Division main road on Sunday. He attended the event as the chief guest. "Speaking on the occasion, Parameshwar Reddy expressed happiness over the launch of the Fly Axis office in the area. He stated that the organization would serve as a valuable platform for students aspiring to pursue education abroad by providing proper guidance and support. With the assistance of experienced counselors, students can move forward in the right direction toward a brighter future, he added. He also wished that the ?????? would grow further and benefit many more students in the coming years. "The event was attended by the management team including Tirupati Reddy, Akati Agam Reddy, Naresh Mudiraj, and Prashanth Reddy.



Muted Eid message signals leadership churn within Jaish-e-Mohammed



GNS News Agency, March 22

New Delhi: The chief of the Jaish-e-Mohammed, Masood Azhar, has always released a message for his supporters and cadres before Eid-ul-Fitr. This time, too, an audio clip has been released, but the Indian agencies noticed something drastically different. In his Eid message, Azhar sounded broken, and his normal fiery message against India, too, sounded very weak. Indian agencies tracking the Jaish-e-Mohammed say that all is not well within the outfit, and since Azhar appears to be very sick, many are seeking a leadership change. Within the terror outfit, many feel that the current situation is not helping and it is stalling a lot of work. An official said that if one notices, it is the Lashkar-e-Taiba which seems to be more active this time. The Lashkar leadership has been seen hobnobbing with members of Hamas. The Jaish-e-Mohammed, on the other hand, is visibly quiet and absent from major events. This suggests a tussle within the leadership of the Jaish. Many realise that it will not be easy to replace Azhar, and doing so will demoralise the cadre even further. However, others feel that if there is no proper command, then the outfit will begin to wither away.

Owing to the absence of a strong leader at the moment, the behaviour of the members of this outfit too has

changed. There are launchpads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). However, it is the operatives of the Lashkar-e-Taiba who seem more active when compared to those part of the JeM, officials say. At first, it was thought that the Jaish-e-Mohammed was putting up an act to make it look as though Azhar was sick and broken. This was being done to protect the JeM chief from being targeted by the Indian forces, it was believed. However, now the Intelligence agencies have been able to confirm that all is not well with Azhar and the top command has been bickering over a leadership change.

Another official said that the outfit is in a dilemma on whether to appoint a member of Azhar's family as chief or someone who has experience in operations. The official explained that for the cadres to remain united, a family member would be the first option. However, the outfit known for carrying out large-scale and lethal attacks is also in need of a strong commander. Abdul Jabbar, who is in charge of military affairs, would be a choice as he oversees on-ground operations that also include logistics and planning. Azhar's brother, Talha Al Saif, is unlikely to make the cut as his primary role has been limited to managing digital wallets for Jaish-e-Mohammed funding. Azhar's son, Abdullah Azhar, has experience when it comes to the financial operations of the outfit through digital platforms. Another choice would have been Yusuf Azhar, the brother-in-law of Masood Azhar. He was in charge of weapons training, but he was killed during Operation Sindoor, and Masood Azhar himself confirmed this in an audio clip that he shared. In the same audio clip, Azhar, however, did not mention the name of Abdul Rauf Azhar, his brother. This has led to speculation on whether or not Rauf Azhar is alive, or if he, too, was killed during Operation Sindoor. Abdul Rauf has not been visible for sometime and this has led to more speculation. The Indian agencies say that Azhar could well be hiding the fact of his brother's death to ensure that the morale of the cadre does not collapse. This could be a ploy on the part of the top leadership, the official explained. Another official said that, looking at the condition that Masood Azhar is in, the Jaish-e-Mohammed, with the guidance of the ISI, would soon look to effect a leadership change as it is inevitable and the cadres are getting extremely edgy.

Experts warn Israel's strategy of killing Iran's top leaders could backfire



GNS News Agency, March 22

Dubai: Israel has killed one senior Iranian leader after another in airstrikes as it seeks to topple the Islamic Republic. But its past experience of targeting senior militants shows the strategy has limits and can sometimes backfire. Israel killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. The group still fires rockets. It took out Hamas' top brass. The group still controls half of Gaza and has not laid down arms. As a strategy, targeted killing has rarely been employed against a state. While it may provide tangible achievements that leaders can brand as victories — especially in wars with no clear endgame — it rarely addresses the underlying grievances that propel conflicts.

Jon Alterman, chair of Global Security and Geostrategy at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said the impact of targeted killings often fades over time. He noted that Iran's government and military are made up of several overlapping institutions that have so far survived waves of punishing US and Israeli strikes. "Even dictators need to rely on entire networks that support them," he said. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in the opening salvo of the war. He has been replaced by his son, Mojtaba, who is seen as even less compromising. Iran's Revolutionary Guard has continued to fire waves of missiles at Israel and neighbouring Gulf states — and effectively choke off the Strait of Hormuz — after top commanders have been killed or driven underground. An age-old tactic

Israel has carried out dozens of targeted killings throughout its history, but Palestinian and Lebanese militant groups have often endured and grown even more powerful after the loss of top leaders. Take Hezbollah, for example. An Israeli airstrike killed its then-leader Abbas Musawi in southern Lebanon in 1992. Under Nasrallah, his charismatic replacement, Hezbollah grew into the region's most powerful armed group and fought Israel to a bloody stalemate in 2006. Nasrallah and nearly all of his deputies were killed in the 2024 war between Israel and Hezbollah. The Iran-backed group suffered other major losses that year, but resumed missile and drone attacks on Israel days after the start of the current war.

Hamas has lost one leader after another. Israel killed its founder and spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, in a 2004 airstrike. Nearly all the architects of the group's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel have since been killed. Both groups have pressed on, fuelled by the decades-old grievances stemming from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States has also resorted to targeted killings against

al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, taking out Osama bin Laden in a 2011 raid in Pakistan and IS founder Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2019. Both groups have been vastly diminished, but only after yearslong wars involving ground forces. It's rarely been used against states, and results are mixed.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says the killing of Iran's leaders is aimed at weakening the government so that Iranians can rise up and overthrow it, ideally replacing it with a friendly government in the mold of the pro-Western monarchy overthrown in 1979. There's been no sign of such an uprising since the war began, after Iranian authorities crushed mass protests in January. US President Donald Trump has at times suggested the war is aimed at elevating a more moderate leader from within Iran's government, but the end result could be a more radical one — or outright chaos if the state implodes. In the modern era, it's rare for one nation to assassinate leaders of another. Congo's Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba was overthrown and killed in 1961 in a plot backed by the CIA and Belgium. The African country went on to experience decades of authoritarian rule, civil war and instability. NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya paved the way for rebels to capture and kill longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi. After more than a decade of fighting and instability, that country is still divided. Iraq was plunged into similar chaos when the 2003 US-led invasion dismantled Saddam Hussein's government and led to his detention and eventual hanging.

The question is who comes after Yossi Kuperwasser, the former head of Israel's military intelligence research division, said targeted killings can be an effective tool but are not a "cure for all problems." "These operations by themselves don't dramatically change the ability of those organisations to cause damage and to carry out attacks," he said. "But it's important for Israel to weaken its enemies." In Gaza, Lebanon and now Iran, he noted, Israel has taken out dozens of figures, reshaping the leadership structure in lasting ways. In Iran, "maybe there's not 'regime change' yet, but there is 'change in regime.' The people are not the same people," he said. A senior Israeli intelligence official told The Associated Press that Israel's decapitation strikes in Iran had degraded political leaders' ability to issue orders to the military, form policy and make decisions. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss classified assessments. But killing leaders can also backfire, radicalising followers, elevating more extreme successors or turning slain leaders into martyrs with enduring influence. Northeastern University political scientist Max Abraham said data from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel and the Palestinian territories shows violence against civilians spikes after targeted killings. "Leadership decapitation is risky," he said. "When you take out a leader that prefers some degree of restraint and had influence over subordinates, then there's a very good chance that, upon that person's death, you're going to see even more extreme tactics." Targeted killings can create leadership vacuums and the potential for change, but only when coupled with a coherent political strategy, said Mohanad Hage Ali, deputy director of the Carnegie Middle East Centre in Beirut. "You can decapitate an organisation or defeat it militarily, but if you don't follow through politically, it doesn't work. And it's hard to see how this goes much further," he said.

How the law of naval warfare applies to the Strait of Hormuz

GNS News Agency, March 22

Kensington: The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow body of water adjacent to Iran and Oman, which connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman. While it is a shared body of water between Iran and Oman, Iran functionally exercises a greater amount of control over it. The strait is a vital conduit for the shipment of oil, gas and other exports (notably fertiliser) from the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world. At its narrowest point, it is just 21 nautical miles (39 kilometres) wide. With the ongoing conflict between Iran, Israel and the United States, Iran has restricted the movement of ships through this waterway, causing global repercussions for oil supply and trade in other important commodities. Can Iran do this under international law? And can the US lawfully send military convoys through the strait to protect international shipping? What is its legal status during times of peace?

The Strait of Hormuz is used for international navigation between two high seas areas. As such, it is defined as an international strait under international law. Even though these waters are subject to the sovereignty of the adjacent states, all other states' ships have navigational rights through the strait. So as long as those ships pass through the strait continuously and expeditiously, the coastal states should not take any steps to prevent their passage. What about during war? Once there are armed hostilities between two (or more) states, the law of armed conflict or international humanitarian law applies. The law of naval warfare is part of the law of armed conflict. Some laws of naval warfare can be traced back to the Hague Conventions adopted at the start of the 20th century. Most commonly, states will rely on the 1994 San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea. Under the law of naval warfare, states are generally divided between belligerents (those engaged in armed hostilities) and neutrals (those not involved in the war).

The line between belligerents and neutrals is not always an easy one to draw. In the Middle East, at a minimum, Iran, Israel and the US could be classified as belligerents. According to the San Remo Manual, ships flagged to neutral states, including their warships, may exercise their navigational rights under general international law through a belligerent's strait. It is recommended that neutral warships give notice of their passage as a precautionary measure. A belligerent must not target neutral ships — they are not considered military objectives and must not be fired upon. During this conflict, Iran's territorial sea (which includes the waters within the Strait of Hormuz) counts as an area of naval warfare. The belligerent states



are legally required to have due regard for the legitimate rights and duties of neutral states in an international strait. But legal protection for neutral commerce is weak. Many ships have avoided the strait — and will continue to do so — during this conflict. Can Iran close the strait during times of war? In line with the San Remo Manual, straits under the sovereignty of neutral states must remain open for transit passage for both neutral and belligerent shipping. However, belligerent states are not similarly required to keep their straits open.

Can convoys lawfully be used to protect commercial shipping? Convoys typically involve warships travelling with a fleet of merchant ships to deter and protect against attacks from belligerents during passage. They have been used previously in the Strait of Hormuz and in the Persian Gulf. But merchant vessels may become military objectives and subject to attack by belligerents if they travel in a convoy with belligerent warships.

So any cargo vessel being escorted by a US warship places itself in danger, as it may be lawfully attacked by Iran. If warships belonging to neutral states escort cargo ships that are also flagged to neutral countries, these merchant vessels are not military objectives, in accordance with the San Remo Manual. A belligerent warship would, however, have a right to visit and search these ships to ensure they are not carrying contraband to the enemy. To minimise this risk, neutral states would need to provide Iran with information as to what each ship is carrying. What about ships of states helping Gulf nations? Iran may question status of other nations as a neutral state in light that these states such as Australia offer to assist the United Arab Emirates as a measure of collective self-defence against Iranian attacks. If Australia's actions render it a "party to the conflict" under the law of armed conflict, it is no longer a neutral state — it is now a belligerent. Its warships, along with any private vessels escorted in the strait, could then potentially be subject to lawful attack by Iran.

US military shifting to AI-led warfare model: Pentagon

GNS News Agency, March 22

Washington: A US congressional hearing on special operations forces offered a glimpse into the future of warfare — one driven by artificial intelligence, cyber operations, and autonomous systems — highlighting lessons closely watched in India as it reshapes its military to address emerging threats. Lawmakers and military leaders stated that the battlefield is rapidly evolving, with technology lowering the barrier for both state and non-state actors to deploy advanced capabilities such as drones, cyber tools, and AI-driven systems.

"The bar to access advanced technology like AI, drones, and complex cyber tools has never been lower," Congressman Jason Crow said, warning that such tools now allow smaller groups to "punch above their weight". Assistant Secretary of Defence Derrick Anderson said the current security environment is marked by "simultaneous convergence and speed", with adversaries increasingly aligned and "technologically enabled". He described US Special Operations Forces (SOF) as uniquely positioned for this shift, providing "scalable, tailorable and asymmetric options across the full spectrum of competition and conflict". Admiral Frank Bradley, commander of US Special Operations Command, said the military must adapt quickly to remain effective in this environment. "We must adapt

faster than our adversaries," he said, underlining the need to "accelerate capability development" and integrate emerging technologies. Bradley identified cyber and the digital domain as central to future conflict. "The cyber and the virtual domain are critical manoeuvre spaces that we must take advantage of," he said, adding that the growing "ubiquitous information environment" presents both risks and opportunities. He also pointed to the rise of autonomous systems, describing "the emergence of abundant lethal autonomy" as a defining feature of modern warfare. However, he stressed that human control remains central, saying the law of war requires "a human that's making that decision" on the use of lethal force. Despite this technological push, both lawmakers and military leaders warned that resources have not kept pace with demand. Chairman Ronny Jackson said Socom's "purchasing power has been reduced by 14 per cent since 2019, despite increasing demand for support worldwide". Bradley added that growing operational demands have forced the command to divert funds from future capabilities. "That pace of — of growing usage but diminishing resources was causing us to have to eat into our modernisation budget," he said. Lawmakers said this shift requires rethinking how forces are structured and equipped, including greater emphasis on cyber capabilities, information warfare, and partnerships with allies.

Responding to US-Israel vs Iran War: Indonesia's Board of Peace dilemma intensifies



Bandung: Indonesia faces a strategic choice as pressure mounts at home to withdraw from US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace amid the escalating US-Israel-Iran conflict. Former minister for Politics, Legal and Security Affairs and Vice President candidate Professor Mahfud MD recently noted that leaving the BoP would likely not cause significant losses and could be done easily if the government is "not being held hostage". President Prabowo Subianto may therefore need to reassess Indonesia's decisions, especially as the country is increasingly viewed as aligning with US interests — from joining the BoP to signing one-sided trade agreements with Washington.

This perception raises concerns that Indonesia is losing its independence in global affairs and drifting away from its long-standing, free-and-active foreign policy. At the same time, President Prabowo has expressed readiness to "evaluate" Indonesia's role in the BoP. Indonesia has offered to mediate between the US and Iran, but the chances of success remain low. Instead, the current situation should prompt the government to reconsider whether the BoP framework is still relevant and effective for Indonesia's foreign-policy goals. First, Indonesia is trying to maintain neutrality by offering to facilitate dialogue and urging all parties to prioritise diplomacy. The Iranian Embassy in Jakarta welcomed this offer, although no concrete steps have followed. Iran's ambassador stated that both Indonesia and Iran are influential middle powers with the potential to promote peace, and that closer cooperation could strengthen regional stability. Indonesia has also increased communication with Middle Eastern countries, shown by its intensified diplomatic engagement with Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Second, Indonesia is expected to remain in the BoP despite criticism and calls to withdraw. President Prabowo has assured local Islamic clerics that if he sees no benefit for Palestine and finds that it is not in line with Indonesia's national interests, he will withdraw. The government views the BoP as an important platform for addressing the Israel-Palestine issue, allowing Indonesia to defend Palestinian interests even though Palestine is not represented on the board. Third, the conflict presents an opportunity for Indonesia to strengthen its image as a peace-oriented country. If Indonesia succeeds in facilitating dialogue, it could position itself as a balancing actor contributing to global stability. Mediation efforts may also help ease economic pressures, especially with rising oil prices.

Indonesia's membership in the BoP as a strategic tool. Although withdrawing from the BoP may appear to be an option, Indonesia would likely lose bargaining power with the United States if it left. Indonesia's long-standing strat-

egy is to avoid conflict with major powers such as China and the US while gaining selective advantages, especially in trade negotiations. This raises a key question: would Indonesia's geopolitical position become too closely tied to the US? The answer is complex. Indonesia's trade, investment, and import ties with the US already limit its freedom to some extent. Its BoP membership and efforts to maintain good relations with Washington reflect a cautious approach aimed at avoiding clashes with a major power.

Openly criticising US actions in Iran could also disrupt Indonesia's diplomatic agenda, particularly within the BoP. Offering mediation allows Indonesia to maintain balance and promote de-escalation without directly confronting Washington. Indonesia is navigating a difficult situation during the US-Israel vs. Iran conflict while trying to assert itself as a middle power committed to peace in BoP even as it faces criticism and economic pressures. This issue is important because Indonesia-long a supporter of Palestine and without diplomatic ties to Israel-is now part of a platform where unlikely actors appear together. As Indonesia considers reviewing its BoP membership, the decision will shape its future position in the board and its efforts to support Palestinian self-determination.

Operation Epic Fury weakens Iran but fails to eliminate threat

Washington: Iran's military and strategic capabilities have been significantly degraded by recent US-led operations, but the regime remains intact and continues to pose a serious threat to American interests and regional stability, US intelligence officials told lawmakers. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said the Iranian regime has been weakened but not eliminated.

"The IC (intelligence community) assesses the regime in Iran appears to be intact but largely degraded due to attacks on its leadership and military capabilities," she told the Senate Select Intelligence Committee on Wednesday (local time). She mentioned that Iran's conventional military power has been severely reduced.

"Its conventional military power projection capabilities have largely been destroyed, leaving limited options," Gabbard said, adding that "Iran's strategic position has been significantly degraded." However, officials warned that Tehran retains both intent and capacity to reconstitute its military strength over time. "The IC assesses that if a hostile regime survives, it will likely seek to begin a years-long effort to rebuild its military, missiles, and UAV forces," she said. CIA Director John Ratcliffe underscored that Iran remains a long-term adversary. "I think Iran has been a constant threat to the United States for an extended period of time and posed an immediate threat at this time," he told lawmakers. He also highlighted concerns about Iran's missile ambitions. "If left unimpeded... they would have the ability to range missiles to the continental US," Ratcliffe said, referring to Tehran's advancing missile and space launch technologies. The intelligence assessment noted that Iran continues to engage in active conflict with the United States and its allies.

All stacked up, and no gas to use: Amid LPG crisis, housing societies along Dwarka Expressway in Gurgaon are waiting for PNG for over a year



Stacked yellow pipes go up and down the outer walls of residential towers in Emaar Imperial Gardens and Adani Oyster in Gurgaon's Sector 102, and Puri Emerald Bay in Sector 104, large condominium complexes along the Dwarka Expressway. Similar stacked pipes can be seen at Raheja Vedaanta and Experion The Heartsong in Sector 108 to the north of the Expressway. You'd think residents of these condos can afford to rest somewhat easy amid the shortage of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders in the wake of the war in the Middle East – no crisis of piped natural gas (PNG) has been reported so far.

Not quite – the PNG pipelines in these societies are not connected to any distribution pipeline, nor are the connections metered. Residents say they paid deposits and advances of at least Rs 7,000 per flat more than a year ago, but they are yet to receive piped gas supply. And they have little hope that the central government's push to states on Tuesday (March 17) to ramp up piped gas connections will succeed in finally moving things forward. "We have been waiting for nearly two years, and we have made multiple representations to both Haryana City Gas (HCG) and Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) during this period," Kamal Malhotra, a resident of Adani Oyster, said. "At least 40 per cent of our residents have paid Rs 7,000 each. But so far, only the stack pipelines have been installed, and nothing has happened thereafter." According to Malhotra, the GMDA is yet to give Right of Way (RoW) permissions, not even the digging to test the mother line connection has started as yet. Haryana City Gas Distribution Ltd, a unit of the SKN Group, is authorised by the Haryana government to distribute PNG and CNG in most residential sectors of Gurgaon district. (In Delhi and Noida, the authorised distributor is Indraprastha

Gas Limited, or IGL.)

On Wednesday (March 18), the Residents' Welfare Association (RWA) of Adani Oyster wrote to the CEO of GMDA, PC Meena, drawing attention to the delay. "This prolonged inaction [in making the PNG connections operational] has caused severe hardship to residents, who are left with no option but to carry LPG cylinders to upper floors of high-rise buildings, posing significant safety risks and daily inconvenience," RWA vice-president Alka Malhotra said in the letter. "PNG (Piped Natural Gas) is a basic and essential utility for modern urban living, particularly in high-rise residential societies... Residents of Dwarka Expressway Sectors Gurugram – comprising approximately 15,469 residential flats – have been deprived of this essential facility," the RWA's letter to GMDA said. Sunil Sareen, a resident of Emaar Imperial Gardens and co-convenor of the Dwarka Expressway Gurugram Development Association, said the situation is similar in the other housing societies in the area.

"Bureaucratic hurdles are impacting thousands of citizens who are deprived of PNG connectivity for the last two years in the DXP (Dwarka Expressway) sectors," Sareen said. Sareen said residents of his society had paid advances of around Rs 8,000 per flat for PNG connectivity in February 2025, and had been promised a three-month timeline of activation. "But it (the gas) has still not come." He also explained the nature of the operational difficulties in play in some cases. "For the other 20-plus societies in the area, the issues are two-fold – the gas agency (HCG) needs a minimum committed sum of money or number of users to install gas connections, and not all residents are willing to pay the advance. As such, the agency does not have the bandwidth to install in so many societies at once, and it has to go one by one," Sareen said. Asked for a comment on the complaints of residents, the GMDA said that applications from HCG and other agencies are processed according to timelines as and when they come. "The CEO approved two [applications of the Dwarka E-way area] on Tuesday (March 17)," GMDA superintendent engineer and nodal officer for RoWs, Faisal Ibrahim, said. "There is no particular pendency from the Expressway area, we process applications across the city. One RoW application can be for pipelines that connect to dozens of societies," Ibrahim said. HCG CEO A K Jana said that he would be meeting with the GMDA CEO to expedite the pending RoW applications for installation of PNG pipelines. He hoped for a speedy resolution of the situation, Jana said.

Why traders want Election Commission of India to revise the 50,000 cash-carrying limit



With the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in force in poll-bound Tamil Nadu, some stakeholders have raised concerns over the ₹50,000 cash-carrying limit prescribed by the Election Commission of India (ECI). Those carrying cash above this limit would have to satisfactorily explain its source. Tamil Nadu Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Archana Patnaik had said, "If valid documentary evidence or written explanation is provided regarding the source and intended purpose of the funds and upon verification, if the authorities are satisfied that the cash is not meant for distribution to voters, such amounts will be returned to the rightful owner and will not be seized."

However, Tamil Nadu Vanigar Sankangalin Peramaippu (a traders' body) president A.M. Vikrama Raja questions the logic behind the cash limit. He argued the slab of ₹50,000 was fixed several years ago and urged that traders be allowed to carry cash up to ₹2 lakh. "The price of commodities were different back then when compared to the situation now," he told The Hindu. District Collectors should invite trader associations for talks, as they are among the most affected along with farmers, Mr. Raja said. If the documents produced for the cash were in order, traders should not be harassed unnecessarily. "Let there be one point. Now, traders are being asked to go to the Tahsildar, then to the RDO, the Collector, or the election officer. It should not happen. There are practical issues," he underlined. In some places, money was confiscated, just a few minutes after the Model Code of Conduct came into force on Sunday last. "Don't we need at least some time to go home?" V. Gopalakrishnan, who used to own a shop, suggested if the limit was only ₹50,000, banks should be directed to disburse only ₹50,000 in cash (in a single transaction) to customers. He also flagged a practical difficulty. "When a trader winds up business with several transactions during the whole day and goes home with money, how can he/she show all the bills if they are intercepted?" To avoid trouble, he rather suggests going fully digital during the MCC. "It is not impossible. These days, even small shops have provisions for

digital transactions," he reasoned. According to Ms. Patnaik, to redress grievances related to the decision of the authorities on cash seizure, an appeal can be made to the District Grievance Committee. The restrictions are part of efforts to ensure free and fair elections in the State on April 23. As of March 17, as many as 2,106 Static Surveillance Teams and an equal number of Flying Squads have been deployed across the State to monitor the movement of cash. Additionally, 25 Election Expenditure Monitoring Agencies, including the Income Tax Department, Customs Department, and others, are also engaged in monitoring and surveillance. Though there are norms for checking the movement of cash and returning them after verification, the implementation of the norms may vary across districts.

In some districts, District Election Officer (respective District Collectors) has appealed to the public to avoid carrying cash above ₹50,000 without valid documents, while the Election Commission of India, in a press note, said that DEOs have been directed to obtain information regarding unusual and suspicious cash withdrawal or deposit of cash exceeding ₹1 lakh from banks for due verification followed by necessary action. If the amount is more than ₹10 lakh, then DEOs are to pass on such information to Income Tax Department for necessary action. The Financial Intelligence Unit – India (FIU-IND) has been requested to share Cash Transaction Reports (CTRs) and Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs) with CDDT for effective monitoring of the election expenditure of the candidates. The Election Commission has also issued a Standard Operating Procedure for Flying Squads and Static Surveillance Teams, constituted for keeping vigil over excessive campaign expenses, distribution of items of bribe in cash or in kind, movement of illegal arms, ammunition, liquor, or antisocial elements, among others, in the constituencies during election process. The District Grievance Committee in each district comprises three officers of the district, namely, (i) CEO, Zila Parishad/CDO/P.D. DRDA, (ii) Nodal Officer of Expenditure Monitoring in the District Election Office (Convener) and (iii) District Treasury Officer. The committee shall suo motu examine each case of seizure made by the police or SST or FS and where the committee finds that no FIR/complaint has been filed against the seizure or where the seizure is not linked with any candidate or political party or any election campaign etc., as per SOP, "it shall take immediate steps to order release of such cash etc. to such persons from whom the cash was seized after passing a speaking order to that effect." The commission further said: "In no case, shall any matter relating to seized cash/seized valuables shall be kept pending in Malkhana or treasury for more than seven days after the date of poll, unless any FIR/complaint is filed."

World Happiness Report 2026: The social media and happiness connect

Is the digital landscape quietly making a generation less happy? The answer, according to the latest World Happiness Report 2026, appears to be yes. Heavy social media use seems to be contributing to a drop in wellbeing among young people in English-speaking countries and Western Europe, especially among girls, according to the report's findings, published on March 19, ahead of the UN's International Day of Happiness. Brought out by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford, in partnership with Gallup, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and an independent editorial board, the World Happiness Report 2026 provides an insight into the global picture of social media and happiness. Less happy youngsters

The report said that life evaluations among those aged under 25 in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have dropped dramatically (by almost one point on a 0 to 10 scale) over the past decade, while the average for the young in the rest of the world has increased, according to Gallup World Poll data. According to data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which covered seven internet activities for 15-year-old students in 47 countries (not including United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), life satisfaction is highest at low rates of social media use and lower at higher rates of use. Looking at two groups of internet activities, it said that communications, news, learning, and content creation are associated with higher life satisfaction, while social media, gaming, and browsing for fun are associated with lower life evaluations. All internet activities are associated with lower life satisfaction at very high rates of use, especially for girls and for those in the U.K. and Ireland, the two English-speaking countries in PISA. Type of internet use is a factor

Data from Latin America show that the type of platform is crucial. Those designed to facilitate social connections show a clear positive association with happiness, whereas those driven by algorithmically curated content tend to demonstrate a negative association at high rates of use, the report said. When combined, PISA and Gallup data show significantly higher youth wellbeing in countries that spend more time using the internet for communication, and insignificantly lower youth wellbeing in countries with higher average hours of social media use. Young people who use social media for less than one hour per day report the highest levels of wellbeing. This was higher than those who do not use social media at all. But adolescents are spending an average of 2.5 hours a day on social media as per one estimate, it said. Happiest countries The 14th edition of the World Happiness Report has also put out a ranking of the world's happiest countries, with Nordic countries leading the rankings. Finland continued to lead the world in happiness for a record ninth year in a row, according to the ranking of the world's happiest countries. Finns reported an average score of 7.764 out of 10 when asked to evaluate their lives. Finland was followed by Iceland and Denmark. Costa Rica, by climbing to number four, continued its multi-year rise from a low of 23rd in 2023. This rise marks the highest ever ranking for a Latin American country, it said.

Switzerland (10th) re-entered the top 10 after a one-year absence. The upward trends continued for countries such as Kosovo (16th), Slovenia (18th) and Czechia (20th). But there was a catch. For the first time since the World Happiness Report was published in 2012, none of the English-speaking countries - New Zealand (11th), Ireland (13th), Australia (15th), United States (23rd), Canada (25th) and the UK (29th) - appear in the top 10, with only half in the top 20. India stood at a distant 116th rank, with Indians reporting an average score of 4.536. The report also found that nations in or near zones of major conflict remain at the foot of the rankings. These rankings, according to the report, are based on a three-year average of each population's average assessment of their quality of life. Factors such as GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on, a sense of freedom, generosity and perceptions of corruption are also taken into account.

Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, Director of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Centre, Professor of Economics at the



University of Oxford, and an editor of the World Happiness Report, said, "The global evidence makes clear that the links between social media use and our wellbeing heavily depends on what platforms we're using, who's using them and how, as well as for how long. Heavy usage is associated with much lower wellbeing, but those deliberately off social media also appear to be missing out on some positive effects. Beyond the complexity, it is clear that we should look as much as possible to put the 'social' back into social media." The findings describe a complex global picture at a time when many countries are seeking to implement greater legislative protections for those aged under 16 online. In December 2025, the Australian government increased the age limit for 10 social media platforms from 13 to 16, while other countries, including Denmark, France, and Spain, are planning similar regulation, the report said, hoping that the evidence in the volume would help policy-makers in their assessment of such policies.

One in 7 Indians affected by mental health disorders, treatment gap persists

New Delhi: One in seven Indians is affected by mental health disorders, while several states continue to face a treatment gap ranging from 70 to 90 per cent, experts said on Monday. At a post-budget webinar breakout session, experts deliberated on the Union Budget announcements, which focus on strengthening mental health infrastructure by establishing NIMHANS-2 and upgrading key institutions. The Union Budget 2026-27 announced the establishment of a second National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in North India to improve regional access to mental healthcare. The expert highlighted the growing burden of mental and neurological disorders in India and the urgent need to strengthen institutional capacity to meet emerging healthcare demands. Participants also emphasised that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for over 60 per cent of deaths in the country, with neurological and mental health conditions being among the leading contributors to disability-adjusted life years (DALYs). In this context, strengthening tertiary mental health institutions and expanding specialised services were identified as critical priorities for the healthcare system, a health ministry statement said. The session also noted that North India currently lacks adequate tertiary neuro-psychiatric care facilities, particularly in areas such as advanced neuroimaging, neurocritical care, and specialised neurological services. They observed that the establishment of NIMHANS-2, along with the modernisation of existing mental health institutions, would enhance advanced clinical care, training capacity, research capability, and innovation in neurosciences, it said. Participants also proposed the creation of a National Brain-Mind Cloud Network under the National Health Mission, which would connect premier institutions such as All India Institute of Medical Sciences, state medical colleges, and primary healthcare centres.

Indore tragedy: why do EV batteries catch fire? | Explained

The story so far: A fire tore through a house in Indore on March 18, killing eight people including two children. An electric vehicle (EV) charging point outside the house appeared to have sparked the blaze. An investigation is underway. Are EV batteries safe? Nearly every EV on the road today runs on lithium-ion batteries, which use the same chemistry powering millions of smartphones and laptops. They pack more energy than lead-acid batteries and are generally safe when managed well. A common cause of EV battery fires is an event called a thermal runaway. A lithium-ion battery packs thousands of cells tightly together, each generating heat as it charges and discharges. Normally, an onboard computer called the battery management system keeps the temperature within a safe range. But if something goes wrong, one cell can overheat, causing neighbouring cells to overheat in a chain reaction that can outpace the cooling system. This process also releases a toxic cocktail of gases, including hydrogen fluoride, in a flammable vapour that eases the 'path' to a fire.

What causes thermal runaway?

Manufacturers protect battery packs by packing them inside shells of reinforced steel or aluminium. However, a hard impact — like from a strong impact to the undercarriage — can deform the casing and puncture or deform the cells inside, leading to a short circuit. Charging a battery beyond its designed capacity can force charge to build up in the 'wrong' places inside cells. Reputable EV manufacturers include safeguards in their charging systems to prevent this but third-party or damaged chargers may not pay attention to these limits. And regularly changing a battery overnight with such a charger can increase the risk. As the battery expands and contracts during use, rare manufacturing defects like a small protrusion of metal can bring the positive and negative electrodes in touch, causing an enormous current to flow between them. This releases heat that then spreads through the pack. Extension cords or domestic wiring in old buildings can also overheat when they can't handle the sustained current.

Do external conditions matter?

In hot weather, like during summers in India, the cooling system can struggle to shed heat. Parking an EV in direct sunlight for long periods or charging it immediately after a long drive can add to the thermal stress. As batteries age, their internal components also degrade. So users who ignore warning lights or skip inspections can miss early signs of swelling or chemical decomposition. Flooding also threatens batteries. The contaminated water after heavy rains can infiltrate a battery pack and cause short circuits. Several EV fires have occurred in the days after vehicles were submerged in floodwater. EVs are not uniquely dangerous. Petrol cars catch fire too, and more often, as they carry flammable fuel next to an engine running at a high temperature. The difference is that EV battery fires burn hotter, spread faster, and are harder to put out (as the battery releases oxygen as it burns). Firefighters often have to use lots of water or specialised fire blankets to douse the source and cool it down. The Indore incident was made worse by the fact that LPG cylinders were stored in the building, a sports bike was parked inside, and electronic door locks jammed when the power failed.

What are industry, users doing?

Most EVs today have channels alongside the cells filled with a coolant that absorbs their heat and dissipates it into the air. Scientists are currently developing a new form of cooling where the coolant evaporates as it absorbs heat and releases it into the air, improving heat transfer and handling temperature spikes better. Manufacturers are also exploring batteries that use a solid electrolyte rather than the current liquid, reducing the risk of a thermal runaway, while refining firewalls inside existing designs so that if one cell fails, the fire doesn't spread. Users can also take precautions by using the charger that came with the vehicle or one certified by the manufacturer, avoiding routine unattended charging,



ensuring home electrical systems meet the necessary standards for high-power appliances, and having EV batteries inspected after any significant impact. Since heat is a common trigger, experts have recommended letting batteries cool after a long drive before charging and also keeping the charging area clear. Finally, the Bureau of Indian Standards released updated safety norms for EV batteries in 2023 after a spate of fires the previous year prompted a government review. As part of its AIS-156 standard, the Automotive Research Association of India also requires tests to check how heat propagates in a battery and requires battery packs to give a vehicle's users at least five minutes to escape before a fire.

NavIC needs urgent reset to meet India's navigation goals

Billed as India's answer to the American GPS network, the indigenous satellite navigation system — Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) — is plagued by technical failures and ageing infrastructure. It needs an urgent reset if the ambitious goals set by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) are to be met. Experts have commented that NavIC represents a classic case of overpromising and underdelivering. It is ironic that just two years ago, the Ministry of Science and Technology had described it as "a magnificent gem in the crown of India's technological prowess" and "a beacon of self-reliance, shining brightly in the world of satellite navigation". Despite ISRO's commendable technological achievements, persistent issues such as satellite failures, delays, and limited integration in consumer devices have restricted NavIC's effectiveness. The system's primary weakness has been the failure of onboard rubidium atomic clocks — many of which were imported. Without these precise clocks, satellites cannot provide accurate positioning data, leading to a cascade of service capability losses. The clocks have continued to malfunction, and as many as five satellites have been rendered unusable. A functional satellite navigation system requires at least four satellites to be visible simultaneously for reliable positioning. With reports indicating that the constellation has fallen below this threshold, the system's reliability for critical applications like defence, disaster management, and transportation is severely compromised. The navigation system was envisioned as a step towards self-reliance in satellite-based navigation, yet its relatively low usage in smartphones and commercial applications reflects gaps in policy execution and industry collaboration. Immediate corrective steps can help NavIC realise its true potential. The idea of NavIC was born out of a strategic need for indigenous navigation and timing services, particularly after India was denied access to foreign GPS data during the Kargil War. The NavIC was designed to provide precise position, velocity, and timing information over India and surrounding areas. It was meant to be particularly useful in high-altitude areas where signals from global systems are sometimes unavailable.

What to know about Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant after report of projectile hitting its complex



Dubai: Iran and Russia both allege a projectile struck the grounds of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in the Islamic Republic, raising the spectre of a radiological incident as Tehran's war with Israel and the United States rages. Neither Iran nor Russia say there was any release of nuclear material in the incident on Tuesday, but it again underlines a longtime worry of Iran's neighbours – that the power plant on the shores of the Persian Gulf could be stricken by either an attack or an earthquake.

Here's what to know about the incident, the plant itself and Iran's wider nuclear programme, which remains a reason US President Donald Trump points to for starting the war alongside Israel against Iran on Feb. 28. Russia's state-run Tass news agency quoted Rosatom CEO Alexey Likhachev late Tuesday as claiming "a strike hit the area adjacent to the metrology service building located at the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant site, in close proximity to the operating power unit." Russian technicians from Rosatom operate the plant, using Russian-made, low-enriched uranium.

"There were no casualties among Rosatom State Corporation personnel," Likhachev said. "The radiation situation at the site is normal." The Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran later issued a statement saying "no financial, technical, or human damage occurred, and no part of the plant was harmed." The International Atomic Energy Agency, which has had its inspections of Iran restricted over years of tensions over Tehran's programme after Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, issued a carefully worded statement early Wednesday. "The IAEA has been informed by Iran that a projectile hit the premises of the Bushehr NPP on Tuesday evening," the United Nations agency said, using an acronym for nuclear power plant. "No damage to the plant or injuries to staff reported." No other independent expert has seen the damage. Neither Iran nor Russia published images of the damage. Moscow has made claims about nuclear sites during its war on Ukraine that turned out not to be true, while Iran has been trying to use both force and coercive diplomacy to pressure its neighbours to, in turn,

push the US to halt the war.

It remains unclear what the "projectile" that hit the complex was. The US military's Central Command, which is in charge of forces launching airstrikes across southern Iran, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Shrapnel from missile interceptions and other air defence fire also caused damage in the region since the war started. Bushehr, some 750 kilometres (465 miles) south of Iran's capital, Tehran, is home to an Iranian navy base and a dual-use, civilian-military airport with air defence systems protecting the area. Iran's Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi announced plans in the 1970s to build 23 nuclear reactors while also having full control of the nuclear fuel cycle – opening the door to being able to build atomic weapons. That rattled US officials, who imposed limits on American companies from selling to Iran. German firm Kraftwerk Union began construction of the Bushehr plant in 1975 as part of a USD 4.8 billion deal for four reactors. But the 1979 Islamic Revolution halted the project. Iraq repeatedly bombed the site during its eight-year war with Iran in the 1980s, seeking to stop Tehran's programme.

Russia ultimately signed onto the project, which saw the power plant connected to the Iranian grid in 2011, running a pressurised-water reactor that generates up to 1,000 megawatts of electricity, which can power hundreds of thousands of homes and other businesses and industries. But it contributes only 1 per cent to 2 per cent of Iran's power. Iran has been trying to expand Bushehr to multiple reactors. In 2019, it began a project that ultimately plans to add two additional reactors to the site, each adding another 1,000 megawatts apiece. A satellite image from December from Planet Labs PBC showed the construction still ongoing at the site, with cranes over both sites. The reactor currently running at Bushehr uses uranium from Russia enriched to 4.5 per cent, a low level needed for power generation in such plants. Bushehr had been untouched in the 12-day war in June.

Bushehr, as a running, civilian nuclear power plant, was left untouched during the 12-day war in June between Israel and Iran. During that war, the US bombed three Iranian nuclear enrichment sites, destroying centrifuges and likely trapping Tehran's stockpile of highly enriched, 60 per cent uranium underground. In the time since, Iran has blocked IAEA inspectors from visiting those sites. A possible strike on a nuclear power plant could see a leak of radiation into the environment. That's been a major concern in the years after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Nuclear plants in Ukraine, built when the country was part of the Soviet Union, have come under attack and found themselves on the front lines of that war. Such a leak into the Persian Gulf would be an existential crisis for the Gulf Arab states, which rely on desalination plants in the Gulf for their water supplies.

India's future demographic challenges

A new report by the International Institute of Migration and Development and the Population Foundation of India titled 'Unravelling India's Demographic Future: Population Projections for States and Union Territories, 2021-2051', underscores the demographic risks that are beginning to surface nationwide. India's population is projected to increase from 1,355.8 million in 2021 to 1,590.1 million in 2051, with an average annual increase of 0.5%, suggesting a prolonged period of slower population expansion. These figures fall below earlier estimates, strengthening the case that India is unlikely to face the threat of population explosion that once dominated political and academic debates. These projections point to a turning point, where India is poised to move beyond a youth-led, fast-expanding population into an era of a more urban, steadily ageing, and balanced demographic structure.

A problem for schools The projections point out that the pre-primary school-going population (0-4 years) is expected to dwindle from 113.5 million in 2021 to 8.6 million by the middle of this century. Since most regions in the country are now close to universal primary school enrolments, the demand for new schooling facilities could ease out, especially in the government sector. A sustained drop in fertility could leave the country with an escalating number of 'uneconomic schools' (schools with lesser enrolment rates that cannot justify their economic costs), raising the threat of teachers losing their jobs, a trend that the State of Kerala has seen play out for more than three decades.

Evidence from different parts of the country suggests that declining fertility rates have already started influencing schooling requirements, with classrooms adjusting to smaller cohorts. Data from the Unified District Information System for Education and the Ministry of Education highlights a significant reduction in the number of government schools over the last decade, with schools dropping from 11.07 lakh in 2014-15 to 10.18 lakh in 2023-24, amounting to a reduction of close to 90,000 schools across the country. This decline has been accompanied by a sharp increase in private schools; their numbers grew from 2.88 lakh to 3.31 lakh over the same period, an increase of 43,000 schools. While falling birth rates have led to a reduction in enrolments and closure of government schools, smaller families and improved capacity to afford education have propelled the demand for private schools. Many parents choose private schools in the hope of giving their wards the education they never had in life, nudged by social pressure and a common perception that government schools generally fall short on quality compared to private schools.

Ageing population As the demographic dividend largely depends on the working age population (15-59), a relatively higher proportion of this specific group can lead to faster economic growth, a dynamic evident in the development phases of several countries, including China, Japan, and South Korea. India has one of the world's largest workforces, rising from 833.8 million (65.2%) in 2021 to a projected peak level of 1,009.0 million (65.5%) in 2041, before declining to 998.1 million (62.8%) by 2051. There is an impending concern that the demographic dividend window will close after 2041, highlighting the urgency of leveraging it before its contribution to economic growth starts to diminish. Nevertheless, close to six out of every 10 persons in the country are expected to be part of the workforce by 2051, which is an encouraging sign.

However, India's population is ageing. In 2021, India's elderly population (60+) stood at 130.5 million or 9.62% of the population. By 2051, this number is projected to touch 325.3 million (20.5%), highlighting that there will be a profound increment in the ageing population. The median age, a measure that splits the population evenly by age, is pro-



jected to climb from 28 years in 2021 to 40 by 2051, signalling India's shift towards a more advanced stage of demographic transition. The growing elderly population is set to exert increasing pressure on healthcare and social security, thereby putting a strain on the state's finances. Policy signals

The declining child population is expected to offer a better teacher-pupil ratio and expand infrastructural facilities in schools. Further, declining birth rates reduce demand for maternity care, allowing the healthcare system to rationalise the use of resources and offer better quality care. Though fertility levels have been falling, continued investments are required for family planning and to prevent unintended pregnancies, as well as reduce infertility and ensure the reproductive rights of women. India needs to overhaul its education and skill development system to cope with modern-day challenges. It should also equip the younger generation to seize new opportunities before our demographic leverage disappears in the coming decades. The decline in the working-age population can be offset by bringing in more women to formal work (gender dividend) and by expanding access to better-quality employment. With the rapid growth of the elderly population, India's financial and healthcare systems, especially geriatric care, must be redesigned to support the growing needs of elderly citizens. At the same time, this creates a strong potential for a thriving silver economy, and could help in unlocking a second demographic dividend in the future.

HDFC Bank stock falls over 4% as chairman resigns on ethical grounds

The sudden resignation of HDFC Bank part-time chairman Atanu Chakraborty on ethical concerns has adversely impacted the bank's share prices besides putting pressure on the management and board to clarify doubts on lapses if any. On Thursday (March 19, 2026), the stock crashed 4.45% on BSE soon after opening even as the benchmark index the Sensex fell over 2% owing to developments in West Asia. On Wednesday (March 18), the HDFC Bank stock had closed lower despite the indices being in the positive territory before the resignation news came out, raising speculations wherever there was insider trading at the bank. The Bank on Thursday clarified to stock exchanges that though the chairman's resignation letter was dated March 17, it was received by the Bank on March 18 after market hours.

Brain tumours take control of sugar metabolism to grow, study suggests



Immune cells within a brain tumour could be taking control of sugar metabolism, breaking down fructose to suppress immune responses and promote tumour growth, a study has found. Published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the study is the first to identify a sugar metabolism driving immune suppression in glioblastoma, an aggressive, rapidly growing malignant tumour in the brain, researchers said. They suggested blocking how fructose gets broken down in specialised immune cells may improve a patient's response to immunotherapy and outcomes. "Across several mouse models, when we removed the fructose transporter, the tumours simply didn't grow," senior author Jason Miska, assistant professor of neurological surgery at Northwestern University's school of medicine, said. Glioblastoma is among the most treatment-resistant brain tumours, partly because of its tumour microenvironment -- or the mix of cells surrounding the tumour -- including microglia.

Microglia are immune cells that surround and support neurons (nerve cells) in the central nervous system. Crucial for the early stages of tumour growth, microglia also express a unique fructose transporter, 'GLUT5', enabling them to transport and metabolise the sugar molecule. Varied

analytical techniques, including genetic sequencing methods, were used to study microglia, macrophages -- which are immune cells that can enter tumours from the bloodstream -- and tumour cells. The analysis confirmed that microglia uniquely express GLUT5 and showed microglia to be the only immune cells in the glioblastoma microenvironment capable of breaking down fructose.

"We knew microglia use this fructose transporter as part of their normal biology, but we did not expect it to be this important for brain tumour growth," Miska said. In mice, genetically engineered without the GLUT5 transporter, tumours were seen to produce a much stronger immune response, including a better recognition of tumour cells, an increased production of cytokines driving inflammation and a rapid multiplication of CD8+ T-cells, the immune system's main cancer-killing cells. "This not only makes the microglia themselves more inflammatory, but it also causes those T-cells and B-cells that are in the tumour to be more activated and create more inflammatory molecules that we have shown are required for rejection of brain tumours," first author Leah Billingham, a postdoctoral fellow in Miska's lab, said. "This isn't just solely the microglia doing something; this is an intricate interaction between the different parts of the immune system and how they are then impacting tumour rejection," Billingham said. Microglial fructose metabolism is a key regulator of immune suppression in glioblastoma and may be a promising therapeutic target to improve immunotherapy response in patients, the researchers suggested. The authors "demonstrate that microglia uniquely express the fructose transporter GLUT5 and are the only immune cells in the GBM (glioblastoma) microenvironment capable of metabolising fructose." They show that a "global deletion of GLUT5 confers profound resistance to tumour growth. This effect is driven by loss of fructose metabolism in microglia and occurs independently of contributions from peripheral immune compartments."

Life-saving numbers: what the 2026 U.S. cholesterol guidelines mean for everyone

The call woke me from a dead sleep. The ER physician uttered the words STEMI, short for ST elevation myocardial infarction. She didn't need to say more: I was out of bed as she narrated the rest. A STEMI occurs when a ruptured cholesterol plaque triggers a cascade of clot formations, sealing the artery shut. No blood flow. No oxygen. The heart is dying by the minute. The team had rushed in and were already draping the 58-year-old man, who was writhing as I walked in and scrubbed. We threaded a wire across the occlusion, inflated a balloon to crush the plaque, and deployed a drug-eluting stent. The blood roared back into the starved heart muscle. His chest pain vanished. He stopped moaning and mustered a weak smile, blinking under the cath lab lights, asking when he could eat.

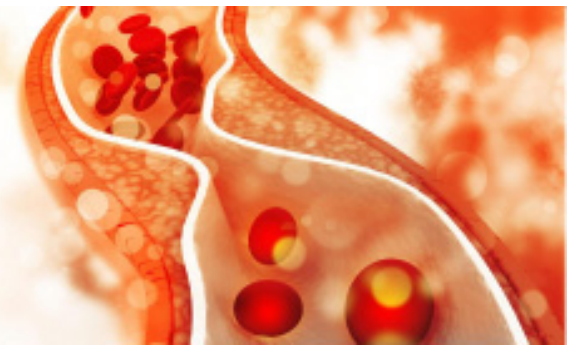
I had seen him two years earlier in the clinic. His LDL cholesterol was 168 mg/dL, and his risk profile warranted statin therapy. I recommended it. He refused. He had read online that statins were poison, that cholesterol was a myth concocted by the pharmaceutical industry. He cited a podcast, a retired surgeon on social media—everything except the 70 years of clinical evidence I laid out between us. Now, lying in the recovery bay with a fresh stent in his coronary artery along with the metallic taste of mortality still on his tongue, he looked at me and said, "Doc, I'll take the statin." A near-death experience cuts through disinformation.

His conversion could not have come at a more fitting time. On March 13, 2026, the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association, joined by nine other medical societies, released the most sweeping cholesterol guideline update in nearly a decade. The 2026 Guideline on the Management of Dyslipidaemia restores clear, numerical LDL targets based on risk. For patients like mine with established disease at very high risk, the target is below 55 mg/dL. For high-risk patients, below 70. For primary prevention, below 100. These numbers are drawn from decades of randomised trial data showing that lower LDL levels, sustained over time, are associated with fewer heart attacks, fewer strokes, and fewer deaths. LDL and heart disease

The story of LDL as a causal agent in atherosclerotic disease is among the most robust in medicine. It began in Framingham, Massachusetts, in 1948, when the National Heart Institute enrolled over 5,000 residents in a study that would define modern cardiology. Framingham established that elevated cholesterol, hypertension, smoking, and diabetes were independent predictors of heart disease. Mendelian randomisation analyses later confirmed that lifelong LDL exposure increases cardiovascular risk in a dose- and duration-dependent manner. Every 39 mg/dL reduction in LDL reduces major events by about 22%. The biology is merciless: LDL particles infiltrate the arterial intima, undergo oxidation, trigger inflammation, attract macrophages, and form the lipid-rich necrotic core that one day ruptures, exactly as it did in my patient's artery at three in the morning. Statins changed the game. Since the 1980s, these HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors have lowered LDL by 30 to 50%, but their benefits go beyond lipid lowering: they stabilise plaques, reduce vascular inflammation, and improve endothelial function. The 4S, WOSCOPS, and JUPITER trials cemented their role in prevention, and they remain among the most cost-effective interventions in medicine.

The rationale for these aggressive targets: lower LDL for longer equals less disease. The 2026 guidelines adopt the PREVENT equations as the preferred risk calculator, replacing the older Pooled Cohort Equations. PREVENT was derived from over 6.5 million diverse adults and estimates 10- and 30-year cardiovascular risk for individuals aged 30 to 79. It incorporates kidney function and haemoglobin A1c, acknowledging that diabetes and chronic kidney disease accelerate atherosclerosis. Most notably, PREVENT includes an optional Social Deprivation Index based on zip code, incorporating poverty, education, unemployment, and housing instability. Cardiovascular disease also is determined by the neighbourhoods people live in and the stresses they endure. The guidelines also break new ground in biomarker testing. Universal screening for lipoprotein(a), or Lp(a): the bane of the South Asian population, is now recommended for all adults at least once. Lp(a) is a genetically determined particle that independently causes atherosclerotic disease and aortic valve stenosis, affecting millions. It is not altered by diet, exercise, or statins. The guidelines also recommend selective apolipoprotein B testing in patients with diabetes, elevated triglycerides, or metabolic syndrome. ApoB directly measures atherogenic particle number and may better predict residual risk than LDL alone.

On the therapeutic horizon, pelacarsen, an antisense oligonucleotide that silences apolipoprotein(a) mRNA in the liver, reduces Lp(a) levels by about 80% in phase 2 trials.



The pivotal Lp(a) HORIZON trial, enrolling over 8,000 patients, is expected to report results in 2026. If positive, it would be the first proof that lowering Lp(a) reduces cardiovascular events, a landmark moment comparable to the early statin trials. Other agents in the pipeline, including oloparin, lepidisiran, and muvalaplin, share the same goal: making Lp(a) a treatable risk factor rather than an ominous footnote on a lab report. And yet, for all our pharmacologic ingenuity, we must reckon with a soberingly humbling truth: we are all going to die. Cellular senescence, telomere attrition, and genetically programmed apoptosis ensure that ageing itself is the most powerful cardiovascular risk factor, one no statin or antisense oligonucleotide can eliminate. The arteries stiffen, the endothelium thins, and the cumulative burden of a lifetime's lipid exposure eventually declares itself. Age is the independent variable we cannot modify. What we can modify is how early we start fighting back. The 2026 guidelines make a bold statement: begin active screening and treatment from age 30. Not 40. Not 50. The writing committee cites growing evidence that atherosclerosis begins in adolescence and that long-term exposure to even modestly elevated LDL levels over decades compounds the problem. Over 80% of cardiovascular disease is preventable, and the tools are neither exotic nor expensive: a heart-healthy diet, routine physical activity, proper sleep, avoiding tobacco, and stress management. When lifestyle alone is not enough, a cheap generic statin can close the gap. So, start early. Eat your vegetables. Move your body. Manage your stress. Get your cholesterol checked. And if the numbers warrant it, take the medicine. In other words, listen to your mum and dad. They were right all along.

Countries should consider vaccination for groups at highest risk of severe COVID-19 disease

Countries should consider routine COVID-19 vaccination for groups at highest risk of severe COVID-19 disease — two doses per year six months apart — due to the limited protection beyond six months after the last dose. These groups include the oldest adults; older adults with significant comorbidities or severe obesity; residents in care and long-term care facilities; and moderately or severely immunocompromised individuals, said an update issued by the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE), which held its regular biannual meeting from March 9 to 12 to discuss, among other topics, the current epidemiology of COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccine recommendations for different population groups, typhoid conjugate vaccine (TCV) dosing schedules, and the number of bivalent oral polio vaccine (bOPV) doses in routine immunisation. SAGE on Immunization was established by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1999 to provide guidance on the WHO's work, and is the principal advisory group to the WHO for vaccines and immunisation. SAGE is concerned not just with childhood vaccines and immunisation, but all vaccine-preventable diseases. In its latest meeting, the group discussed the future of immunisation, with experts assessing how to strengthen global immunisation planning for the rest of the decade, and help shape a long-term vision for the future of vaccines and vaccination from 2026 to 2050. "SAGE took up the issue of vaccine prioritization and portfolio optimization, and how WHO can support countries as they make hard decisions about their immunization programmes amid tightening health budgets," the release said. Meanwhile, the recommendation also said that countries may consider routine COVID-19 vaccination for additional groups,

Healthcare in Tamil Nadu: where less meets more



Between 2021-2022 and 2024-2025, the average daily outpatient (OP) numbers in Tamil Nadu's public tertiary health facilities increased by 49%. The bed capacity grew by 37%. As patient volumes swell and infrastructure expands, human resources become central to sustaining services. This raises a crucial question: has the State's health workforce grown proportionately to meet this rising demand? In other words, do government hospitals have enough doctors, nurses, and other health staff to sustain the system's expansion? Over the years, the State's health infrastructure has grown substantially. It now has over 11,000 government health facilities, including 2,336 primary health centres (PHC), 8,713 health sub-centres (HSC), 372 government hospitals, and 36 government medical college hospitals. The addition of new multi-and super-specialty hospitals, upgrades to existing government hospitals, and the rollout of numerous health schemes have improved public access to healthcare. However, while the State government has spent heavily on infrastructure, investment in human resources is lacking. The Medical Services Recruitment Board (MRB), which started functioning in 2012, has so far recruited 42,151 candidates for 49 categories of posts, including 18,144 assistant surgeons, 13,287 nurses, and 10,720 paramedical staff till March 31, 2025. Since 2022, two batches of assistant surgeons — 1,021 and 2,553 — were recruited through the MRB. A few additional vacancies identified during the process were also filled.

In a recent press meet, Health Minister Ma. Subramanian listed the various recruitments in progress — 1,100 doctors, 2,100 health inspectors, and 2,145 village health nurses. Health administrators insist they are working toward "zero vacancy" in the Health department, but many in the workforce argue that this overlooks the bigger picture. There are simply not enough personnel, especially doctors and staff nurses, not only due to long-standing unfilled vacancies, but also because no new positions have been created in proportion to the rising patient load and newer facilities/schemes. At the same time, certain "flawed" policy decisions proved both expensive and damaging. One such decision was a restructuring exercise introduced through a Government Order by the previous government, which resulted in the reduction of nearly 500 doctor posts. Critics argue that this led to reduced manpower, a decline in the quality of services, and increased workload for doctors in government medical colleges. Now, a similar "misstep" is being repeated through the redeployment of doctors, with 572 junior resident (JR) posts already reduced — a move that, they warn, could affect the workforce in more than one way. Contractual appointments, instead of permanent appointments, have also become very common in the health sector. Instead of evaluating on-the-ground realities, the department has lately been diverting, redeploying, or redistributing staff, and creating new posts by surrendering existing posts, justifying these moves using the National Medical Commission's (NMC) minimum standards meant for medical education, not patient care. A. Ramalingam, secretary, Service Doctors and Post Graduates Association (SDPGA), said.

This approach is evident in a series of recent Government Orders. New facilities and services have been approved without a corresponding increase in sanctioned manpower, relying instead on redeployment or surrendering of posts from existing institutions. In a Government Order dated November 3, approval was granted to create 59 new posts to strengthen cancer care across 16 tertiary care hospitals by surrendering an equal number of posts from various medical institutions. Earlier this year, the State government approved the establishment of 617 new HSCs in rural areas and 25 in urban areas, specifying that no new posts would be sanctioned; instead, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives from existing PHCs were redeployed to staff the new HSCs. Similarly, 78 medical officers were redeployed from existing upgraded PHCs to 50 new PHCs. Likewise, no posts were sanctioned for the newly opened Government Pentland Multi Super Speciality Hospital, Vellore, and peripheral hospitals in Sholinganallur, Salem, and Tirunelveli. These hospitals are made functional by redeployment or diversions from nearby medical college hospitals, doctors said. Some of the demands of the health workforce and representing associations. New hospitals should be constructed after sanctioning posts. Display statistics of sanctioned posts and vacancy details at every hospital and on the Health and Family Welfare Department website. Give in-principle approval to make new appointments to implement new schemes so routine patient care will not be affected. Doctors and nurses should be appointed based on the outpatient and in-patient strength of hospitals. Existing posts should not be diverted to other hospitals, rather new posts should be created. Paramedical workforce should be strengthened. Some of the Government Orders specifically state that new or upgraded facilities should be operated with existing workforce and no additional manpower has been granted. "There have been so many new health-oriented schemes and programmes, such as Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam and Innuvir Kappom-Nammai Kaakum 48, and upgrading of hospitals but no consequent increase in workforce. In fact, for the Kalaignar Centenary Super Speciality Hospital (KCSSH) in Guindy, many posts were diverted from existing medical college hospitals rather than creating new posts. Wouldn't this affect the quality of work in both places?" a government doctor asked.

At the core of the staffing issue lies the State's growing insistence on adhering to the minimum standards prescribed by the NMC — a move that many government doctors view as reflecting a "narrow, convenient interpretation of the regulatory framework". "NMC's minimum standards apply only to teaching requirements. For instance, institutions with 250 MBBS seats such as Madras Medical College, Stanley Medical College, and Madurai Medical College are required to have an outpatient inflow of 2,000. In reality, these colleges handle nearly three times that number. NMC standards do include a provision allowing manpower to be increased proportionately in line with the patient load," K. Senthil, president of Tamil Nadu Government Doctors Association, contended. The State, he added, has nearly 22,000 sanctioned doctor posts, including about 800 service post-graduates. However, roughly twice this number is required to meet the demand, he said. A physician at a hospital in

Chennai paints a familiar picture: for years, government hospitals have been bustling with activity, often overcrowded, with patients waiting in long queues. "One major reason for this is that the staffing patterns for doctors and nurses have remained the same for the past several years. No new posts have been created. Doctors and nurses are not recruited on the basis of the number of outpatients," he said.

The paramedical workforce is almost entirely absent in Tamil Nadu healthcare. "The role of physician assistants for documentation, nursing assistants, research assistants, insurance managers, public relations, health educators, data entry operators are done by doctors, postgraduates, and nurses. This frustrates many, resulting in poor concentration on the actual work of clinical care," he added. While Dr. Senthil describes the current scenario as among the best in the past two decades, with most doctor vacancies filled and only about 1,000 to 1,200 remaining vacant, he makes a key observation: "This addresses only vacancies. The doctor-patient ratio has remained inadequate for decades. The government should stop focusing solely on new hospitals and buildings, and instead proportionately increase manpower. This is not only for doctors but also paramedical staff, especially nurses. Older medical college hospitals are severely understaffed with nurses," he stressed.

Shortage of nursing staff The shortage is not limited to doctors and is acute among the nursing staff. In a communication dated December 12, the Directorate of Medical Education and Research requested heads of medical college hospitals at Karur, Nagapattinam, and Pudukottai to depute the prescribed number of staff nurses — 20, 10, and five respectively — to Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Government Hospital, Tiruchi, on rotation basis. This was to address shortage of staff nurses at the hospital. When the Government Peripheral Hospital, Periyar Nagar, was upgraded as a 300-bed hospital, the creation of 375 posts of various categories (109 regular and 266 contract) was approved. What irked a section of nursing staff is that 20 staff nurses were redeployed from the Tamil Nadu Government Multi Super Speciality Hospital, Omandurar Estate, and Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Egmore, and 156 nursing posts were taken on contract pay. This, when some 8,000-odd nurses recruited through the Medical Services Recruitment Board on consolidated pay are demanding regularisation of their services. Both doctors and nurses frequently stress the need to have manpower in line with the Indian Public Health Standards recommendations. For example, it recommends one staff nurse for every six beds in a general ward and a one-to-one nurse-to-bed ratio in the Intensive Care Unit. However, these recommendations are far from being implemented. N. Subin, general secretary, Tamil Nadu Nurses Empowerment Association, highlighted the shortage of nurses. "In a city hospital, a single staff nurse handles a 12-hour shift in the ICU. In some hospitals, it is common for one nurse to manage two wards, each with 30 patients, during a shift. At times, they even manage an entire floor," he said. In fact, a senior surgeon added that there have been situations when one staff nurse had to manage three floors. "A minimum of 10,000 regular nursing posts should be created immediately, and the 8,000-odd nurses recruited through MRB on consolidated pay should be regularised for these posts," Mr. Subin said. Secondary care institutions worst-hit Doctors agree that the many institutions under the Directorate of Medical and Rural Health Services are the worst-hit. One of them noted that a number of district headquarters hospitals, taluk, and non-taluk hospitals run with skeletal staff. P. Saminathan, SDPGA's president, said that the previous AIADMK government upgraded 11 district headquarters hospitals into medical colleges and the nearby taluk hospitals were re-designated as district headquarters hospitals without a corresponding increase in doctors, staff nurses, and paramedics posts. Going back a little further, during 2004-2005, the Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (CEmONC) centres, a significant milestone in improving maternal and child healthcare, came up with no extra posts for doctors. It remains the same to date. CEmONC centres in certain GHs, which were conducting around 80 deliveries per month in 2005, account for nearly 300 deliveries now but run with the same number of sanctioned posts of doctors — four obstetrician-gynaecologists, four paediatricians and two anaesthetists, said Dr. Saminathan. "A number of GHs are inadequately staffed. The Valliyur District Headquarters Hospital in Tirunelveli district has five doctors. The non-taluk GH at Pulicat has four sanctioned doctor posts and is run 24x7 by diverting doctors from nearby hospitals at Avadi and Ponneri three days a week," he said. Dr. Saminathan added that GHs are upgraded on paper with no increase in human resources, resulting in an exploited and overworked manpower. This impacts patients as they are made to believe that these are new facilities and speciality services will be available. He said that hospital administrations have no options but to employ paramedical staff, including nurses, on an outsourcing basis using funds generated through the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme. Another doctor who worked at a DMS hospital said that most facilities largely manage because of Non Service Post Graduates posted there during their bond period. "Once their tenure ends, the hospitals face severe understaffing until the next batch arrives," he said. "No new posts were created for the recently opened District Headquarters Hospital in Tambaram. Those from other hospitals were redeployed. There are some 30 doctor posts at the facility, while at least 80 are required," he added. Strain on healthcare delivery A doctor in a newly-established hospital in Chennai said the patient footfall was huge. "In fact, people from middle income groups are seeking services here. Patients expect that all speciality services will be available on a full-fledged basis. But on the ground, departments such as general medicine and general surgery are inadequately staffed. Ophthalmology and pulmonology departments have only one doctor each," he said. Patients receiving treatment at the nephrology ward at Stanely Hospital, Chennai Patients receiving treatment at the nephrology ward at Stanely Hospital, Chennai | Photo Credit: S.R. Raghunathan

There are doctors who have completed postgraduation and have entered government service through MRB and there are NSPGs on bond period, another doctor said, adding: "What is the point of posting an obstetrician-gynaecologist in a PHC, a plastic surgeon in a GH with no equipment, a nephrologist in a GH with no dialysis facility, and a neurosurgeon where there is no CT scan? In many places, qualified manpower is being wasted. This has to be rationalised," another doctor added. "When the government is willing to invest ₹200 crore in new buildings and ₹50 crore in equipment, why is it reluctant to create new doctor posts?" an assistant professor asked. "These deputations and redeployment are essentially cost-cutting measures," he added. A senior surgeon posed a question: "If pilots have stipulated flying hours because fatigue can endanger passengers, what about doctors? Most government medical institutions, including the one I work in, are severely understaffed. Patient loads are overwhelming, and we often push ourselves to work even when we are extremely unwell or exhausted. More posts must be created to ease the workload and reduce stress on doctors."

Creating suicide-safe campuses



Entering the gates of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) is a remarkable achievement. But every year, there are disturbing headlines about the young lives lost on these campuses. Between 2005 and 2024, 115 IIT students were reported to have died by suicide. Surveys indicate that over 60% of students identify academic pressure as the primary source of stress, alongside employment insecurity, family issues, and harassment. While these numbers are troubling, the IITs are making proactive efforts such as introducing and enhancing counselling services, peer support networks, and specialised wellness programmes to assist the students get treatment early, prevent them from feeling alone, and create an environment where they feel safe asking for help.

The IITs are now laying emphasis on mental health and peer support. Some have trained teachers, administrators, wardens, and student volunteers to recognise warning signals and help students. Others have introduced the Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) method, which educates people on what to do when they think someone might be in trouble. Counselling services, peer support, suicide awareness, accessible support are all various measures that various institutions are taking to ensure that help is available. Some IITs have also restructured academic demands to reduce stress.

IMA flags threats to nation's affordable, accessible health system



India's healthcare system, which is unique because of its high accessibility and affordability, driven largely by neighbourhood clinics and small to medium hospitals, is under serious threat because of chronic under-investment in public health by the government, insurance-driven price controls and unregulated foreign investment in health sector, according to the Indian Medical Association (IMA). In the document, "IMA's blueprint for a healthier India", which was recently released as a policy document, IMA points out that the minimum government allocation for health sector alone should be 2.5% of the GDP and that separate provision should be made for the provision of drinking water, sanitation and such social determinants of health. The document is a summation of the concerns IMA has regarding the nation's health sector, as well as policies that the organisation thinks that the nation should embrace for an equitable and accessible healthcare system, says V.R. Asokan, former national president of IMA. The document is being circulated by IMA amongst the Members of Parliament. India's overall health spending (public and private) is currently estimated to be 3.8% of its GDP, much lower than the average health spending by low-and-middle income nations, which is 5.2%.

Sustained underfunding of public sector facilities and the rapid growth of the private sector has contributed to rising out of pocket (OOP) costs on health care for households. Of this, a significant share, almost two-thirds of OOP expenses, are for purchasing Outpatient care, especially medicines. Because households bear the burden of the high OOP health expenses in India, more than 55 million people are impoverished each year on account of expenses for ill health, says IMA. In 2024, the government (Union and States) expenditure on health was ₹4.95 lakh crore, while the private health expenditure was ₹9.3 lakh crore, of which

IIT-Bombay, for example, allows first-year students to drop one topic each semester. Other IITs have established programmes and orientation sessions to help students deal with their emotions. But there are not many resources for counselling and not enough people to help. Finding out depends on students speaking up. The pressure to do well in school has not gone away. People still do not receive help because of stigma. Researchers have found that being alone raises the chance of suicide. Students who face stressful family relationships, high expectations, or exposure to peers who are also struggling are more vulnerable. Addressing this issue needs a combination of strategies such as such counselling, peer networks, early discovery, and family engagement. Digital tools, like anonymous check-ins, give students a safe way to reach out when they are struggling but not ready to talk openly. Workshops, mentoring, and initiatives to raise awareness need to happen periodically.

To make campuses safer, we need to modify policies and the way people think. Educational institutes that make mental health a part of everyday life, make support easy to acquire, and teach people how to help when someone is in trouble offer intervention and a chance to prevent problems from getting worse. Families play a part too, as parents need to know about mental health and what their children are going through. There are also government programmes like Manodarpan, but they can only succeed if institutions ensure their policies are implemented properly. While counselling and wellness programmes, family and community engagement, peer and faculty training for early intervention interventions and continuous monitoring and research have begun, the challenge is to make sure these initiatives are consistent. Monitoring and collecting data will show if progress is still being made. Student suicide exposes cultural and systemic flaws, which can be reversed only if families, educational institutions, and policymakers work collaboratively. Mental health requires time, effort, and consistent attention.

OOP expenditure was ₹8 lakh crore, while health insurance provided for Rs. 1.32 lakh crore. In order to achieve the goals of Viksit Bharat 2047, allocation to the health sector should go up to at least 5% of the GDP by 2030, the document says.

Unregulated inflows IMA points out that FDI has brought capital and technology into Indian healthcare, but unregulated inflows could undermine medical autonomy and alter the character of the Indian health system. It says that unregulated FDI and cross holdings across hospitals, diagnostics, insurance, pharma sector and medical equipment could lead to a situation where business interests could begin to influence clinical decisions, commercial exploitation of patients happen, pushing up healthcare costs. Apart from tighter government controls over FDI and strengthening domestic capital mobilisation, IMA urges the Union government to set up a National Healthcare Fund, akin to other government funds for specific purposes, so that it could support healthcare entrepreneurs and enable hospital expansion. This would ensure that Indians retain strategic ownership and governance of the healthcare ecosystem and that clinical decision making will always remain with doctors, independent of commercial influence. IMA also seeks to distinguish between Universal Health Care, which is all about equitable access to quality health care for all and Universal Health Coverage, which ensures that everyone has financial protection against healthcare costs. It holds that the Government should be primarily responsible for guaranteeing universal health care. IMA advocates a tax-based system of health financing. The public sector should be the primary provider, supplemented by strategic purchase from private hospitals. Intermediaries such as insurance companies and TPAs should not control healthcare delivery, it says. IMA warns that insurance-led models risk pushing India toward the US healthcare model of high cost, inequity, and exclusion. It assesses AB-PMJAY to be a scheme which was well-intentioned, but which has serious flaws. Inadequate funding and unscientific package rates have made the scheme totally unviable for small and medium private hospitals, which are being forced to deliver services at sub-par costs. IMA suggests that government hospitals should be funded directly by the Government and PMJAY should be exclusively used for strategic purchase from private sector with pricing of services based on a scientific system. It points out that the current allocation for PMJAY — ₹9,406 crore — is grossly inadequate.

Managing pain, not just eliminating it, is also important: US-based interventional pain management specialist

Pain medicine has moved ahead from its early origins in trying to manage pain by prescribing pills. Instead, it has evolved into a fine art and science of understanding the human experience in the context of pain, and multi-pronged efforts are deployed to remove pain, but also, equally so to manage it, says Vasanth Kattalai Kailasam, a Pain Medicine and Interventional Pain Management specialist at Mercy Health, Illinois, U.S., and faculty member at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

Speaking to The Hindu, during a recent trip to India, Dr. Kailasam explained that pain remains one of medicine's most complex phenomena because it hinges on multiple factors and perceptions, besides the pain score that doctors administer. The International Association for Study of Pain defines pain as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with an underlying tissue damage or a potential damage that's been going on, he explains. Pain can be broadly split into two categories — "Acute pain, such as that from surgery or injury, can often be measured and managed with standard tools," and "chronic pain—lasting beyond three months—has biological, psychological, and social components." He further adds: Even a good day or a bad day can change how a patient feels pain.

In chronic cases, specialists recommend a "biopsychosocial assessment," to understand the full impact and intensity. This approach looks beyond symptoms to consider emotional health, life circumstances, and functional ability. Interestingly, he narrates the path taken by John Joseph Bonica an anesthesiologist, known as the founding father of the discipline of pain medicine. He pioneered the world's first multidisciplinary pain clinic at the University of Washington in the 1950s. His basic multi-disciplinary model, bringing together specialists in neurology, psychology, physi-

cal therapy, and rehabilitation to work with patients, was born out of his experience of working with war veterans. This remains the backbone of comprehensive pain care today, Dr. Kailasam explains.

The world of pain management, and particularly, interventional pain management, he says, involves using image-guided procedures such as epidural injections, nerve blocks, and radiofrequency ablations. The more recent advances that have revolutionised pain management include neuromodulation therapies such as spinal cord and peripheral nerve stimulation, which basically work with the electrical currents that pass through the nerves to interrupt pain signals and restore function. Data from these implantable devices now allow physicians to remotely monitor patients' activity and outcomes over time. On the burgeoning fentanyl, or opioid analgesics, crisis in the United States, Dr. Kailasam underscores that accessibility and overprescription in the 1990s led to widespread addiction and illegal fentanyl use. "We tried to manage one problem and created another." He stresses that opioids play a limited role outside of acute or cancer pain. "For chronic, non-cancer pain, we rarely recommend opioids—they don't improve long-term functioning and can be counterproductive," he says. Instead, again he summons multimodal care strategies—combining non-opioid drugs, physiotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and lifestyle interventions—forms the current evidence-based standard. He also warns against the unregulated use of over-the-counter painkillers such as ibuprofen: "Every time you use a Non Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drug (NSAID), you're actually trading your kidney for freedom from pain." He highlights the cumulative risks of kidney damage and hypertension that can be caused with the excessive use of NSAID.

'Jana Nayagan' censor row: Can't reveal anything, says CBFC Regional Officer



Even as actor-turned-politician Vijay's fans are more than anxious to know whether his much-awaited last movie Jana Nayagan would get released before the upcoming Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry or not, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has refused to reveal any information. When contacted to know the authenticity of information floating around in film circles that the production house KVN Productions LLP had agreed for a reference to the review committee, CBFC Chennai Regional Officer D. Balamurali said, the law prohibits sharing of any information related to the certification process.

"I don't have any information. Even if I do have, I cannot reveal it at this stage. All our examination process is confidential. We cannot reveal anything until a certificate is issued. The law prohibits sharing of any such information. Public will get to know only when the film is certified. At that time, we will communicate through our portal," he said.

Censor certificate row: a background Jana Nayagan, which was originally slated to be released on January 9, 2026, had been watched by the CBFC's five-member examination committee on December 19, 2025 and the production house claimed to have received a communication on December 22, 2025 stating that the board had come to the conclusion that the film was suitable for U/A 16+ certificate if certain excisions were carried out.

The production house had accepted the recommendation instead of appealing to the nine-member revising committee for a 'U' certificate and carried out all the suggested excisions. The edited movie was resubmitted to the board on December 24, 2025. However, in the meantime, one of the members of the monitoring committee sent a complaint to the CBFC Chairman Prasoon Joshi in Mumbai. The complaint read: "Dear Sir, I came to know that Tamil film Jana Nayagan which is going to be released across India has been approved by the Examination Committee at Chennai without following due procedure. The film

has shown visuals and dialogues in which foreign powers creating religious conflict at large scale in India which may disturb religious harmony of this great country."

It went on to state: "There are many Army related references in the film but no defence expert has been included in the Examining Committee to address these issues. There are procedural lapses during examination of the film which is gross violation of the Cinematograph Act and Rules. I am an APM (Advisory Panel Member) member and I have watched the film on December 19, 2025 but my objections were not considered during examination of the film. So, we humbly request you to intervene in the procedure and direct the competent authority to re-examine the film."

After the receipt of this complaint, the CBFC on December 29, 2025 instructed its Regional Office in Chennai to put the certification process of 'Jana Nayagan' on hold and on January 5, 2026 the production house was informed that the chairman had decided to refer the movie to the revising committee. The chairman's decision was uploaded on the e-cinepramaan portal on January 6.

The legal battle Hours before the decision was uploaded on the portal, KVN Productions rushed to the Madras High Court with a writ petition seeking a direction to CBFC to issue U/A 16+ certificate within 24 hours and obtained a lunch motion for an urgent hearing of its case on the same day afternoon.

Justice P.T. Asha heard the matter and directed CBFC to produce all relevant records related to the certification of Jana Nayagan on January 7. After perusing the records and hearing the arguments advanced by Additional Solicitor General A.R.L. Sundaresan for the CBFC and senior counsel Satish Parasaran, assisted by advocate Vijayan Subramanian, for the producer, the judge reserved her orders on January 7. She allowed the writ petition on January 9 and directed the CBFC to issue the U/A 16+ certificate forthwith. Within a few hours on the same day, the board moved an urgent writ appeal before the first Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and Justice G. Arul Murugan of the Madras High Court and obtained an interim stay of the single judge's order. Though the production house went on appeal, the Supreme Court refused to interfere with the interim order. Thereafter, the writ appeal was taken up for final hearing and argued at length before the first Division Bench of the Madras High Court on January 20 when the judges reserved their orders. The Bench delivered its judgment on January 27 setting aside the single judge's order on the ground that she had not granted an opportunity to the CBFC to file its counter affidavit. The Division Bench remanded the matter back to the single judge for a fresh hearing and granted liberty to the production house to amend its prayer by challenging the decision taken by the CBFC chairman on January 6. However, so far, the production house had neither filed a petition in the High Court to amend its prayer nor approached the Supreme Court challenging the Division Bench's order. This had led to speculation in the film industry of the production house having agreed upon the reference to the revising committee. While the production house had not gone public with any announcement regarding its decision, the CBFC too refused to comment on the issue citing the confidentiality clause.

Injustice to Telangana in budgetary allocations despite its potential, says Finance Minister Bhatti

The Telangana Government has expressed its thorough dissatisfaction over the Central Government ignoring Telangana's repeated requests seeking its assistance for the State's growth in Union Budget 2026-27 allocations. The total outlay of the Central Government's budget presented in the Parliament on Sunday (February 1, 2026) is to the tune of ₹45.48 lakh crore, but Telangana was meted out injustice as its name did not figure in allocations made for key sectors. "Given the massive outlay, we have expected announcements in favour of Telangana. But the State's interests were cold shouldered despite repeated representations submitted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Ministers," Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said.

The State expected allocations for Musi Rejuvenation project, development proposed in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) area and Metro rail, but nothing had come about. The Centre had announced Biopharma Shakti scheme with an outlay of ₹10,000 crore and Telangana's name was not considered in spite of its ecosystem in the form of Genome Valley and its contributions in vaccine manufacturing. The same was the case with electronic component manufacturing wherein the State did not receive any support from the Centre. The State did not find mention in the projects proposed like chemical parks, affordable spots goods manufacturing and orange economy as well as promotion of regional medical value hubs. Besides being ignored in inland waterways project, the project for exploration of rare earth minerals did not make a mention of the State in spite of traces of rare earths identified in the Singareni coal belt. "It is a sort of embarrassment to note that Telangana's name did not figure in the initiatives proposed for semi-conductor development," he said.

The development came at a time when the State competed at the global level to become a \$3 trillion economy and contribute a significant share in the Viksit Bharat vision



of the Centre. The Government had also not considered the State's request to allow fiscal deficit at 4% so as to enable the State to carry out its developmental agenda. "The Central Government has however kept the limit of fiscal deficit at 4.3% for itself," he said. Mr. Bhatti Vikramarka asked the MPs from Telangana, cutting across political lines, to meet Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and represent to them the need to undo the injustice meted out to the State. "We are requesting our MPs to meet the Prime Minister and Finance Minister irrespective of political affiliations and seek our due," he said.

What is waste-to-energy technology?

A: Waste-to-energy (WtE) is a technology to convert non-recyclable waste materials into usable fuel, typically heat or electricity. A common method is incineration in which trash is burned at a high temperature to boil the water off, creating steam that turns a turbine to generate power. Other methods include gasification, which uses a large quantity of heat with little oxygen to turn waste into gas, and anaerobic digestion, where bacteria break down organic waste to produce biogas. The impact of WtE on the environment involves both benefits and drawbacks and is a subject of ongoing debate.

Waste reduction facilities can reduce the volume of waste by around 90%, significantly extending the life of existing landfills and reducing the need for new ones. By diverting organic waste from landfills, WtE can also prevent the release of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere.

On the flip side, burning waste releases carbon dioxide and — especially in poorly controlled environments — pollutants like dioxins, furans, and heavy metals. Some contemporary facilities use advanced scrubbing and filtration systems to trap these toxins. Critics have also argued



that WtE may discourage more sustainable practices like recycling and composting by creating a constant demand for trash. India currently has at least 21 WtE plants in operation and 133 biogas facilities.

The plants come under the purview of the Solid Waste Management Rules 2026, which mandate waste segregation and encourage refuse-derived fuel (RDF) in order to reduce the burden on landfills.

Why we need to take measles seriously again



Measles, that ghost from a distant past, is making an unwelcome return, in many countries around the world, including in developed nations. And it's impossible to ignore. We could soon be staring at a 'Measles Map' indicating regions where the protection of herd immunity has now fallen apart.

How we got here For many years, the MMR vaccine (measles, mumps, rubella) has kept a sentinel watch on these dangerous viruses, offering protection not just with a 95% effectiveness for the vaccinated but also through "herd immunity" for those unable to be vaccinated. That wall of immunity has now begun to slowly break down. In the post-COVID years, many regions across countries saw reduced access to routine childhood vaccinations such as MMR, even critically low levels, due to increased strain on over-extended public health facilities overwhelmed by the COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, due to lockdowns, a large number of parents couldn't access hospitals for timely vaccinations for their children. India also reported over 32,000 suspected and confirmed measles cases in late 2022, with Maharashtra, Kerala, Jharkhand, and Gujarat being the hardest hit. Mumbai became the epicentre with its numerous clusters in high-density areas. Overall, the pandemic and its after-effects caused approximately 3 million children in the country to miss their routine measles vaccine doses.

Spartanburg's shadow To grasp the sobering truth of what the Measles Map of 2026 entails, one needs look no further than Spartanburg County in South Carolina, United States. What began with a small number of sporadic cases quickly mushroomed into a full-blown outbreak, with more than 550 reported cases as of January 2026. Schools were closed, hospitals prepared for overflowing paediatric wards, and people were caught unawares of the alarming rate of virus transmission. The situation in Spartanburg County is not unique: measles has reared its head in other countries too, including 14,000 reported cases in Indonesia, as well as in Yemen and Pakistan. A worrying aspect is the fact that in 2025, Canada lost its measles elimination status and the USA and Mexico face the same reality in 2026, undoing decades of public health progress.

Measles is far more than just a rash and a fever. Its true danger lies in what scientists are calling "immunological amnesia", which often gets lost in public discourse. When the measles virus infects a child, it doesn't just cause acute illness; it systematically targets and destroys the very cells that form the backbone of the immune system's memory. These are the cells that remember how to fight off other diseases—influenza, pneumonia, even chickenpox. Measles affects the immune system in such a

way that sometimes, even years after recovery, a child is left with a compromised immune system, essentially reverting to an infant-like state of vulnerability. This means children who survive measles in 2026 will likely face a significantly higher risk of succumbing to other common infections for the next two or three years, creating a "secondary health crisis" that public health systems may be ill-equipped to handle.

Recognising measles Measles doesn't start with a visible rash; rather, it begins as a cold, which is often mistaken for the common flu. This cold could also be accompanied by cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis (red, watery, and light-sensitive eyes). After two or three days of these symptoms starting, tiny white spots may appear inside the mouth along with a fever. About 3–5 days from the onset of the first symptoms, a rash will appear, usually starting at the hairline or behind the ears, and it then spreads downward to the neck, trunk, and finally the hands and feet. For most people, two doses of the MMR vaccine provide permanent, lifelong immunity. You do not need booster shots as an adult, if you have completed the two-dose series.

With major outbreaks expected in 2026 across Europe, Southeast Asia, and parts of the U.S., here are some things to take care of before planning international journeys: Ensure you have documentation of two doses of the MMR vaccine. If you are unsure, you can either get a "catch-up" dose (it is safe even if you've had one before) or take a blood test to check for antibodies. If traveling with an infant (six–11 months old), they should receive an early dose of the vaccine before leaving. Get vaccinated at least two weeks before departure to allow the body to build immunity. Measles has a long incubation period. Monitor your health for 21 days after returning from an affected country. If you develop a fever and rash while travelling, wear a mask immediately and alert airline staff. Measles is airborne and can stay in the air for up to two hours after an infected person has left a room or plane. People who are pregnant or have severely weakened immune systems should consult a doctor before travel, as they cannot receive the live MMR vaccine and are at high risk for complications if exposed.

More shots, less protection?

There is an interesting shift in policy regarding vaccinations. An advisory board recently generated controversy in recommending an adjustment to the usage of the four-in-one MMRV vaccine (measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella/chickenpox). There have been concerns about a small increase in the risk of febrile seizures in a few children. Recommendations are to have the MMR and Varicella vaccines separately. On the surface, this might seem like a cautious, patient-centric approach. But in the real world of childhood immunisations where parental compliance is paramount, it's a dangerous gamble. More shots could mean lower compliance as parents, already juggling busy schedules, are significantly less likely to return for two or three separate appointments in place of one convenient combination shot. The Measles Map of 2026 is an important reminder of broader community responsibility. The struggle against this invisible enemy is not just to protect ourselves; it is also to preserve the vulnerable immunological memory of our children, the wellness of our communities, and to reclaim our health.

What does the Budget offer urban India?

As the Union Budget 2026 was placed before Parliament, the Finance Minister once again invoked the familiar triad of capital investment, growth momentum and the long-held vision of "Viksit Bharat". Cities were spoken of as engines of development, enablers of productivity and sites of future opportunity. Yet when one moves from rhetoric to arithmetic, urban India emerges not as a priority but as a sector quietly absorbing fiscal contraction. The headline fact is stark: the total central outlay for urban development has fallen from ₹96,777 crore in the previous year to ₹85,522 crore in 2026-27. This is a reduction of ₹11,255 crore, amounting to a shrinkage of about 11.6%. When inflation is factored in, the real cut is even sharper. In effect, urban India is being asked to do more with less, at precisely the moment when cities face mounting pressures of migration, climate stress, infrastructure fatigue and job creation.

This contraction also signals a deeper problem: while the government continues to foreground capital expenditure at the macro level, urban development is no longer seen as a growth-critical investment space, but rather as a residual category to be adjusted once larger fiscal priorities are met.

The centrality of the metro rail Within this shrinking envelope, the structure of spending remains deeply skewed. Metro rail projects continue to dominate urban allocations, even as overall urban spending contracts. The allocation for metro and mass rapid transit projects has declined from ₹31,239.28 crore to ₹28,740 crore, a reduction of ₹2,499.28 crore. In percentage terms, this is a cut of roughly 8%. While this appears as moderate, the larger picture tells a different story. Out of the total urban outlay of ₹85,522 crore, metro rail alone accounts for ₹28,740 crore, which translates to approximately 33.6% of all central urban spending. In other words, one-third of India's urban budget continues to be absorbed by a single transport mode.

This is not a neutral policy choice. Metro systems are capital-intensive, spatially limited and socially selective. They primarily serve dense corridors in large cities and cater disproportionately to formal, middle-class commuters. They are important, but they are neither the most inclusive nor the most scalable solution for India's urban mobility crisis. What is missing is proportional investment in bus-based public transport, non-motorised transport, suburban rail, and last-mile connectivity — modes that actually carry the urban majority. By continuing to privilege metros even within a shrinking budget, the state reinforces an urban imagination that prioritises visibility over universality. The persistence in metro-centric planning reveals a deeper policy blind spot. Public transport is being equated with rail projects, while buses, walking and cycling — the modes that actually move most urban Indians — remain peripheral. Metros cannot be the sole answer in a country where a majority of urban trips are short, income-constrained and highly sensitive to fare increases. A fraction of metro spending redirected towards city bus systems or non-motorised infrastructure would yield far higher social returns. Yet the Budget does not reflect such a rebalancing. Urban mobility, in this fiscal design, is treated as an engineering problem rather than a social one.

The retreat of flagship urban schemes If the metro rail represents continuity, the treatment of flagship urban welfare and service schemes represents retreat. Every major centrally sponsored urban programme has seen a reduction in allocation. The allocation for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) (PMAY-U) has declined from ₹19,794 crore

to ₹18,625 crore, a reduction of ₹1,169 crore — nearly a 5.9% cut. This comes at a time when urban housing shortage remains acute, affordability is worsening, and informal settlements continue to expand at the peripheries of cities. A cut in housing support is not fiscally neutral — it directly translates into prolonged informality, overcrowding and exclusion from basic services.

The sharpest cut has been reserved for sanitation. The allocation for the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) (SBM-U) has been halved from ₹5,000 crore to ₹2,500 crore, a 50% reduction. This is not a marginal adjustment; it is a fundamental rollback. Urban sanitation is not a one-time achievement but a continuous service requiring sustained investment — particularly for waste processing, sewage treatment, faecal sludge management and worker safety. Cutting sanitation funding by half signals that urban cleanliness and public health are no longer seen as urgent policy domains. Additionally, the allocation for the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) scheme has also fallen from ₹10,000 crore to ₹8,000 crore, a 20% cut. This reduction is especially troubling in an era of acute urban water stress. Cities across India are grappling with groundwater depletion, inequitable access, ageing pipelines and climate-induced variability. AMRUT was meant to be the backbone of universal water and sewerage access. A fifth of its budget disappearing weakens the very foundations of urban sustainability.

Shrinking commitments Taken together, the picture is unambiguous. Centrally sponsored urban schemes have received major cuts, reinforcing the 11.6% nominal contraction in central support for cities. This contraction is not offset by any new institutional architecture, fiscal devolution or empowered municipal financing frameworks. Urban local bodies remain fiscally weak, dependent on tied transfers, and constrained in their ability to plan long-term infrastructure or service delivery. What makes this particularly consequential is the timing. Urban India is currently absorbing large-scale migration and demographic churn; rising urban unemployment and informalisation of the workspace; climate shocks such as heat waves, floods, and water scarcity; and infrastructure backlogs in transport, housing and sanitation. Against this backdrop, reducing real urban spending is not fiscal prudence; it is strategic short-sightedness.

The empty promise of development The government's vision of Viksit Bharat rests on growth, productivity and global competitiveness. But no country has achieved high-income status without strong, well-funded, inclusive cities. Urban India generates the bulk of GDP, absorbs labour, and anchors innovation ecosystems. Weakening its fiscal base undermines the very ambition the Budget claims to advance. What this Budget ultimately reflects is a contradiction: cities are celebrated rhetorically but constrained fiscally. The emphasis remains on select capital-heavy projects rather than everyday systems that determine whether cities are liveable, equitable and resilient. The Union Budget 2026 does not abandon urban India — but it unmistakably pulls back. With an 11.6% cut in total urban allocations, steep reductions in sanitation, water and housing, and one-third of remaining funds locked in metro projects, the Budget signals caution where urgency is required. Urban India is expected to carry the weight of future growth, climate adaptation and social transformation. Yet the fiscal imagination on display treats cities as cost centres rather than engines of national renewal. If India is serious about its development trajectory, urban budgets must expand, diversify and decentralise — not shrink.

World looking at us as \$30 trillion economy, trusted partner: Piyush Goyal



The deal had nothing to do with the visit. It was a happy coincidence we could conclude it. In principle, both sides had decided not to work with a deadline or pressure on us... it had to be a win-win deal for both. There were a few issues pending towards the last few weeks. I went to Brussels on January 6-8 or thereabouts. We had a hiatus during the (Lok Sabha) election; they also had a change. This had changed by the time Maros Sefcovic (the current European Union Trade Commissioner) came in December 2024. Since then, we've been relentlessly on it. And while appointing Sefcovic, they actually told us we had put our best man on the job who can get you over the finishing line. In this deal, how much was geopolitics a factor since the EU probably felt being pushed to a corner because of what had happened with the US. And India too, given how things unfolded for it.

We had launched the talks in 2021, started discussions in 2022... They brought in Sefcovic in December 2024 and told us he was their best man on the job to conclude fast. That time there was no geopolitical impact. So this has nothing to do with geopolitics... They are all seeing a \$30 trillion economy. Look at the delta of opportunity... from \$4 trillion to \$30 trillion in 23 years. Who would like to miss out on it? Also, we are a trusted geography, a trusted partner... They (also) desperately want us to take their technologies, convert them into scale of manufacturing, and they say, we are looking at India as a base for Africa, for Asia, maybe even Latin America, they are very clear about it.

One issue that was of concern to New Delhi was the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. How has it been tackled?

In the spirit of being practical, pragmatic, and ensuring we are protected from any discrimination, we have a forward-MFN (Most Favoured Nation) i.e., any concessions they give to anybody, we get that. There's already a simplification process which they presented to me when I was in Brussels before the January 6-8 trip. Valdis Dombrovskis, the former (EU) trade commissioner, is now in charge of simplifying all these regulations. He promised when we met in Paris to make a presentation during my visit to Brussels, which he did four months ago. There's a huge demand from their industry also to deregulate and simplify. In fact, you might have heard about the (Mario) Draghi report... We get the benefit of all that. They've agreed that any carbon taxes paid here will be recognised. They've agreed to have verifiers in India, so people don't have to get foreigners all the way spending money to verify their carbon footprint. They've also agreed on a rapid response mechanism, where if anybody has any difficulty, then our team will help resolve those difficulties... Plus, the European Union is very appreciative of the good work India has done. Amongst the G20, we are in the top three in terms of fulfilling our contributions. For

example, in renewable energy, we have fulfilled it eight years ahead of schedule. And now the PM has set a target of 500 GW... far beyond anybody's imagination. So they have announced their commitment to support our decarbonisation efforts in a big way through a joint fund. 500 million euros they've already announced. That is just the beginning.

What about some of the other contentious issues such as GI (Geographical Indication) products or Intellectual Property Rights, etc, for the Europeans?

There is no contention on IPR. I have not had one meeting on IPR. At the official level, they settled it. I have not had one conversation on IPR, because we've done it with Switzerland and the UK. They are the ones who are more difficult. The EU had nothing in IPR that they had a problem with. GI is pending. GI is not covered in the present IPR chapter, there'd be a separate agreement... We'll do it afterwards. GI, etc, these are operational issues, and not (really) contentious. The reason why we're asking you is, in 2013, when the (India-EU FTA) talks got stalled, GI and IPR were perhaps contentious issues alongside car and car parts...

EU does not have any issue with IPR. We settled IPR issues with Switzerland and the UK. They are the difficult ones. In fact, the previous government didn't want to open up spirits. Now, what's the harm to India from spirits coming from the EU? Guess how many farmers make grapes for wines? 6,000, that's all. What is the production of wine in India, in terms of value? About Rs 1,000 crore. More than that, I've got duty free access in Europe for table grapes. I've got 85,000 tonnes of table grapes, duty free access in the FTA, which is worth more than Rs 1,000 crore. And by the way, our wines are liked internationally. So there is a great export potential, which has opened up for us — duty free. We are bigger exporters than importers. And even if they come, consumers will have choice, our quality will improve. And here too, we've kept a benchmark, nothing below \$3 will get a concession.

And this is the first deal where the EU has agreed to a quota... Yes... it is the first deal they've done without dairy... Australia did without dairy, New Zealand did without dairy, Switzerland also... All sensitive items are out. No cereals, no GM products, no dairy, no rice, wheat, no soya, no corn.

How did you manage to keep government procurement out? Because (with) the UK, you did allow it.

See, with the UK, there is significant government procurement. I told the EU that, look, you want government procurement, you get me a commitment from all the 27 (member) states that they'll allow government procurement. They said, Oh! That's the competence of the European states. I said, why do I give you my government procurement. (Reciprocity), that's a principle of this government. See, the export of motor vehicles is \$9 billion, import is just \$921 million. In other words, we export 10 times as compared to (what we) import. Should this country be scared of auto sector imports?

China is still a large percentage of European imports, say 10-12%, India is only about 2%. You see a narrowing of this gap? We'll have to see what they do, but (it's) quite possible. We have to see how quickly our industry ramps up. Our industry has to create capacities, ramp up production, and ramp up quality. The Prime Minister has been driving home

FPIs withdraw Rs 36,000 crore in January amid global worries

New Delhi: Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) remained in a selling mode in January, withdrawing nearly Rs 36,000 crore (about USD 3.97 billion) as global uncertainties persisted. Meanwhile, a higher securities transaction tax (STT) proposed in the Union Budget may weigh on overseas investor participation in the near future.

The recent flight of foreign capital followed the worst outflow of Rs 1.66 lakh crore (USD 18.9 billion) recorded in 2025, triggered by volatile currency movements, global trade tensions and concerns over potential US tariffs and stretched market valuations. Going ahead, the sharp increase in STT on futures and options is likely to act as a marginal negative for FPI flows in the near term, particularly for high-frequency and derivative-focused global funds, said Aakash Shah, Technical Research Analyst at Choice Equity Broking.

"While the STT hike may help boost tax collections, it risks dampening trading volumes and could slow tactical FPI participation. To meaningfully revive sustained FPI inflows, investors will be looking more closely at macro stability, the rupee movement, and consistency in tax policy rather than just growth optics," he added.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech for 2026-27, announced a proposal to raise the STT on futures to 0.05 per cent from the present 0.02 per cent and STT on options premium and exercise of options to 0.15 per cent from the present rate of 0.1 per cent and 0.125 per cent, respectively. According to data from NSDL, FPIs pulled out Rs 35,962 crore from Indian equities in January. This continued selling pressure by FPIs reflects a combination of global and domestic drivers impacting foreign investor sentiment.

The key reasons for the FPI sell-off include US tariff



threats on Europe amid the Greenland dispute, which sparked global risk-off sentiment, alongside a stronger US dollar, elevated bond yields, rupee weakness to Rs 90-92 levels, and stretched valuations, Vaqarjaved Khan, Senior Fundamental Analyst, Angel One Ltd, said. Himanshu Srivastava, Principal, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said, "Globally, persistent risk aversion, still elevated interest rates in developed markets, and a strengthening US dollar have encouraged capital to remain on the sidelines or rotate into other markets perceived to offer better risk-adjusted returns." At the same time, geopolitical uncertainties and ongoing tariff and trade tensions have weighed on emerging market risk appetite, further dampening overseas interest in Indian equities. On the domestic front, mixed corporate earnings momentum and looming macro events such as the upcoming federal budget have prompted caution among foreign funds. The weakening rupee has also magnified the impact of outflows in dollar terms, reinforcing short-term risk aversion, he added.

impact on pricing." According to a report from Marketsanddata, a market intelligence and business consulting company, the India microwave oven market is projected to witness a CAGR of 8.52 per cent during FY2026-FY2033. LG Electronics India, one of the leaders in the segment, appreciated the move and said the government has considered its request to waive BCD on key imported components used exclusively for microwave ovens. "This is a welcome move that will strongly benefit LG Electronics India and the Indian microwave manufacturing industry by boosting local manufacturing and further building on the government's Make in India scheme," said LG Electronics India Factory Head, Greater Noida, Gaganjeet Singh. He said the initiative will further strengthen the domestic consumer electronics sector and also improve viability for the microwave export business. According to some reports, India primarily sources components for its microwave ovens from China, with additional supplies from countries like South Korea, Malaysia and Japan. Terming the budget proposal a "timely move", Panasonic India said it will significantly boost domestic value addition,

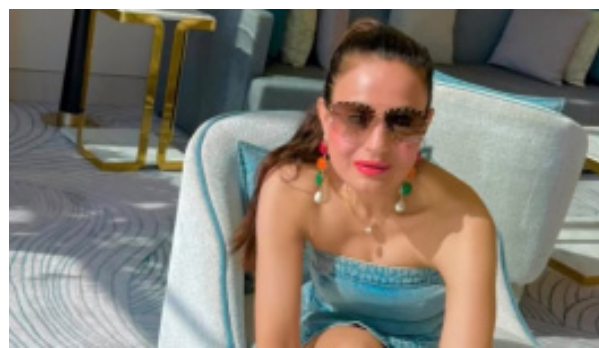
Duty exemption to boost microwave manufacturing in India

New Delhi: Prices of microwave ovens will have a minor impact after the proposed exemption of customs duty in the FY27 budget, but the move will encourage domestic manufacturing of the product, industry players said.

Currently, the microwave oven market in India is estimated to be around 2.2 million units and is projected to grow with a CAGR of over 8 per cent for the next five years, led by factors such as growing urbanisation and expansion of nuclear families. A handful of companies, such as LG Electronics and Haier, manufacture or assemble some models, while others import components from China, Taiwan, Thailand and other markets. The exemption of basic customs duty on these imports will boost component sourcing, strengthen the domestic manufacturing ecosystem and make India-made microwave ovens globally competitive. Furthermore, localisation will happen," Haier India President N S Satish told PTI. "This will help manufacturers in component sourcing," he said.

When asked whether it will have any downward impact on prices, Satish said, "Not much. It will have a minus-

Expert reflects on Ameesha Patel's choice to prioritise career over marriage: 'I had one serious relationship, and it was before I joined films'



Actor Ameesha Patel recently reflected on her journey of love, marriage, and long-term companionship and why she chose to remain single despite receiving countless proposals. Marriage, she explained, was never her ultimate goal. "I never used to chase boys in school; they used to do that. I have got a lot of proposals since then, and they continue to come till now. But a lot of the people I met wanted me to stay at home and not work after marriage, and that didn't sit right with me. I wanted to become Ameesha Patel first, because I had already spent so much of my life being someone's daughter, and I didn't want to spend my adulthood as just someone's wife," she said during her appearance on Ranveer Allahbadia's podcast.

Patel also shared that her career and personal life often pulled her in opposite directions. "People who love you will let your career prosper. I have lost a lot for my career, and I have also lost a lot for love. I have given up both things for the other, and I think that I have learnt from both. For example, I had one serious relationship, and it was before I joined films. He belonged to a very big industrial family from South Bombay, like mine. Had the same background and education, and the family setup was the same. It ticked all the boxes, but when I decided to go into film, my partner did not want a person in the public eye, and that is how I chose

my career over love." Despite those choices, she hasn't closed the door on companionship. In her own words: "I am all up for marriage, as long as I find someone worthy. They say that 'Where there is a will, there is a way,' so the person who finds me through everything and maake par chauka maarlege (takes advantage of the situation) will be my person. I still get all kinds of proposals from a lot of well-to-do families. People half my age want to take me out on a date, and I am open to it because a man has to be mentally mature. I have met a lot of people older than me who have the IQ of a fly."

How common is it for individuals to prioritise self-identity or career before marriage, and what impact does this have on long-term happiness?

Psychologist Rasshi Gurnani tells indianexpress.com, "Many individuals, especially women, increasingly choose to establish a strong sense of self and independence before marriage. From a psychological perspective, this fosters autonomy, self-efficacy, and higher self-esteem, which are vital for long-term well-being."

Prioritising identity or career helps create a secure base, she adds, making relationships healthier because they stem from choice rather than dependency. Research shows that when people feel fulfilled in themselves, they tend to form more stable and satisfying partnerships later in life.

Trade-offs between relationships and professional aspirations Trade-offs between career and relationships often create cognitive dissonance—conflicting values pulling in different directions. Gurnani states, "Psychology suggests that balance is less about dividing time equally and more about aligning decisions with core values. When individuals sacrifice one domain entirely for the other, it can lead to regret or burnout. A mindful approach involves recognising personal needs, setting boundaries, and adopting flexibility, allowing both love and ambition to coexist without one erasing the other."

Hard vs. soft belly: Why the texture of your stomach fat is a major health 'red flag'

Gastroenterologist Dr Shubham Vatsya recently shed light on the different types of protruding belly fat. "If you have a protruding belly and it feels soft, then the concern is usually less, but if you have a protruding belly and it feels hard, then it's a red flag," he noted on Instagram. According to him, a hard belly is a sign of visceral fat, which leads to metabolic issues. "Soft belly is mostly subcutaneous fat, which gets stored under the skin, and is easily pinchable, and has a relatively less metabolic impact. Hard belly, or visceral fat, accumulates in the liver, pancreas, and intestines. This releases inflammatory chemicals and stress hormones, which cause insulin resistance, leading to high BP and heart disease risk. So, don't just go by weight or BMI. More protein, daily movement, and proper sleep are your saviours here," he added.

So, we verified these insights with Dr Rituja Ugalmugle, consultant in internal medicine at Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central, who said that a firm or tight belly is often linked to visceral fat, which sits deep inside the abdomen around vital organs such as the liver, pancreas, and intestines. "This type of fat is active in the body and is more harmful. A softer belly usually indicates subcutaneous fat, which lies just under the skin and poses far fewer health risks," said Dr Ugalmugle. Visceral fat behaves differently from surface fat. Dr Ugalmugle noted that it releases inflammatory substances and stress hormones, which affect how the body processes sugar and fats and regulates blood pressure. "Over time, this raises the risk of type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease, high blood pressure, and heart disease, even in people who do not seem overweight," said Dr Ugalmugle.

Absolutely, exclaimed Dr Ugalmugle. "This is why weight and BMI do not provide the whole picture. A person can be at a 'normal weight' but still have excess visceral fat, a condition often referred to as metabolically obese nor-



mal weight. Waist size, belly firmness, and lifestyle habits are often better indicators than the number on the scale."

Is a softer belly completely harmless, then?

Not completely, contended Dr Ugalmugle. "While subcutaneous fat is less harmful, too much of it can still lead to joint strain and overall weight gain. However, from a metabolic view, visceral fat is the bigger concern and needs immediate attention."

What lifestyle changes specifically help reduce visceral fat?

According to Dr Ugalmugle, visceral fat responds well to consistent lifestyle changes, not quick fixes. Focusing on protein-rich meals, cutting back on refined carbohydrates, moving daily (even brisk walking helps), managing stress, and getting quality sleep all contribute. Crash dieting often fails, while steady habit changes show lasting results. Your belly is more than just a cosmetic issue; it's a health indicator. Instead of focusing on weight loss, pay attention to how your body feels and functions. Better food choices, daily activity, and proper rest can significantly improve metabolic health, regardless of your body size.

Why elephants' feet, not the ears, are their most powerful sensory tool



through the air but also travels as seismic vibrations through the earth. Elephants sense these vibrations using special sensory cells in their feet, especially in the fat pads on their soles. An elephant's foot is specially built for this job. Under the thick skin is a layer of fatty tissue that acts as a shock absorber and amplifies vibrations. Inside this tissue are Pacinian corpuscles, sensory receptors highly sensitive to pressure and vibration. After the vibrations are picked up, they travel through bones and nerves to the inner ear, where the elephant's brain processes them as sound. So, elephants do not just listen with their ears; they also feel sound through the ground.

How do they make use of this unique ability?

This ability to sense vibrations gives elephants a strong advantage for survival: Long-distance communication: Herds can stay connected across vast landscapes, even when visual contact is impossible. Early warning system: Elephants can detect approaching predators, humans or rival herds long before they appear.

Environmental awareness: Vibrations from distant thunderstorms or rain help elephants locate water, which is crucial in arid regions. Studies show that elephants respond to seismic signals by freezing, gathering, or moving toward or away from the source of the vibrations. Feet, ears, and the elephant social network Elephants use information from their feet along with signals from their large, dish-shaped ears, which are also very sensitive to low-frequency sounds. This two-part system helps them figure out not only that something is happening, but also where it is happening. This supports elephants' famously complex social structures. Matriarchs, in particular, rely on these cues to guide herds safely, avoid danger, and reunite with distant family members. When human noise interferes Modern threats are beginning to disrupt this ancient sensory system. Heavy machinery, mining, road traffic, and construction generate ground vibrations that can confuse or overwhelm elephants' seismic communication. Researchers believe that this may contribute to stress, disorientation, and altered movement patterns, sometimes bringing elephants into closer contact with human settlements.

According to wildlife researchers, when an elephant makes a low-frequency call, the sound not only moves through the air but also travels as seismic vibrations through the earth. Elephants sense these vibrations using special sensory cells in their feet, especially in the fat pads on their soles.

When we think about hearing, we usually picture ears. But for elephants, the largest land animals on Earth, listening involves their whole bodies. Besides using their big ears, elephants can pick up sound vibrations through their feet. This helps them notice distant calls, oncoming storms, and even threats from far away. This unique skill is important for their survival, communication, and social life.

How elephants hear without ears Elephants make and respond to low-frequency sounds called infrasound, which humans cannot hear. These deep rumbles can travel several kilometres through the air and even farther underground.

According to wildlife researchers, when an elephant makes a low-frequency call, the sound not only moves

Lamine Yamal and Raphinha: The prized and unprized jewels who dazzle for Hansi Flick's Barcelona



GNS News Agency, March 22

Every time Barcelona scored a goal in their 7-2 thrashing of Newcastle United, wingers Raphinha and Lamine Yamal retreated to a corner of the ground, slapped their palms twice before raising both arms aloft and bowing their heads. It's a ritual they had begun last December, and which the Brazilian described as "the way they greet each other." Even in the canteen and dressing room.

It's a metaphor of the thrilling union they have stitched up under Hansi Flick as well as Barcelona's transformation from the Cruyffian ideals of control and organisation to chaos and cinema. Raphinha was involved in six goals, netted a brace, assisted a pair, won the penalty that Yamal converted at the stroke of half-time and essayed the free kick that Marc Bernal nudged in. Yamal, besides his goal, conjured numerous svelte flicks, a gorgeous back-heel, the half-turn that resulted in Barcelona's second goal and glided along the turf with the lightness of a dancer. In spite of an injury-stalled season, they have struck 40 goals and conceived 24 others.

But they are a pair beyond quantification, in the fascinating contrast of their game and background. Yamal was the prized one, the boy who belonged, the son of African migrants who Lionel Messi bathed when he was a toddler for an advertisement, who made heads turn at the La Masia Academy, who broke most youngest-to records and who Spain's coach claimed was "touched by the wand of God". He was a star, a Euro champion and touted as football's future by 16.

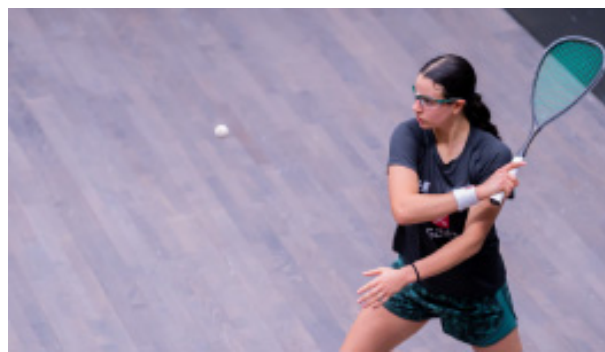
Raphinha, son of an Italian immigrant, a street musician, grew up in the crime-inflicted, impoverished Restinga, a neighbourhood in Porto Alegre. He reached Barcelona after trials and tribulations in Portugal and England, searched endlessly for a sense of belonging. At Camp Nou, he was the unprized one. Flick's predecessor Xavi wanted to sell him and buy Yamal's friend Nico Williams; the club enter-

tained offers from the Middle East. At 27, he deliberated on quitting the sport. "I saw people asking me to leave," he said. "That I wasn't good enough for the club. I was struggling mentally," he would say. Flick's phone call changed it all. "Before you make any decisions," Flick told him, "come and train." He did, and in months became the club's captain and a Ballon d'Or contender last season. Some of the board members were left bemused; they wanted the team to be built around the slender boy from La Masia. Flick would say: "Raphinha is the most important player in the team." Soon, the audience and the board-izens would know why. He, like Yamal, is not a traditional touch-line hugging winger that cuts back like a knapsack (though he certainly could), but one who slips between the lines, dribbles at high speed, pulls the centre-backs, can find narrow pockets of space and conjure the pass of ideal weight to the target man, and is alacritous, often pulls the trigger himself. Shaped by Marcelo Bielsa at Leeds United, he presses like a man possessed, makes defensive contributions (of two players, Bielsa once insisted) and is industrious without the ball. Flick once likened him to a machine.

The magician is Yamal, the boy who slips through defences like a ghost. He architects Barcelona's transitions with not so much as a touch as a caress. He is the figure his teammates' eyes gravitate toward. Every move is made with him in mind; every pass with the purpose to find him. He twists and spins past his markers, he finds angles that no one sees and scores goals that dizzy. The first goal was a classic instance of him orchestrating quick switches of play. He was tussling the ball with a pair of Newcastle defenders at the centre of the pitch before he turned brilliantly to leave both clutching at thin air and thrust upfield at pace, splitting Newcastle's defence and feeding the ball to Fermin Lopez, who tangoed with Raphinha. Later in the first half, he turned up his explosive pace after a back-heel and burned past three Newcastle shirts. He fed the Brazilian whose shot the goalkeeper repelled.

Raphinha facilitates him to shine brighter by dropping into the rivals' defensive lines, creating space for Yamal to rove in the channel between the centre of the pitch and right wing. They operate close to each other, interchange positions, and curiously, both are primarily left-footers. When Yamal throws defences off-kilter, Raphinha attacks the spaces that open up. Both have different personas. Yamal swaggers; a halo flickers. He has the unbreakable spirit of Cristiano Ronaldo; he even shows his dejection when Robert Lewandowski, twice his age, misses chances. Raphinha's self-belief can be fragile. He can be moody and depressed. Dismayed by the Ballon d'Or snub, he said: "I think I deserved much more recognition after last season." Flick would say, "he is someone who needs a bit of love."

Meet Nadien el Hammamy, the teenaged daughter of a glass artist who paints four walls of the squash court with creative racquet-work



GNS News Agency, March 22

They don't make glass slippers for princesses in Egypt. Over the last decade, Egypt's women squash players hit a small black crazy ball as hard as they could against three glass walls and create a winning din. Nadien el Hammamy is the latest in a long jostling line of players, though her connection to fortified glass started much earlier. Her father Walid Onsy is one of Egypt's most renowned artists, known for his paintings on fused glass. Starting with one piece a day in a solitary kiln, experimenting with glass and colours, he now creates masterpieces that shimmer on the walls of the rich and influential. "His art is very special and unique. Not many in Egypt do it. So I was inspired by his creativity," Nadien says, having taken after his father to study graphic design, alongside playing squash. Art flows in Egyptian squash too, and Amr Shabana (a sort of Roger Federer within glass courts) is a massive inspiration for Nadien besides current World No. 1 Hania el Hammamy. It took an entire nation to replace Nicol David. But the Malaysian's dominance in women's squash (eight World titles between 2005 and 2014) eventually made way for the start of the Egyptian dynasty, to the extent that in the last 10 World Open finals, 19 of the 20 contestants have been Egyptians.

Nadien is not quite in the Top 20 in the rankings (she's No. 43), where nine including the top 3 are from the nation of the Pyramids and Cleopatra, the last pharaoh. But the tall 18-year-old is tipped to take over from Nour el Sherbini and current World No. 1 Hania in the coming years, though she's already picked up the reputation of being a fighter on court, known as the 'Comeback Queen'. Playing at the JSW Indian Open this week, as she leaves behind her junior exploits and gets down to jostling for her place amongst Egypt's and the world's finest, Nadien, a year older than Anahat Singh, is expected to mount her typically stubborn challenge whenever she goes, staking claim on every title.

"The competition within Egypt is why we are so good at squash. We have big rivalries amongst ourselves in local tournaments that make us stronger. I remember each and every match with each of them," the teen says of scores that are meticulously kept. And settled. Nadien grew up looking up to Hania, but the bar has been set high in the north African nation by Sherbini, a serial winner (8 Worlds) over the last decade. Nadien el Hammamy, the tall, 18-year-old, is tipped to take over from Nour el Sherbini and current World No. 1 Hania in the coming years. (Photo: PSA) Rise in profile As the sport enters the Olympics, plenty of focus is on Egypt, where most girls follow their fathers and brothers to the court and end up outshining them. "I was always at the training sessions of my older brother, ready to jump on court even if for two minutes. The coaches told my mother I'll be a champion one day," Nadien, the reigning British Juniors and World Juniors champ, recalls.

Helped by a commanding presence on court due to her towering frame, Nadien picked the street cred of a fighter after she came back from 0-2, 2-7 down once at the British Junior Open. Her clutch mentality is quite the talk of squash-town, and while a lot of Egyptian squash is about elegant wristy strokes and deception, Nadien has plenty of grit and bosses clutch moments. The strength almost comes from having emerged from a sporting kiln herself. "When I'm trailing, I take a couple of seconds to imagine how I'll feel when I lose," she says. That jolts her out of any slump. "I tell myself it can't get worse than that feeling of losing. And I fight. Point by point." Like her father's work, experiments can go terribly south. Nadien has lost many matches ("couple silvers that hurt") though she's still 18. But like fellow player Amina Orfi, who made four world junior finals, resilience courses through Egyptian veins as much as filigreed shot angles. "Playing with PSA legends makes a huge difference," she says.

Nadien's tall frame grants her a good reach to cover the corners of the court. "But there are challenges too. You need a very strong core. Because squash has a lot of up and down, up and down," she says about all the bending required on her backhand hits. Nadien has had several face-offs with Anahat, her comebacks notable each time. She's accustomed to India too. "I've been to Mumbai and Indore. The humidity is too hot," she laughs, adding, "Food is great. Anahat is doing very well for her age being in the top 20 already." Nadien juggles university assignments and mid-terms with the short-term goal to get into the top 20. "It can be very stressful to balance with all the travelling," she says. But nobody better than a squash player to know how glass isn't always fragile.

'His captaincy itself is a weak link': Former CSK batter slams Ajinkya Rahane and KKR ahead of IPL 2026 season

GNS News Agency, March 22

Kolkata Knight Riders are approaching their IPL 2026 campaign with poor form and injury concerns compounding their woes, and former Chennai Super Kings batter S Badrinath did not mince words as he criticised the team's overall management. Badrinath slammed KKR for backing veteran India batter Ajinkya Rahane as captain for a second successive season and also questioned the team's decision to make a record-breaking signing of Australia all-rounder Cameron Green for Rs 25.20 crore during the IPL 2026 mini-auction last December. Battling injuries and poor form since, Green has struggled to make an impact in national colours and Badrinath questioned if the Australian had it in him to win games all by himself.

"You've signed him for 25 crores, and he is woefully out of form. He struggled massively for Australia in the T20 World Cup. Cameron Green went for so much purely because of the hype. He is not worth that much. Has he singlehandedly done anything in the IPL? Australian players always get hyped up, and he benefited from that. I believe it was a bad move by KKR," Badrinath said on his YouTube channel. 'Captaincy a weak link'

Just a season after they clinched their third title in IPL 2024, KKR went in for a major overhaul by even releasing the title-winning skipper, Shreyas Iyer, and banking on the experience of Rahane. The move backfired last year when



KKR finished eighth on the points table with only five wins in 14 matches. Badrinath lambasted the KKR management for entrusting Rahane with the leadership again, declaring it to be the weakest aspect of KKR's contingent, which is also grappling with multiple injury and availability concerns. "Ajinkya Rahane is definitely a weakness. His captaincy itself is a weak link. All their big investments have gone wrong. They trusted Harshit Rana and invested in him, but he is ruled out. Pathirana was a huge signing, and now he's doubtful. Mustafizur was another big investment, and he is ruled out. They've taken many costly decisions as there is uncertainty over most of their big investments," remarked Badrinath.

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Pakistan 'not to be taken lightly', says coach Craig Fulton after India drawn together in hockey World Cup

GNS News Agency, March 22 India has been drawn in a competitive Pool D alongside a resurgent Pakistan, a tricky England, and the upstarts Wales, with all group-stage matches scheduled at the Wagener Hockey Stadium in Amstelveen, Netherlands. (Photo: Hockey India) India has been drawn in a competitive Pool D alongside a resurgent Pakistan, a tricky England, and the upstarts Wales, with all group-stage matches scheduled at the Wagener Hockey Stadium in Amstelveen, Netherlands.

It might be a no-contest on paper – with India unbeaten against them in the last 17 matches, a run stretching a decade – but coach Craig Fulton has warned that Pakistan are a side 'not to be taken lightly' after the two sides were drawn in the same group of this year's hockey World Cup.

India has been drawn in a competitive Pool D alongside a resurgent Pakistan, a tricky England, and the upstarts Wales, with all group-stage matches scheduled at the Wagener Hockey Stadium in Amstelveen, Netherlands. India will open their campaign against Wales on August 15, followed by a crucial match against England on August 17, before facing Pakistan on August 19 in what is expected to be one of the most high-voltage encounters of the group stage.

Reacting to the draw, Fulton highlighted the intensity and challenge of the group, particularly pointing to Pakistan's rich hockey heritage and unpredictable style of play. "We're excited. It's a strong group, but that's exactly what you want at a World Cup — to be tested against the best," he said, adding that the team is motivated and clear in its preparation. "The mood in the camp is very positive. The players are motivated and hungry, and knowing our opponents now gives us real clarity and focus going into our preparation."

He further elaborated on the different tactical challenges



each opponent presents. "England are a well-organised, physical side who are also top seed in our pool. Pakistan bring flair, unpredictability, and a rich hockey tradition — never a side to take lightly. Wales are making their mark on the international stage and will be full of energy and determination," Fulton explained. "We respect every opponent in this pool, but we back ourselves against all of them."

With months to prepare, Fulton emphasised the importance of refining key areas such as structure, pressing, and finishing. "We'll be working hard on our structure, our press, and our finishing — the fine margins that decide games at this level," Fulton noted. "Every opponent in this pool has different strengths, so our preparation will be tailored and detailed. The next few months are about peaking at exactly the right moment." Fulton's India have been under pressure recently, with the team losing all four matches in the home leg of the FIH Pro League. The team did reasonably well in Australia, holding the giants to draws in the double-headers last month. India will return to action in the Pro League in June when they will travel to the Netherlands and England, where they will play Pakistan twice in the build-up to the World Cup.

'Don't need to prove anything to anyone': Neymar breaks silence on Brazil omission amid fitness debate

GNS News Agency, March 22

Talismanic Brazilian footballer Neymar admitted that he is no longer the same footballer he was 10 years ago and has nothing to prove to anyone after he was snubbed from the national team for the friendlies against France (on March 26 in Boston) and Croatia (March 31 in Orlando). "I'm not going to be the Neymar of 10 years ago. I'm not going to be. It's very different. Today I improved my game in a way that, for me, is what is necessary," said the former Barcelona and PSG striker in a video he posted on social media when referring to criticism of his physical condition. "I don't need to prove anything to anyone. And I say that with the greatest respect in the world. The world knows. They can attend matches and also training sessions," he was quoted as saying by Spanish media outlet Marca. The striker published the video days after Carlo Ancelotti, coach of the Brazilian national team, left him out of the list of players called up for the friendlies — the last ones before the announcement of the 26 Brazilians who will play in the World Cup. The Italian coach, who took charge of the Brazilian national team in May 2025, has not considered Neymar, saying that the Santos striker needs to be fully fit to be called up. Neymar returned to Santos last year with the intention of recovering and returning to the Brazilian national team, with which he has not played since October 2023, when he suffered a serious injury in a match against Uruguay in the World Cup qualifiers. Ancelotti had explained why he had left out the forward despite him playing the full 90 minutes recently in a 1-1 draw against the Corinthians where two of Ancelotti

‘No water to drink, how’s he shaving everyday?’: Aamir Khan recalls spat with Ashutosh Gowariker over Bhuvan being clean-shaven in Lagaan



Actor Aamir Khan and filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker were present at the Red Lorry Film Festival in Mumbai. The actor and director celebrated 25 years of their iconic film Lagaan. While talking about the film, Ashutosh and Aamir revisited the uncertainty that existed around sports films back then. Aamir recalled how seven to eight sports films had flopped before Lagaan was released. Aamir called it an ‘unusual film for Indian cinema’ and also recalled having a spat with Ashutosh over his character Bhuvan being clean-shaven in a village struck with drought.

‘Bhuvan should have been how I look now’ Discussing who eventually won the argument about Aamir’s character in Lagaan being clean-shaven, the actor said, “Eventually Ashutosh won the spat, but be honest, Bhuvan should have

been how I look now.” Ashutosh defended himself and said, “Lagaan was an experimental film and script; I had to do fresh casting for other characters. I only had one Aamir Khan, and I thought he had to look handsome in the film. He was supposed to be clean-shaven and have a slightly different hairstyle and no moustache. I thought that was more important for the film.” Later, Aamir pulled up Ashutosh said, “Tell me one thing, it wasn’t raining in that village, there was no water to drink, and this guy was shaving every day, how come the entire village didn’t beat him up? Bhuvan was getting water to shave every day, while other villagers didn’t even have water to drink. No one reacted to it that time, but it’s a logical question as to why he was shaving, that should be the last thing on his mind.” Aamir Khan on Lagaan

Last year, speaking to Mashable India about Lagaan, Aamir Khan had said, “The first cut that Ashu showed us was of seven and a half hours. We shot that much. In that, four and a half hours was the lead-up to the cricket match. We removed several sequences, and some sequences were very long, so we cut them short. We came down to 3 hours, 42 minutes. We had to cut around half of the film.” Also Read: Aamir Khan reveals Lagaan went over double its Rs 12 crore budget; says Ashutosh Gowariker asked for 3,000 extras: ‘We had 150 security guards on set’ Aamir had also recalled how distributors were quite upset with Ashutosh Gowariker for not selling the film’s rights. He recalled, “We weren’t happy. I felt that even a three-hour film was enough, but we couldn’t tell the story in that duration. So, the distributors were very upset because I didn’t sell the rights to the film. It was my first film as a producer, and I wanted to see for myself first if everything was good or not. I didn’t want to pre-sell in advance; it would have been irresponsible. I focused on making the film first. I knew that it was a risky film, the subject is cricket, and the distributor doesn’t even know.” Lagaan was released in 2001, and it was also nominated for the Oscars in 2002. The film remains iconic in the Hindi cinema for its scope and success. This article provides behind-the-scenes editorial insights and personal reflections from the creators of Lagaan; it is intended for entertainment and informational purposes only.

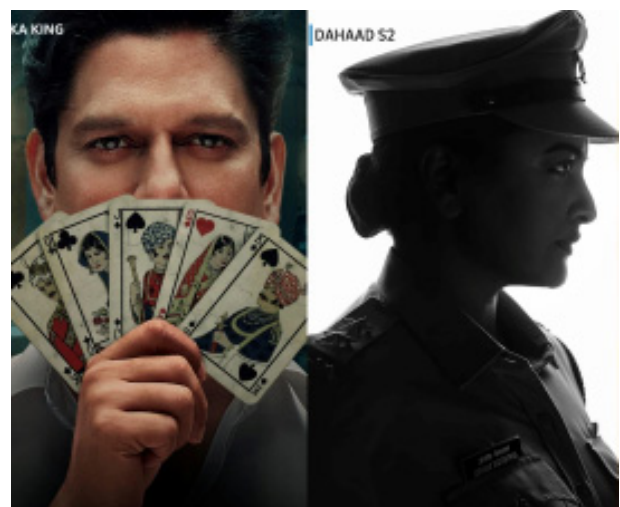
Amazon Prime Video 2026 slate out: Dahaad S2, Mirzapur The Movie, Hrithik Roshan, Alia Bhatt-backed projects headline lineup

From Hrithik Roshan’s HRX Films marking its OTT debut with Storm and Mess, to the second season of popular series Dahaad, Alia Bhatt’s Don’t Be Shy and big-ticket titles like Mirzapur The Movie, Naagzilla, the platform is going big on scale, storytelling and star power. Dahaad Season 2 once again follows a chilling serial killer investigation in Rajasthan.

Directed by Reema Kagti and Ruchika Oberoi, the series stars Sonakshi Sinha, Gulshan Devaiah, Vineet Kumar Singh, Sikandar Kher and Aisha Ahmed. Official synopsis: “A missing twelve-year-old in a quiet Rajasthani town pulls Sub-Inspector Anjali Meghwal into a serial-killer hunt that investigates how power, patriarchy, and privilege can fuel horrifying violence.” Expanding one of Amazon Prime Video’s most popular franchises, Mirzapur The Movie will bring its crime saga to the big screen before streaming on the platform. Directed by Puneet Krishna, the film features Ali Fazal, Pankaj Tripathi, Divyendhu, Jitendra Kumar, Ravi Kishan, Abhishek Banerjee, Rasika Duggal, Shweta Tripathi and Shriya Pilgaonkar. Storm is a tense, character-driven drama about five women caught in a dangerous scam that could either destroy them or set them free. Backed by Hrithik Roshan’s banner HRX, Storm is directed and created by Ajitpal Singh and stars Parvathy Thiruvothu, Alaya F, Srishri Shrivastava, Rrama Sharma, Saba Azad, Rajit Kapoor and Gautam Rode. Official synopsis: “Five women—each nursing wounds, dreams, and deadly secrets—are drawn into a web of deception that threatens to crush them or set them free when a sustainable housing project unravels into a deadly scam.” Mess is a dark comedy thriller where a robbery spirals into chaos as the intruders realise they may not survive the night.

Starring Pratik Gandhi, Ranvir Shorey, Gajraj Rao and Anurag Thakur, the film is directed by Rajesh A. Krishnan. Official synopsis: “When a motley group of robbers invade the family house of a man with OCD, they slowly realise, it’s not the family but them who need to survive this one night standoff.” Don’t Be Shy is a coming-of-age story that follows a young woman whose perfectly planned life begins to unravel unexpectedly. Backed by Alia Bhatt and Shaheen Bhatt’s Eternal Sunshine Productions, the film is directed by Sreeti Mukerji. Official synopsis: “Don’t Be Shy follows the story of Shyamili ‘Shy’ Das, a 20-year-old girl who thinks she has everything figured out until her perfectly planned life takes an unpredictable turn, and things begin to spiral out of her control.”

Naagzilla is a fantasy comedy set in a world of shape-shifting serpents, where a magical conflict triggers chaos and danger. Starring Kartik Aaryan, the film will stream post its theatrical release. Official synopsis: “In a world where shape-shifting Ichhadhaari naags have been living amongst humans, chaos ensues when a once carefree Ichhadhaari naag’s Naagmani and his life are threatened by a wily, power-hungry villain.” System is a courtroom drama exploring power, privilege and justice through the lives of two women from vastly different backgrounds. Directed by Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari, the film stars Sonakshi Sinha, Jyotika and Ashutosh Gowariker. Official synopsis: “When Neha Rajvansh, a privileged public prosecutor, meets Sarika Rawat, a courtroom stenographer from a humble background, their lives are thrown into upheaval where power defines truth, blurring the system and raising a question of what justice truly means to them.” Khoya Mahal is a mysterious drama about estranged siblings forced to run a crumbling heritage hotel with secrets of its own. Directed by Jaydeep Sarkar and Konkona Sensharma, the series stars Aditi Rao Hydari, Barun Sobti and others. Official synopsis: “Kanishk and Kanupriya, ex-royals and half siblings united by a crumbling inheritance, are forced to take over their family’s remote heritage hotel, The Khoya Mahal. Desperate to escape, they hatch a reckless plan to free themselves, unaware that Khoya Mahal has plans of its own.” Raakh is a gritty crime thriller following an investigation into the disappearance of two teenagers. Directed by Prosit Roy, the series stars Ali Fazal, Sonali Bendre and Dibyendu Bhattacharya. Official synopsis:



“When two teenagers vanish, a close-knit family is shattered and the city is left on edge. Determined to uncover the truth, a relentless officer leads a nationwide manhunt that pulls him deep into a world of violence and human depravity.”

Matka King is a period drama set in 1960s Mumbai, tracing the rise of a gambling empire that reshapes the city’s underbelly. Directed by Nagraj Papatrao Manjule, the series stars Vijay Varma, Kritika Kamra and others. Official synopsis: “In this fictional tale set in 1960s Mumbai, an enterprising cotton trader who craves legitimacy and respect, starts a new gambling game dubbed ‘Matka’, that takes the city by storm and democratizes a terrain previously reserved for the rich and elite.” Teen Kauwe is a spy thriller about a former agent forced to return and uncover a conspiracy while being hunted himself. Directed by Priyanka Ghose, the series stars Sidhant Gupta, Fatima Sana Shaikh and Bobby Deol. Official synopsis: “An ex-secret agent, believed to be a mole and thought dead for seven years, must return to find the traitor who framed him, while his own agency is trying to terminate him.” Adarsh Baal Vidyalaya is a light-hearted take on a dysfunctional school and an unlikely attempt to reform it. Directed by Himank Gaur, the series stars Kay Kay Menon, Naveen Kasturia and Archana Puran Singh. Official synopsis: “In a dysfunctional government school, a laidback headmaster’s attempt to turn around the school sparks a chaotic makeover — forcing a ragtag team of teachers to fix the broken system, one blackboard lesson at a time.” Tax Department Story is a sharp drama about a young officer taking on powerful white-collar crime and facing systemic challenges. Directed by Saurabh Bhavne, the series stars Ravi Kishan, Aditya Rawal and Barkha Singh. Official synopsis: “A newly minted Revenue Services officer takes on the most powerful white-collar criminal in Agra, only to realize that winning is taxable.” Camaame Badla Gear Palti Kismat is a crime drama where a small-time plan escalates into a dangerous, large-scale operation with life-threatening consequences. Directed by Vinay Waikul, the series stars Purav Jha, Naman Jain, Sikandar Kher, Sai Tamhankar. Official synopsis: “Four friends steal cars to escape debt, but one job spirals into a massive interstate operation. Now hunted by loan sharks, cartels, and cops—loyalty is their only hope.” Official synopsis: “A struggling singer is stuck sharing his place with his ex-mother-in-law while his successful ex-wife lives upstairs with her new boyfriend. Every awkward encounter proves they may not be over each other—but is love worth surviving this nightmare?” Official synopsis: “A young sportsman infiltrates the wild and dangerous world of Punjab’s rap music to investigate a drug syndicate, only to find himself torn between love, family, guilt and brotherhood.” Vvan: Force of the Forrest is a mythological fantasy where a man must confront supernatural forces and embrace his destiny to save his people. The film will stream post its theatrical release. Directed by Deepak Mishra and written by Arunabh Kumar, the film stars Sidharth Malhotra and Tamannaah Bhatia. Official synopsis: “

Amazon Prime Video 2026 slate out: Hrithik Roshan backs Storm, Mess; teasers hint at gritty drama and dark humour



Amazon Prime Video has announced its 2026 content slate, and among the most talked-about additions are two projects backed by Hrithik Roshan’s banner, HRX Films, a series titled Storm and the film Mess. Teasers for both titles were released alongside the announcement. “I became an actor out of fear of failure, every instinct my body says this is going to be impossible but I pushed through that impossibility and out of that space HRX was born out of the journey from hopelessness to inspiration, that was the transformation,” he said. Directed and created by Ajitpal Singh, known for Tabbar, Storm brings together a strong ensemble including Parvathy Thiruvothu, Alaya F, Srishri Shrivastava, Rrama Sharma, Saba Azad, Rajit Kapoor, Gautam Rode.

The series revolves around five women navigating personal struggles, ambitions and hidden truths. The official synopsis reads, “Five women—each nursing wounds,

dreams, and deadly secrets—are drawn into a web of deception that threatens to crush them or set them free when a sustainable housing project unravels into a deadly scam.”

The teaser opens with Parvathy’s character expressing a desire for her own “kingdom.” As the visuals unfold, glimpses of the other characters, played by Alaya F, Srishri Shrivastava, Saba Azad, Rajit Kapur and Gautam Rode, build a tense atmosphere. We also see a gun pointed at Parvathy, along with fleeting images of chaos. Mess leans into dark comedy with a suspenseful edge. The film stars Pratik Gandhi, Ranvir Shorey, Gajraj Rao and Anurag Thakur, and is directed by Rajesh A. Krishnan. The official synopsis of the film reads, “When a motley group of robbers invade the family house of a man with OCD, they slowly realise, it’s not the family but them who need to survive this one night standoff.” The teaser introduces the premise through Pratik Gandhi’s character, who struggles to complete a simple announcement due to his obsessive tendencies. Minor details, a misaligned collar, foggy glasses, a misplaced flower pot, even a slightly tilted camera, derail him, setting the tone for the film’s offbeat humour. Mess is based on an original screenplay by Paul Soter, with adaptation and dialogues by Kapil Sawant. Speaking about the collaboration, Hrithik Roshan said, “Storm marked the start of something special with Prime Video, and Mess feels like a natural next step for us at HRX Films. Our partnership with Prime Video has allowed us to explore bold, innovative storytelling, and this project embodies that spirit perfectly. Rajesh brings a distinctive voice both as a producer and director, with a rare ability to blend comedy with compelling narratives. His creative vision for Mess has been extraordinary from the start.”

Elvish Yadav calls it his ‘Independence Day’ after SC quashes snake venom case: ‘What we went through, I wouldn’t wish on anyone’

YouTuber and Bigg Boss OTT 2 winner Elvish Yadav has reacted after the Supreme Court quashed criminal proceedings against him in the snake venom rave party case, calling it his ‘Independence Day’. The Supreme Court on Thursday set aside the FIR, chargesheet and trial court proceedings against Elvish Yadav, holding that the case could not be sustained in law on the limited issues examined. According to PTI, the bench noted that the complaint was not filed by an authorised person, and the IPC charges were based on an earlier FIR in Gurugram that has already been closed. It also observed that provisions of the NDPS Act would not apply as the substance in question was not a scheduled drug.

Elvish said, “Today is a very happy day — today is your brother’s Independence Day. Because the Supreme Court has dismissed that snake-related case. I always had faith in our judiciary, in the justice system, that justice is always served. Whoever has done wrong will be punished, and whoever hasn’t will be saved. A big thank you to the Supreme Court for quashing our case and setting your brother free. I can’t even express how happy I am right now, but please understand.” Recalling his arrest and the prolonged legal battle, he said, “Exactly two years ago, on March 17, 2024, I was arrested in this false case that was filed against me. Since then, I have kept saying that I did nothing wrong. The case was registered against me in November 2023, and from that day, I’ve been saying I’m innocent. But the media kept running stories saying ‘Elvish Yadav did this, did that.’ I faced harassment for nearly two and a half years.” Elvish Yadav also spoke about the impact on his family: “There was a stain on my name, on my family’s name. My family went through so much harassment. What we went through, I wouldn’t wish on anyone. But today, truth has prevailed.” While welcoming the court’s decision, he asked about accountability for the period he and his family spent under scrutiny.

Elvish said, “It’s a very big day for me. Everything is finally okay — the case is over, all charges against me have been dropped. But I do have one question: the two and a



half years of harassment that I and my family endured, my family crying on national television — what compensation is there for that? I don’t want an apology, but how is that time, that suffering, going to be accounted for? I still don’t understand.”

He added, “But anyway, who should I even ask this question to? I’m happy, and I just want to stay happy. I pray that no one ever has to go through such a tough time. Our comeback has been strong because I had good people by my side, my family’s support, and faith in the judiciary that justice would prevail. I still can’t fully express what I’m feeling. Thank you to all of you who stood by me during my difficult times and believed that your brother was innocent — and today, the Supreme Court has proven it.” The case dates back to November 22, 2023, when an FIR was registered alleging use of snake venom at a rave party in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. Elvish Yadav was arrested on March 17, 2024. He later moved the Supreme Court after the Allahabad High Court declined to quash the chargesheet and trial court order. On the work front, Elvish is currently seen on Laughter Chefs Season 3, hosted by Bharti Singh and Harpal Singh Sokhi. It airs on Colors TV and streams on JioHotstar.

Chaos at Dhurandhar 2 previews: Police called to Noida mall as mid-movie ‘glitch’ leaves fans fuming

The highly anticipated Dhurandhar 2 finally arrived, but not without hiccups. The makers had planned paid previews across India starting Wednesday evening, giving fans an early look before the film’s official worldwide release. However, technical glitches and last-minute cancellations caused widespread confusion and negative publicity. So significant was the issue that late Wednesday night, director Aditya Dhar himself took to Twitter to apologise for the inconvenience caused. While fans were struggling with the disruptions, Dhar was equally busy. According to the film’s casting director, Mukesh Chhabra, Dhar was still in the studio putting the finishing touches on the film, ensuring that no issues would affect the main release day. Mukesh shared a photo of Dhar on his X account, writing: “This morning at 2:30 am., he was still working, giving everything to the film till the very last moment. That kind of dedication is rare, and honestly, it’s inspiring.” He further added: “I won’t say much because I’ve already seen the film twice... but trust me, this is going to shake everything, every record, every expectation. This man is a genius. Truly. I’m just really happy, grateful, and proud... proud of him, proud, proud.”

Despite the excitement, many fans expressed frustration over the chaotic previews on social media. Several reported exhaustion caused by sudden show cancellations. One user, Amit Behal, posted a detailed video on X describing the mishaps: “The Dhurandhar team would remove this so watch this video before it’s taken down, so it doesn’t happen again. I saw online that many shows were cancelled. I went to Cinepolis, Screen 1, they had four screens in total, but in three of them, the shows were cancelled. We were lucked out even though they were saying ours might also get cancelled.” He continued: “They showed us the first half, but the second half wasn’t available. It’s so strange, the first half had all the abusive language muted, but in the second half, it wasn’t. We had a 40–50 minute interval, and people were fighting for re-

funds. People kept walking in and so many of them watched it while standing. The lights kept going on and off in the middle of the movie. It was a very poor arrangement by Cinepolis. I’m not sure if people in Screens 3 and 4 would even get refunds.” Behal also criticized the lack of respect for audiences’ time, pointing out that long delays disrupted their schedules. He claimed his account was blocked after posting about the mismanagement: “My X account was blocked even though I only shared photos and no videos or spoilers. But the Dhurandhar team blocked it just because of that.” He also called out not just the cinemas but the production house, Jio Studios, and distributors for failing to ensure smooth availability across chains: “The distributors did not release the movie on time. The censor certificate was received yesterday, so everything should have been sorted by today. But this mess happened, and it was very bad.” Behal concluded by demanding public apologies and at least 50% refunds for affected viewers. It was also reported that chaos also erupted at PVR Superplex, Mall of India, Noida, last night when screenings of the film abruptly halted mid-show due to a reported “technical glitch.” After watching the first half, the audience were keen on watching second half, were left frustrated with no clarity on when, or if, the film would resume. Shashank Singh, a businessman from Sector 78, who attended the screening with his wife Swati, told Hindustan Times: “We’ve been waiting since 8 PM. The show in Audi 1 was stalled, but the other screens kept running their shows.” Swati added: “They kept saying ‘just five more minutes’ while selling popcorn and cola as if the show would start soon. We spent an extra Rs 2,000 on food and drinks, what for? They made the money, but what about our time and money?” It was reported that as the hours dragged on, tension inside the multiplex escalated. Groups of fans started chanting slogans, demanding that the film continue. Anger peaked when another screen was readied for a 10 PM show while many patrons had only seen the first half. Ravish, DLF security head, said: