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Sangareddy police seized 574 kgs of dry ganja

Sangareddy: In a joint operation, Sadasivapet police and the Sangareddy Anti Narcotics Bureau seized 574 kg of dry ganja that was being transported from Sadasivapet to Sangareddy on NH-65 in a DCM vehicle on Monday evening. The worth of the seized ganja was put at Rs 2.87 crore. A Kia car was suspiciously preceding the DCM vehicle when the police tried to stop them. However, the drivers attempted to speed away, but the police chased the vehicles and nabbed three ganja peddlers from Maharashtra. The police seized the two vehicles. A case was registered and the probe is on.

Fire breaks out at private hospital in Masab Tank area

Hyderabad: A fire broke out at a private hospital in the Masab Tank police station limits on Monday, triggering panic among patients and staff.

The incident occurred at Shruti Multi Speciality Hospital in Vijayanagar Colony, where an air conditioner reportedly exploded on the third floor, leading to a sudden blaze.

Trump pauses power infra strikes for 5 days; Iran claims US backed down

New Delhi, March 23

US President Donald Trump on Monday called for a "pause on all military strikes" against Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure for five days. Tehran denied talks took place and claimed the pause had come after it warned of targeting the energy infrastructure across the Gulf, calling it a "defeat for the devil". It said the "US had backed down".

Speaking to reporters in Florida, Trump said the US was currently engaged in high-level discussions with a "top person" within the Iranian leadership in an effort to secure a resolution to the West Asia conflict. He clarified that the negotiations did not involve new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei. An Israeli official said the US was holding negotiations with Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Bagher Qalibaf.

The pause announcement saw Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, falling more than 7 per cent to around \$104 a barrel--it was \$65 before the war started on February 28.

Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform that the US and Iran had had "very good and productive" conversations over the past two days about a "complete and total resolution of hostilities in West Asia".

The White House said in a post on X the pause was "subject to the success of the ongoing meetings and discussions". However, Iran's Fars News Agency, which is affiliated with the country's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, quoted a source as saying there had been "no direct or indirect contact between Tehran and Washing-



ton".

Iran's Mehr News Agency quoted the country's Foreign Ministry as saying Trump's statement of the pause "was part of efforts to reduce energy prices and buy time to implement his military plans".

Before the change of tactics, Trump had on Sunday threatened Iran of "obliterating" its energy network if it did not reopen the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours. "Based on the tenor and tone of these in-depth, detailed and constructive conversations, which will continue throughout the week, I have instructed the Department of War to postpone any and all military strikes against Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure for a five-day period, subject to the success of the ongoing meetings and discussions," Trump posted on Truth Social.

Shortly before Trump's post, Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi wrote on X that his country was "working intensively to put in place safe passage arrangements" for the Strait of Hormuz. "Whatever your view of Iran, this war is not of their making. This is already causing widespread economic problems and I fear they promise to get much worse if the war continues," wrote Albusaidi, who had mediated the latest nuclear talks between Iran and the US.

Albusaidi had on Wednesday said the US-Israel's "unlawful" war on Iran was "a grave miscalculation", which put the Gulf economies in harm's way. "This is not America's war, and there is no likely scenario in which both Israel and America will get what they want from it,"

PM Modi flags long-term impact of West Asia crisis, urges unity in LS



New Delhi, March 23

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday highlighted the potential long-term impact of the ongoing West Asia crisis, reiterating that dialogue and diplomacy remain the only viable solutions.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha for the first time since the crisis began on February 28, he emphasised the need for national unity and preparedness.

The Prime Minister said that a decade of efforts in energy import diversification, fertiliser stockpiling, green energy, and railway electrification were helping India navigate the current crisis.

Assuring citizens, he said the government was making every possible effort to ensure uninterrupted fuel and fertiliser supplies.

"Indian worries are naturally high. If we stay united as a nation, we can face any challenge," he said.

Energy security and imports

Highlighting India's dependence on critical shipping routes, the Prime Minister noted that the Strait of Hormuz remains a key artery for crude oil, gas, and fertiliser imports.

"Shipping along this route has become challenging. The government is ensuring that petrol, diesel, and gas supplies remain largely unaffected and inconvenience to citizens is minimised," he said.

He added that India has expanded its import base from 27 countries a decade ago to 41 today.

The Prime Minister also informed the House that India currently holds 5.3 million metric tonnes of strategic petroleum reserves, with plans to increase this to 6.5 million metric tonnes.

Diplomatic outreach and global position

On the diplomatic front, Modi said India's position has been clear from the outset.

"From the start, we have expressed deep concern about the crisis. I have spoken to leaders across West Asia, urging de-escalation and cessation of conflict," he said.

India has opposed attacks on civilians and energy infrastructure, he added, calling disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz "unacceptable."

BRS alleges scam in rice export from Telangana to Philippines; minister denies

Hyderabad: Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) alleged a scam in export of rice to the Philippines and demanded a House Committee to probe the same. However, Civil Supplied Minister, N. Uttam Kumar Reddy denied the allegation and stated that the Telangana government has entered into an historic agreement with the Philippines government.

BRS Deputy Leader in Telangana Legislative Assembly, T. Harish Rao, made the allegation in the House during Question Hour.

He sought details on export of rice to the Philippines and appointment of Premchand Garg as advisor. The BRS leader said Garg was facing cases booked by central agencies including the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Alleging that a scam took place in the export of rice, Harish Rao wanted the Speaker to constitute a House Committee to probe the 'scam'.

Harish Rao wanted clarification from the government as to why it did not call tenders for export of rice. He asked why a private company was awarded the work on nomination basis.

The BRS wanted to know from the government to clarify if 7,500 tonne rice was still lying at Kakinada port. He also wanted Civil Supplied Minister, N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, to clarify if the government was paying warehouse



and handling charges at the port.

Harish Rao alleged that the state suffered losses due to the alleged scam in rice export and demanded a House Committee to probe the allegations.

N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, however, denied the allegations and stated that there was no link between rice export and Premchand Garg. The BRS registered a protest for allegedly failing to get an appropriate reply from the minister. Uttam Kumar Reddy stated that Telangana has become a global rice market and the state government has entered into an agreement with the Philippines government for exporting rice from Telangana by eliminating middlemen's role.

Need to protect and preserve old 'milestone' near Jannaram

"S. Harpal Singh, Adilabad, March 23**How many people know that the country used imperial measurements even until a decade after independence? Not many especially who belong to the current generation. Among different types of measurements was the one meant for distance which was a mile. Distances used to be measured in miles which is equal to 1.6 km. The country adopted the metric kilometer system in phases after the passage of Standards of Weights and Measures Act in 1955. In erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh, the transition of measuring road distance in kilometers came during the same time but it was a bit delayed in backward areas like the old unified Adilabad district." An old milestone in disuse can be found lying near the Deer Breeding Center at Jannaram in Mancherial district. This specimen from the past is believed to be at least 65 years old and needs to be preserved for posterity before it gets damaged. "The old milestone is made in cement and white colour in a triangular shape.. The lower part embedded in the soil is clearly visible. The distances to Luxettipet, Mancherial and Asifabad are given in miles on one side and Nirmal, Basar and Adilabad on the other side. There was no direct con-



nection between Asifabad town and Adilabad town which was the district head quarter until 1965 when the Asifabad-Uttnoor was laid. So the distances in miles make sense. "When informed about the milestone in his area, Kawal Tiger Reserve Jannaram Forest Divisional Officer M. Ram Mohan agreed it needed protection. "We will get it over in our office and put in on display," he assured Indian Chronicle.

"ITDA Pulse" for speedy disposal of petitions

"S. Harpal Singh, Adilabad, March 23**In order to dispose petitions speedily and increase accountability of officials in the process, the Uttnoor Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) has introduced ITDA PULSE, an information technology based platform to register grievance petitions from petitioners. ITDA Project Officer Yuvraj Marmat inaugurated the platform on Monday at his office in uttnoor. "Mr. Marmat informed that the Monday Pajavani has many petitioners flocking to the ITDA office for lodging grievance petitions. Hereafter these petitions will be registered under the ITDA PULSE. Each petition will have a QR code through which officials can access the issue and address it. "Similarly, petitioners can scan the QR code on their mobile phones from anywhere to know the status of their petitions instead of travelling all the way to the iTDA. "Also, in future the ITDA will introduce online as well as WhatsApp services for petition registering. This will be AI driven services for the benefit of the petitioners, The ITDA PO added



Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Manual scavenging must go

The dehumanising practice of manual scavenging is a blot on any civilised society. The fact that such a profession still exists is a matter of collective shame for India. Despite laws banning the abominable work, it persists across the country, leading to a large number of deaths of workers engaged in sewer line repair and cleaning without critical safety measures. According to official data tabled in the Lok Sabha last week, over 620 sanitation workers have died cleaning sewers and septic tanks across the country since 2017. While 539 families reportedly received full compensation, 52 did not get even a penny. This reflects a cruel apathy on the part of the governments. It is both a legal and moral obligation for the government to ensure that the kin of deceased workers get fair compensation. One wonders how a nation can aspire to become 'Viksit' (developed) by 2047, when a section of its citizens is engaged in such dehumanising work. A 2023 survey conducted under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, found no manual scavengers in any district nationwide. This is nothing but a cruel joke. The ground reality, however, is completely different. There is no let-up in tragic incidents: three sanitation workers lost their lives after inhaling toxic gases while cleaning a septic tank at a leading hospital in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, last week.

Manual scavenging is closely linked to the abhorrent caste system, with nearly 92-97% of those involved belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This occupation reinforces social inequality, untouchability, and stigma. In addition to the social stigma and isolation, manual scavengers are also exposed to serious health hazards. The persistence of complaints — 842 were received by the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis last year — about unpaid wages, lack of safety gear and caste-based discrimination shows that the rot runs deep. Despite official claims that sanitation work is occupation-based, data confirms an overwhelming representation of workers from historically marginalised communities. Despite the Manual Scavenging Act of 2013 prohibiting the deployment of people for such tasks and making it a punishable offence, the practice persists. The Act includes manual cleaning of sewers, septic tanks, drains and manholes under the definition of 'manual scavenging'. This was necessitated by the high rate of deaths at work. Manual scavenging is a degrading profession which needs solutions that are technologically suitable, economically driven, socially responsible, and sensitive. Since manual scavengers do not use protective gear and work in extremely unhygienic conditions, they are relentlessly exposed to harmful gases such as hydrogen sulphide and methane, often resulting in respiratory illnesses, and cardiovascular and musculoskeletal disorders. They also suffer from skin problems such as psoriasis. Carbon monoxide poisoning, diarrhoea, nausea and tuberculosis are some of the other health problems they face.

Petition Submitted to Zonal Commissioner to Resolve Sanitation Issues in Swaroop Reddy Colony

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 23 (Indian Chronicle): Residents of Swaroop Reddy Colony, under the leadership of Colony Welfare Association President Panga Mahender Reddy, submitted a petition to Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta during the Prajvani program on Monday, requesting immediate resolution of ongoing sanitation issues in the colony. The residents explained that the colony is located adjacent to the Warangal National Highway, resulting in frequent movement of people from surrounding areas. Due to this, some individuals from nearby colonies have been dumping



garbage, plastic waste, unusable furniture like sofas, discarded items, and even animal carcasses in the area. This has led to a severe foul smell spreading across the locality. The residents expressed their distress, stating that



the unbearable stench has made it difficult to even pass through the road. They also highlighted that flies and mosquitoes have increased significantly, causing sleepless nights and serious inconvenience to the colony residents. They urged the Zonal Commissioner to take immediate action and ensure justice for the residents by resolving the sanitation problems at the earliest. Responding to the complaint, Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta assured the association members that the sanitation issues in Swaroop Reddy Colony would be addressed promptly and directed the sanitation department officials to take necessary action. Association members including Anya Venkatesh, Gnaneshwar, Santosh, and others were present during the submission of the petition.

Inspected the 10th class examination centers in Wanaparthy town center

“Wanaparthy District Collector Adarsh ??Surabhi” Wanaparthy correspondent Indian Chronicle District Collector Adarsh ??Surabhi has ordered the officials and teachers to take steps to ensure that the tenth class exams conducted in the district are conducted in a peaceful and calm environment without any opportunity for malpractice. On Monday, the District Collector inspected the SSC examination center set up at the Government Boys' High School in Wanaparthy town. On this occasion, he inspected the procedure for writing the exams. When the Collector inquired about the attendance of the students at the examination center, officials said that out of a total of 251 students, 250 attended the English exam held on Monday. On this occasion, the Collector gave key instructions to the officials on the conduct of the exams. He ordered that a minimum distance be maintained between students. It was clarified that no mobile phones should be allowed in the examination center. He ordered that checks should be carried out on students and steps should be taken to ensure that the examinations are conducted in a transparent and peaceful environment. Similarly, he advised the officials to be vigilant to ensure that no mistakes are made in the conduct of the examinations and to make all arrangements so that the students do not face any difficulties. District Education Officer Abdul Ghani, examination center staff, other officials and others were with the Collector.



Budget is a tough sell for BCs under Congress government

TRP protests flare up in Wanaparthy district Kamareddy promises declaration why Wanaparthy district Rajyadhikari party Agriy



“Wanaparthy Correspondent Indian Chronicle” Wanaparthy district center protest rally under the auspices of Telangana Rajyadhikari party. Telangana Rajyadhikari Party (TRP) has taken out a massive protest in Wanaparthy district against the injustice done to BCs in the budget. According to Kamareddy declaration, the Congress government, which promised to allocate Rs. 20,000 crore annually, is currently allocating only Rs. 12,000 crore. Party district president Dande Vijay Yadav criticized the BCs for defrauding them. He said that giving only 6 percent of funds to BCs, which are 60 percent, is against social justice. Rally with black badges on this

occasion Organized and offered a prayer to the Ambedkar statue The document was submitted. The government has stated its position. Statewide protests if things don't change District President Dande Vijay said that he will do it. Yadav informed on this occasion. This Telangana Rajyadhikara Party in the programme District President Dande Vijay Yadav, District Chief Secretary Pujari Swamy, District leaders Balraj Sagar, Chirla Krishnasagar, Satyam Sagar, Nayak Shiva, Tadiparthi Arun Kumar, Tadiparthi Devender Tadiparthi M D Malik, Edula Sathartha Bhanu prakash, Apparala Vishnu Sagar, Apparala Mahesh, Gopal Pet Mandal President Dandu Ramulu and others warned.

Grand Launch of CC Road Construction Works in Samala Village with Rs 3 Lakh under MGNREGS

– A Step Towards Rural Development

“Indian Chronicle” Jade Srinivas. March, 23 “CC road construction works worth 3 lakh have been formally launched in Samala village of Wankidi mandal under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The works were inaugurated by village Sarpanch Vadugure Santosh, who performed traditional rituals and broke a coconut to mark the commencement of the project. The event was held in a festive atmosphere with active participation from villagers. Speaking on the occasion, Sarpanch Vadugure Santosh emphasized the importance of developing basic infrastructure in rural areas. He stated that proper roads not only improve transportation facilities but also make daily life easier for students, farmers, and the elderly. He added that the construction of CC roads would help eliminate the difficulties faced during the rainy season due to muddy roads. He further mentioned that the MGNREGS funds are being effectively utilized for the development of the village and assured that more development works would be taken up in the future to transform the village into a model one. Mandal Congress Party President Gurnule Narayana, who attended the program, highlighted the need for continuous development in rural areas and called upon people to cooperate in such initiatives. Congress Party Seva Dal District President Gurnule Mengaji, Mandokar



Dadaji, Deputy Sarpanch Naga Bhushan, Sarpanch Bhim Rao, Pandirra Gundayya, Pentu, Durgam Jeevan, Youth President Uppula Krishna, Usha, and other leaders also spoke on the occasion, stressing the importance of improving infrastructure in villages. The event witnessed the participation of Congress party leaders, workers, village elders, women, and youth in large numbers. Villagers expressed happiness over the initiation of the CC road construction, stating that it would significantly improve transportation and ease daily activities. They also hoped for more such development initiatives in the future.

Preventive Arrest of BJP Leaders Heading for Assembly Siege

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 23 (Indian Chronicle): BJP leaders and activists from Uppal, who were proceeding to participate in the Assembly siege program to raise their voices democratically on public issues, were preventively arrested and shifted to the Uppal Police Station. Among those arrested were BJP State OBC official spokesperson Vemulakonda Somashekar Goud, BJP Medchal District Urban spokesperson Singaram Karthik, along with leaders Telangana Sampath, Theega Vittal Rao, Reddy Gari Devender Reddy, and Rachakonda Shivakumar, among others. Speaking on the occasion, the leaders alleged that the Congress government is suppressing the voice of the people and demanded an end to what they



termed its stubborn attitude. They stated that they were heading to make the Assembly siege program successful following the call given by BJP State President M. Ramachandra Rao, demanding the implementation of the six guarantees promised to the poor. They condemned the police action of making preventive arrests, calling it undemocratic and oppressive. They further criticized the state government for failing to implement its promises even after a considerable period, including providing one tola of gold under Kalyana Lakshmi, 74,000 monthly allowance for unemployed youth, and 74,000 pensions for the elderly and single women. The leaders also raised concerns over civic issues, alleging that the municipal authorities have failed to address the increasing mosquito menace and poor sanitation, turning Hyderabad into a “garbage city” and a “mosquito-infested city.” They demanded that the government wake up and fulfill its commitments to the people.

Release Pending Wages of Mission Bhagiratha Workers Or Face Indefinite Strike from March 30: AITUC

“Indian Chronicle” (Jade Srinivas) March, 23. “Demanding the immediate payment of three months' pending wages to Mission Bhagiratha workers, the Mission Bhagiratha Contract Workers Union (AITUC) submitted a representation Monday to District Collector Haritha, Mission Bhagiratha EE Rakesh, and L&T representative Srinivas. Speaking on the occasion, AITUC District General Secretary Boge Upender stated that the authorities should fulfill their earlier assurance and clear



all pending wages by March 29, along with resolving other issues faced by the workers. He warned that if their demands are not met, the workers will be forced to go on an indefinite strike starting from March 30. He further demanded that workers be paid a minimum wage of 26,000 per month, along with one month's salary as a bonus, petrol allowances, and other necessary benefits. He emphasized that if the issues are not addressed immediately, the agitation will be intensified. The program was attended by Mission Bhagiratha Contract Workers Union (AITUC) District Honorary President Atmakuri Chiranjeevi, District President Balesh, and leaders Bhaskar, Sreekanth, Venkatesh, Rakesh, along with others.

She Team Awareness Program on Women's Safety Conducted in Zilla Parishad Secondary School in Batpalli

“Indian Chronicle” Jade Srinivas. March, 23 “Under the directions of Kumuram Bheem Asifabad District SP Nitika Panth and Asifabad ASP Chittaranjan, a She Team awareness program on the safety of girls and women was conducted at the Zilla Parishad Secondary School in Batpalli village of Kagaznagar town. Speaking on the occasion, Kagaznagar She Team In-charge ASI Sunitha educated the students about laws related to women's safety, how to respond during emergencies, the usage of Dial 112, precautions to be taken while using social media, and issues such as eve-teasing and



cybercrime. She advised the girl students to be aware of their rights and move forward with confidence. She also urged them to report immediately if they face any form of harassment. In case of any problems, they were asked to contact the Kagaznagar She Team at 8712670565. The program was attended by Principal In-charge Anand Babu, teachers, and She Team members B. Ramadevi, Srinivas, Sunitha, and others.

BJP Uppal Division President Marineni Phanindra Arrested During Assembly Siege Attempt

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 23 (Indian Chronicle): In protest against the Congress government's failure to address public issues, BJP leaders led by state president Ramachandra Rao staged an Assembly siege on Monday. Acting on his call, Uppal Division BJP President Marineni Phanindra, along with



party leaders, participated in the protest. Defying police restrictions, Marineni Phanindra, Nama Shraavan, Venkat Sai, and Mudiraj managed to reach the Assembly premises. However, they were arrested by the police in front of the Assembly. Speaking on the occasion, Phanindra stated that the Assembly siege was organized under the leadership of State President Ramachandra Rao to question what he described as a corrupt and commission-driven government. He said that leaders from Uppal Division joined the protest as part of this call. He further alleged that the Congress government had deceived the public with false promises and asserted that the BJP would continue its struggle despite arrests. He warned that the people would not forgive the Congress for failing to implement the “six guarantees” promised during elections and added that the party would be taught a lesson in the upcoming Greater elections.

SOUTHERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF T.G. LIMITED
Tender Notice No.13/2025-26 (Paper Notification)
 TGSPDCL intends to float tenders are invited from various contractors having experience for “(Spec.No.T.O. 20/2025-26) - Extension of supply to 90No's 1-Ph each 2kW Domestic load, 2 Nos 3-Ph each 5kW (Street Light) under Cat-VII/A and 2Nos 3-Ph each 5HP (Water Works) under Cat-VI/B to 2BHK Govt. Housing Scheme at Pratap Singaram Village represented by Executive Engineer (DPR) in Peerzaidiguda Section of Ghatkesar Sub Division in Keesara Division of Habsiguda Circle under Capital Works (General category)”, “Spec.No. OKSR- 57/2025-26 - Extension of supply to 1No 3-Ph 49KW LT Cat-II Non-Domestic and Commercial load to M/s Indian Oil Corporation Ltd Rep by Guguloth Srinu at Sy.No.2/A/A, Thimmapally Village in Keesara Section of Keesara Sub-Division in Keesara Division of Habsiguda Circle under Capital Works (General category)”. For further details, please visit www.tgsouthernpower.com.
 Sd/- (P.Venkanna) Superintending Engineer, Operation, Habsiguda Circle.
 R.O.No.:17430-PP/CL/ADVT/11/2025-26, Dt.23-03-2026

Everyone Should Excel in Sports Competitions: Quthbullapur BRS Leader Shambhipur Krishna

Quthbullapur constituency BRS leader Shambhipur Krishna inaugurated a cricket tournament organized by the Vaddera community at Karthikeya Grounds, Bowrampet, under Dundigal Circle. "Speaking on the occasion, he encouraged youth to actively participate and excel in sports competitions. He emphasized that sportsmanship, teamwork, and discipline are more valuable than mere victory. He advised participants to make the best use of such opportunities to showcase their talent and build lasting friendships. "Wishing success to all the teams, he formally declared the tournament open." The event was attended by Gaddapotaram municipal BRS youth leaders Mittu Goud, Gadde Ganesh, Kumar Yadav, Arikela Suresh Mudiraj, and Bowrampet BRS youth leaders Kummari Malleesh, V. Tirupathi, Raju, Balraj, Balu, and others.



Former Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkatrao Preventively Arrested



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 23 (Indian Chronicle):” Former Corporator of Ramanthapur Division, Bandaru Srivani Venkatrao, was preventively arrested by Uppal police while heading to participate in the Assembly siege protest. The protest call was given by State President Ramachandra Rao to question the government over its failure to fulfill promises made to the people. "Speaking on the occasion, Srivani Venkatrao criticized the Congress government, alleging that its corrupt practices and commission-based governance are pushing Telangana into decline, affecting people's livelihoods and creating uncertainty for future generations. She termed the police action of preventing the "Assembly Siege" protest organized by the BJP as undemocratic. She further stated that such arrests would not deter the BJP from holding the government accountable and affirmed that the party will continue its struggle until the promises made to the people are implemented.

SP Nithika Panth Receives Complaints During Prajavani – Directs Officials to Ensure Swift Justice



“Indian Chronicle” Jade Srinivas, March, 23. “Kumuram Bheem Asifabad: District Superintendent of Police Nithika Panth received complaints from petitioners during the Prajavani program held on Monday at the District Police Office. A total of 13 complaints were registered on the occasion. "As part of the program, the SP personally heard the grievances of people who came from various parts of the district and instructed the concerned officials to resolve them promptly as per the law. She spoke over the phone with the respective DSPs, ASPs, and Circle Inspectors to review the status of the complaints and issued necessary directions for their resolution. "The SP emphasized that people should make use of police services without fear, influence, or middlemen, and seek justice through proper legal channels. She stated that the primary aim of the district police is to move closer to the public while maintaining law and order effectively. "She further informed that the Prajavani program is conducted every Monday to directly receive and address public grievances, and urged victims and citizens to utilize this platform for resolving their issues.

Grand Birthday Celebrations of Telangana SC Corporation Chairman Nagari Preetham



— Felicitations with traditional honors under the leadership of Ramanthapur Division Congress President Mohammed Rafiq. “KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 23 (Indian Chronicle):” On the occasion of the birthday of Telangana State SC Corporation Chairman Nagari Preetham, grand celebrations were organized under the leadership of Ramanthapur Division Congress President Mohammed Rafiq. During the event, Nagari Preetham was warmly felicitated with traditional honors and garlands. A cake-cutting ceremony was also held, and birthday wishes were conveyed in a joyful atmosphere. A large number of Congress party lead-

ers, activists, and local residents participated and made the event a success. "Prominent attendees included Congress leaders Mohammed Zakaria, Mohammed Shakeel, Thota Shankar, Surya, Icon Madhu, Swamy, Sai, and Ali Hussain, along with several party workers, all of whom extended their heartfelt birthday wishes to Nagari Preetham. Speaking on the occasion, Mohammed Rafiq stated that since assuming charge as the Chairman of the Telangana SC Corporation, Nagari Preetham has been ensuring that loans are being provided properly to SC beneficiaries. He added that Preetham is taking necessary care in selecting eligible beneficiaries and is striving to ensure justice for all.

Inspection of Nursery Activities in Bambara Village

“Deputy Sarpanch, Jade Santhosh” Indian Chronicle. Jade Srinivas, March, 23. “In Bambara village of Wankidi mandal, the nursery activities being carried out were inspected by the village Deputy Sarpanch, Jade Santhosh. "On this occasion, the Deputy Sarpanch stated that maintaining nurseries is very important for increasing greenery in the village and for protecting the environment in the future. He reviewed the plant cultivation and maintenance activities in the nursery and gave necessary instructions to the concerned staff. "Village Secretary Durgam Dharmiah also participated in the program.



BJP WILL INTENSIFY MOVEMENT AGAINST CONG GOVT'S FAILURES

Hyderabad, Mar 23 :: Telangana State BJP President N Ramchander Rao today strongly condemned the arrests of BJP workers and announced that the party would intensify the movement against the state Congress government's failures, deceptions, and incompetent governance. "He was addressing media at Punjagutta police station where he was taken by police after his arrest. The BJP state chief Rao and hundred of party activists including women were taken into custody when they were proceeding to "siege assembly" in protest against government's failure in implementing guarantees and promises given to people of Telangana. " Rao alleged that even after 26 months of the Congress government coming to power, it has completely ignored the promises and guarantees made to the people. In protest against the state government's attitude, the BJP organized an "Assembly Siege" program today. " He said BJP has organized the assembly siege to question the government and raise the voice of the people. The arrests of our leaders at the assembly was another example of the Congress government's anti-democratic attitude. " Over 800 BJP workers, including 150 women and many Yuva Morcha activists, were illegally arrested and held across nine police stations, he said adding that leaders were placed under house arrest starting from midnight and thousands of workers from various districts were prevented entering into Hyderabad. " He said not a single one of the "Six Guarantees" is reaching the people effectively. Except for free bus travel for women, all other guarantees have been sidelined. The government is merely engaging in false propaganda claiming they have been implemented. " BJP state chief accused the state Congress government of deceiv-



ing all sections of society after coming to power by not fulfilling its promises given to people before elections. He alleged that the Congress Party had released special declarations for farmers, youth, BC, SC, and ST communities, gaining the trust of millions of families. However, after coming to power, the implementation of these guarantees is nowhere to be seen. " Rao said the state government still owes farmers up to Rs 45,000 per acre under the Rythu Bharosa scheme and about Rs 8,000 crores in fee reimbursement dues are pending and educational institutions are withholding students' certificates leaving their futures in uncertainty. " He pointed out that the government is showing utter negligence regarding pensions for the disabled, women's pensions, and retirement benefits for retired employees. " He warned that the party will continue to confront the Congress government, which cheated the people with fraudulent promises and demanded it immediately implement the guarantees and promises made to the people.

Wood Traders Invited for Auction in Kagaznagar

“Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), March 23, “Timber Sale to be Conducted at Vempalli Timber Depot” The Forest Department has announced that a timber sale will be conducted at the Vempalli Timber Depot, located in Kagaznagar village limits of Kagaznagar mandal, Komaram Bheem Asifabad district, on March 24, 2026 (Tuesday) at 11:00 AM. "The sale will be carried out under the supervision of District Forest Officer Mr. Neeraj Kumar Tibrewal, IFS, and Forest Divisional Officer, Kagaznagar, Mr. A. Appaiah, ACF. Officials stated that the auction will be conducted in a fully transparent manner in accordance with Forest Department rules and regulations. "Eligible timber traders and consumers are invited to participate in the sale. Participants are required to strictly adhere to the prescribed terms and conditions. "For details regarding timber types, quantities, auction procedures, and registration, interested parties are advised to contact the Vempalli Timber Depot office. "Officials further stated that the timber sale is being organized with the objective of promoting the sustainable utilization of forest resources and sought the cooperation of all stakeholders. "Date: March 24, 2026 - Time: 11:00 AM" Venue: Vempalli Timber Depot, Kagaznagar Mandal, Komaram Bheem Asifabad District "Regards, -Mohd Issak- CC: DFO, KB Asifabad



Contractor Negligence in Development Works at Church Colony; Water Works MD Orders Action



Uppal Constituency Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy demands immediate execution of works

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 23 (Indian Chronicle):” Despite funds being sanctioned, drainage construction works in Church Colony under Uppal Division have not been initiated by the contractor who secured the project. On Monday, Uppal Constituency Congress In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy, along with former corporator Mandumula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy, visited the colony to review local issues. Residents brought to their notice that the drainage works had not yet begun. Responding immediately, Parameshwar Reddy informed Water Works Managing Director Ashok Reddy about the delay and urged that the contracting agency be blacklisted for failing to execute the work on time. MD Ashok Reddy assured that necessary action would be taken promptly. "Officials to Visit Church Colony" A team of Water Works officials will visit Church Colony on Tuesday under the leadership of officer Pankaj.

The team will assess the situation and take necessary steps to ensure that drainage construction works commence without further delay. "Church Colony President John Wilson, along with Polishetty Sudhakar, Ratna Reddy, Satish, David, Vinod, Lucas, Ludi Reddy, Bhaskar, Sandeep, Vinay, Kiran, Raju, Rayanna, Mary, Sumalatha Reddy, Vinashamma, Rose Mary, Pushpalamma, Lakshma Reddy, Shamyul, Balaswamy, Jai Raj, and others participated in the program.

Surprise Visit to Ensure Hassle-Free Board Exams

“Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), March 23, “District Collector K. Haritha emphasized that the Class 10 (SSC) examinations must be conducted smoothly and peacefully. "On Monday, she conducted a surprise inspection of the SSC examination centre set up at Shantiniketan High School in Eezgaon village of Kagaznagar mandal. "During her visit, the Collector reviewed the examination arrangements in detail and instructed officials to ensure that all necessary measures are in place so that students do not face any inconvenience. "She personally verified whether adequate facilities were provided at the examination centre, including proper seating arrangements, availability of drinking water, electricity, and sanitation facilities such as toilets. "The Collector also directed the invigilators on duty to discharge their responsibilities with sincerity and dedication.



Resolving Public Issues is My Sole Objective Underground Drainage Works Launched in Ward 13: Bhuvanagiri Municipal Chairperson Thangallapalli Srivani Ravikumar

“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 23): Bhuvanagiri Municipal Chairperson Thangallapalli Srivani Ravikumar affirmed that she would always extend her utmost support and cooperation to resolve public issues. On Monday, in Ward 13 of Bhuvanagiri town, the Municipal Chairperson—accompanied by Ward 13 Councillor Gurralla Santhosh Srinivas—formally inaugurated the underground drainage works. Speaking on the occasion, she lauded the development initiatives currently being undertaken under the leadership of State Chief Minister Revanth Reddy as truly commendable. She asserted that the Congress government is, in essence, a “people’s government,” and stated that she is working tirelessly, regarding public service as her primary duty. She further explained that the government’s core objective is to ensure that the benefits of all welfare schemes reach every underprivileged citizen. Furthermore, she pledged to strive for the development of the municipality with the active support and cooperation of Bhuvanagiri MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy. She expressed confidence that his sup-



port and blessings would always be with them, and affirmed that they would develop Bhuvanagiri town by following in his footsteps and adhering to his guidance. MD Mazhar Pasha, Naresh, Sabhar Kar, Venkatesh, ward residents, and others participated in this program.

Inspection of Indiramma House Construction Works in Bambara Village



“(Indian Chronicle” Jade Srinivas. March,23)“On Monday, development activities were reviewed in Bambara village of Wankidi mandal. Under the leadership of Deputy Sarpanch Jade Santosh, the Indiramma house construction of Mesram Indira and her husband Lalaji was inspected. “Village Panchayat Secretary Durgam Dharmiah also participated in the inspection. They examined the slab level of the house construction and reviewed whether the works were being carried out with proper quality and in accordance with government norms. They advised that the construction should be completed at the earliest and that beneficiaries should make proper use of government schemes. Officials stated that they are continuously monitoring development works in the village with the aim of providing better facilities to the people. Mesram Kaudu, Mengre Santosh and others were also present on the occasion.

10th Grade Examinations Must Be Conducted in a Peaceful Atmosphere: Bhaskar Rao, Additional Collector (Local Bodies), Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District

“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 23): Bhaskar Rao, the Additional Collector for Local Bodies, stated that the 10th-grade examinations must be conducted in a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere. On Monday, the Additional Collector inspected the 10th-grade examination center established at the Zilla Parishad High School in the Yadagirigutta Mandal headquarters. On this occasion, the Additional Collector reviewed the administrative arrangements at the examination center as well as the facilities being provided to the students. He issued directives to the concerned officials to conduct the examinations peacefully, without any disruptions, and in a calm environment. He advised the students to write their examinations calmly, without succumbing to any stress or pressure. He inquired about various amenities at the examination center, including drinking water, electricity supply, fans, and other essentials. He further instructed that, once the examinations are concluded, the answer scripts must be transported securely under police protection. “School staff members and others participated in this program.



Applications Received via 'Prajavani' Must Be Resolved Promptly and Without Pending:

Bhaskar Rao, Additional Collector (Local Bodies), Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District



“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 22): Bhaskar Rao, the Additional Collector for Local Bodies, stated that applications received through the ‘Prajavani’ program must be resolved promptly and without allowing them to remain pending. On Monday, during the ‘Prajavani’ session held at the Collectorate conference hall, Additional Collector Bhaskar Rao—accompanied by Additional Collector (Revenue) Venka Reddy—received 52 petitions submitted by citizens from various parts of the district. He directed the concerned officials to conduct timely field-level inspections of the applications received via Prajavani and to resolve them without any delay. He fur-

ther informed that, among the received petitions, 39 pertained to the Revenue Department, 5 to the Divisional Panchayat, and one each to the District Manager (Civil Supplies), District Rural Development, Employment Department, Civil Court, Legal Services Authority, District Marketing Department, Special Deputy Collector (Unit-I), and the Executive Engineer (Panchayat Raj Department). The event was attended by District Revenue Officer Jayamma, ZP CEO Shobha Rani, District Officer Nagireddy, District Panchayat Officer Vishnuvardhan Reddy, and district-level officials from various other departments.

Sri Siddharameswara Temple Throngs with Devotees Performing Special Rituals

“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 23):-Kodakandla Ramagiri Sharma, the temple’s hereditary priest, announced that the renowned pilgrimage site—the Sri Siddha Rameswara Swamy Swayambhu Linga Maha Kshetram in Bikkunur, Kamareddy district (which shines as the “Dakshina Kashi” or Southern Kashi)—was filled with devotees who had flocked from various regions. As the day coincided with Panchami (the fifth lunar day) falling under the Kritika star, devotees fulfilled their vows and received the divine grace of Lord Esvara. Notably, within the temple’s Mukhamandapam (front pavilion), devotees performed Abhishekam rituals for the deity using fruits, Panchamrutam (a sacred mixture of five ingredients), and pure Ganges water. Additionally, various ceremonies such as vehicle worship (Vahana Pujas), Annaprāsana (first feeding ceremonies), and the divine celestial wedding (Kalyanam) of the deity were conducted. From early morning onwards, the temple was bustling with crowds of devotees. Devotees also participated enthusiastically in the Annadanam (free food distribution) program, which is conducted every Monday, and partook of the sacred food offering (Annaprāsadam). The events were attended by priests Kodakandla Siddhagiri Sharma and Nyalakanti Rajeswara Sharma; Temple Executive Officer P.



Sridhar; Reconstruction Committee President T. Limbadri; Vice President A. Dayakar Reddy; and committee members Prabhakar Gupta, Neela Anjaneyulu, among others.

Undertake Sanitation Drives at All Temples in the Town: Bhuvanagiri Municipal Chairperson Tangallapalli Srivani Ravikumar



“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 23):- In view of the upcoming Sri Rama Navami festival, Bhuvanagiri Municipal Chairperson Tangallapalli Srivani Ravikumar visited various temples across Bhuvanagiri town on Monday. Speaking on this occasion, the Honorable Chairperson Tangallapalli Srivani Ravikumar issued directives to the concerned officials to undertake special sanitation drives at all temples and to make all necessary arrangements to ensure that the public faces no inconvenience whatsoever. Honorable Ward Members, officials, political leaders, temple staff, citizens, office staff, and others participated in this program.

Awareness Drive on Water Conservation Held in Suraram Colony on World Water Day Students Urged to Adopt Responsible Water Usage

Quthbullapur, March 23 On the occasion of World Water Day, an awareness program on water conservation was conducted at Zilla Parishad High School in Suraram Colony. Essay writing and drawing competitions were organized for students to highlight the importance of saving water. “Social activist and environmentalist Kola Ravinder Mudiraj attended the event as the chief guest and distributed prizes to the winners. Speaking on the occasion, he stressed that rainwater is the primary source of life and must be preserved. He pointed out that rapid urbanization has turned many areas into “concrete jungles,” preventing rainwater from seeping into the ground. “He warned that unless rainwater is conserved through methods like soak pits, future generations may face severe water scarcity. “Even drilling 600 feet may not yield water if we fail to protect natural resources,” he said, adding that water conservation is everyone’s responsibility. “Highlighting practical measures, he noted that producing one kilogram of rice requires nearly 250 liters of water. He advised using smaller glasses during functions to reduce wastage and reusing water from washing clothes for other household purposes. “Headmistress



Punyavathi also addressed the students, encouraging them to conserve water in daily life. She suggested that after meals, students should use minimal water and wash their hands near plants to support greenery. “Teachers Mallikarjun, Nagaraju, Mahesh Babu, and Jhansi, along with other staff members, participated in the program.

Press Club or Private Club? Allegations of Irregularities and Lack of Transparency



“(Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 23, (Indian Chronicle): “Controversy has erupted over the functioning of the Khammam Press Club, with serious allegations being raised by the Telangana Working Journalists Federation (TWJF-H-2843) district committee. The union claims that the press club, which is meant to serve as a common platform for journalists, is being controlled by a few individuals and run like a “private club.” “District President T. Santosh Chakravarthy and General Secretary Nanabala Ramakrishna submitted a representation to the District Collector, demanding immediate intervention. They alleged that illegal collections ranging from ₹1,000 to ₹3,000 are being made in the name of memberships with-

out any proper rules or issuance of receipts. “The leaders expressed concern over the lack of transparency, stating that no proper accounts or financial records have been disclosed. They also pointed out that no audit of the press club funds has been conducted so far. When questioned about financial details, those in control allegedly resort to intimidation. Further allegations include restricting access to the press club by keeping keys with only a few individuals and denying entry to other journalists. The federation also criticized the exclusion of representatives from other unions in WhatsApp groups by not granting them admin rights, calling it undemocratic. The TWJF leaders

stated that recent incidents of obstructing and threatening journalists amount to a direct attack on press freedom. They demanded that the District Collector immediately initiate a comprehensive inquiry into the alleged irregularities, conduct a proper audit of funds, ensure transparency, and guarantee equal access and rights to all eligible journalists. The federation warned of large-scale protests across the district if their demands are not addressed. “Several members, including district treasurer Arvapalli Nagesh, city president Gentele Kumar, press club president Anthoti Srinivas, and others, were present during the submission of the petition.

Hello Gurgaon, AI chatbot calling: Clear your municipal corporation dues, please



GNS News Agency, March 23

If you live in Gurgaon, you could soon get a phone call — from the civic body of the city. On the other end will be a woman — or a voice that sounds like that of a woman. "Namaste, main Nagar Nigam se baat kar rahi hun", the caller will likely say at the beginning of the conversation. You will be asked your name, and then the caller will tell you what civic dues you have pending. Finally, you will be gently asked if you are facing any problems in paying for civic amenities.

You could be forgiven for wondering if the civic authorities have hired an exceptionally polite and gentle new bunch of recruits to reach out to residents of Gurgaon. In fact, the voice isn't a human at all, it is an artificial intelligence-powered (AI) chatbot. The Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) is preparing to deploy an AI-powered voice that will call residents about their unpaid water and property bills, as well as a range of other issues, such as outdated records. These calls will be followed by WhatsApp messages to the residents, complete with official links, urging them to update details or clear dues. "We will roll out four chatbots in the coming weeks and months, starting with dedicated ones for property and water bills, as well as chatbots linked to sanitation services and street vendors," MCG Additional Commissioner Yash Jaluka told The Indian Express. Jaluka said that of the nearly 1.9 lakh water connections in the city, around 70,000 were not linked to the consumer's property ID — which is the geo-tagged registration of housing plots with the Urban Local Bodies department of the Haryana government. Jaluka said that while in many cases, home addresses and phone numbers are incorrect, some connections are still in the name of the old owners though the properties have changed hands. Setting

the records straight is important because fresh water connection applications will not be processed without these details, Jaluka said.

"The real challenge is not just collecting revenue. It is getting people into the system in the first place," Jaluka said, adding that while the civic body has revenue targets, it does not know how many people will pay up — and when. The data generated by the chatbots by making the calls will help MCG work on resolving such issues, he said. Maintaining that MCG has to understand consumer sentiments, Jaluka said, "If a consumer says his connection is not registered or has wrong details, the bot will help him get it corrected. At the same time, grievances over payment will be recorded and analysed, as we have to understand sentiments. Human intervention will come later." But how will MCG ensure that consumers actually take these calls, when many chatbot numbers come marked as "spam" in a person's phone? "We have corresponded with Truecaller to get the chatbot numbers whitelisted and have official tick marks... This will be done in the case of WhatsApp messages as well. We are working with telecom companies to ensure that a green tick comes with MCG branding when the chatbot calls, even if users have enabled the DND (Do Not Disturb) mode," Jaluka said. The MCG is exploring AI-enabled Pan-Tilt-Zoom (PTZ) cameras that can travel inside water pipelines — scanning for cracks, illegal tapping, silt build-up, and even for tree roots intruding into the system.

The cameras would generate AI-based reports, particularly in unplanned colonies where there are no metered water connections, Jaluka said. The civic body's move is in line with a recent crackdown against unmetered water connections, officials said. On March 16, Jaluka inspected various parts of the city, including Kadipur village at Sector 10, looking for unmetered connections.

If anyone does not have a valid water connection despite multiple warnings and challans, we will be ruthless in disconnecting their supply," he said. On March 17, two sweet shops in Basai saw their water connections snapped after inspectors found unauthorised usage. In other areas, residents were warned that repeat violations could invite challans or disconnections. Calling for collective responsibility, MCG Commissioner Pradeep Dahiya has appealed to residents to actively prevent misuse of water connections. He has also invoked Section 180 of the Haryana Municipal Corporation Act, which makes it the duty of every citizen to report such misuse to the authorities.

'Humane approach': Now, pay only 25% of DJB infra charge to begin house construction in Delhi



GNS News Agency, March 23

In what can be pitched as a step forward to ensure ease of constructing homes in the Capital, the Delhi government has decided to rationalise infrastructure charges. The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) has approved a policy reform to ease the burden of Infrastructure Charges (IFC) — a longstanding hurdle in the construction and redevelopment across the city, said officials. "We were receiving repeated complaints that high IFC was stopping people from building their homes. This was neither fair to citizens nor efficient for the system. We decided to fix it with a practical and humane approach," Water Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh told reporters on Friday.

With the latest revision, consumers and developers will now be able to obtain a provisional No Objection Certificate (NOC) by depositing just 25% of the applicable IFC at the stage of building plan approval. The remaining 75% of the amount will be adjusted later based on the final applicable rates at the time of water connection sanction. Singh said, "We are reshaping the system to suit people, not forcing people to struggle with the system. With just 25% payment, construction of a house can begin. The remaining amount will be fairly adjusted later." The move, officials said, will help the DJB earn revenue and keep a record of consumers and prevent water theft. "In recent years, changes

in IFC calculation methodology, shifting from occupancy-based assessment to floor-area-based charges led to a sharp increase in costs. In many cases, charges rose 5 to even 10 times, creating a heavy financial burden and halting construction and redevelopment activity across Delhi," explained an official. As a result, many property owners were unable to secure NOCs, delaying building approvals and redevelopment projects.

Properties up to 200 square meters remain exempt from IFC while larger plots will benefit from the revised, rationalised framework. The overall IFC liability could be reduced by 50% to 70% in many cases, dramatically easing costs for citizens, said officials. Officials also said that the policy will also have a larger impact and is expected to boost construction and redevelopment activity, generate employment and economic momentum, improve compliance and trust in the public system and promote ease of doing construction in Delhi. Highlighting the broader vision, the Water Minister said, "Our effort is to simplify processes, remove bottlenecks, and empower citizens and developers to move forward without delays. Delhi must become a model of efficient, citizen-friendly governance." The Infrastructure Charges are paid by the buyers to the government during the registration of the property and documentation process for facilities provided by different authorities like water connection, pipeline, sewer line, roads, electricity poles, among others. Currently, these charges vary based on the houses and properties that fall in the category A-H as set by the government. Upscale societies like Jor Bagh, Vasant Vihar, and Safdarjung Enclave come under category 'A', while the least developed places and unauthorised colonies, mostly located in Outer Delhi, fall in the category 'H'. Officials said that the move also helps the residents in seeking hassle free water, sewer and electricity connection while building a new house or building. "Our goal is not to maximise revenue, but to create a fair and balanced system. When people can pay easily, the system becomes stronger," the Minister said.

Only Punjab offers universal health coverage, Centre's Ayushman riddled with riders: CM

GNS News Agency, March 23

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday listed several health sector initiatives his government has taken, announcing that 100 more 'Aam Aadmi Clinics' will become operational this month, with 400 more to follow. He also compared Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojana with Centre's Ayushman Bharat saying that the latter came with several riders attached while state's scheme was universal. Mann said his government started Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojana under which cashless medical treatment of up to Rs 10 lakh will be provided to every family. He said 25 lakh beneficiaries have been registered under the scheme so far and 1.60 lakh people have availed treatment.

To run the scheme smoothly, in the current fiscal, a provision of Rs 1,200 crore has been kept while Rs 2,000 crore has been earmarked for three crore people of state for 2026-27, he said. "As against this, the Centre has earmarked Rs 9,300 crore under the Ayushman scheme for 140 crore people. This means Punjab is spending nearly 10 times more per capita," Mann said and alleged that several conditions under the Ayushman scheme limit the number of beneficiaries.

Raising concern over misinformation, Mann said, "Some anti-Punjab forces who don't want people to benefit from such facilities are spreading canards about this Mukh Mantri Sehat Yo. These misnomers are aimed at discouraging people from availing its benefits, which is unwarranted and undesirable." He added that the Punjab Government has empanelled the majority of private hospitals under the scheme, with government-fixed rates for around 2,600 ailments and treatments. He noted, "Around 900 government and private hospitals in Punjab and Chandigarh have been empanelled. The scheme covers 2,356 medical and surgical procedures, including orthopaedics, general medicine, heart, lung, kidney diseases, cancer treatment, and more." Mann said detailed brochures regarding the Mukh Mantri Sehat scheme will be available in Aam Aadmi Clinics soon. He claimed that 94 per cent of patients have expressed satisfaction with treatment at these clinics, calling it the country's best model. Presenting the health



department's four-year report card, he said previous governments had neglected the health sector, but it has been a key focus sector for the AAP government.

He said that tendering for medical colleges at Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur has been done. "All formalities have been completed. For a medical college in Malerkotla, land has been procured, and on Eid, I will visit Malerkotla and will gift it to the people," he said. About the Aam Aadmi Clinics, Mann said that 883 are operational, and 100 more will be dedicated on March 28 and 400 more clinics are being set up, he said. The CM said the number of people visiting the OPD in the Aam Aadmi Clinics has crossed five crore. He said 948 general doctors and 627 specialist doctors have been recruited during the past four years. "The recruitment alone constitutes 35 per cent of the total strength of government doctors. Earlier, even medicines were not available in government hospitals," he said. Mann gave details about several other initiatives taken by his government in the health sector. He said 22 critical care blocks are under construction, and each block has a 50-bed capacity. The CM said the government has introduced first-of-its-kind artificial intelligence-enabled screening devices for early detection of breast cancer, cervical cancer, and refractive errors. Highlighting preventive health initiatives, he said, "Under the CM Ki Yogshala campaign, 8,000 yoga sessions are held daily, benefiting around 2 lakh people."

Espionage racket busted: 5 Juveniles among 9 held for sharing photos, videos, GPS coordinates of sensitive locations with foreign handlers, say cops

GNS News Agency, March 23

Four men were arrested and five juveniles detained on Friday for allegedly running a cross-border espionage network that filmed military establishments, railway stations and other sensitive installations across the country and transmitted photographs, videos and GPS coordinates to foreign handlers, the Ghaziabad police said. Officers said that the main accused — identified as Naushad Ali, a resident of Bihar's Muzaffarpur, and Sameer alias Shooter from Bhagalpur — are currently at large.

Officers said Suhail Malik, identified as the alleged key handler of the gang, was arrested earlier. "The accused arrested on Friday were identified as Ganesh (20) from Nepal's Gulmi district; Vivek (18) from Bihar's Purnia; Gagan Kumar Prapat (22) from Uttar Pradesh's Meerut; and Durgesh Nishad (26) who lives in Navi Mumbai but hails from Uttar Pradesh's Jaunpur," an officer said.

Additional Commissioner of Police (Ghaziabad) Raj Karan Nayyar said that on March 14, officers at Kaushambi police station were informed that some people were sharing videos and photos of railway stations and other important locations with some foreign numbers, and that they were recruiting other youths for such jobs too. "Six people were arrested. An SIT was formed. Names of 11 people emerged. Nine of them were held on Friday," he said. Police said the six accused arrested earlier included a woman and that footage and locations of sensitive locations were found on their phones. The ADCP said that the accused revealed that they were "assigned tasks" by people operating from other countries. "They had set up some solar-powered CCTV cameras. Further investigation is underway." Police said two of these CCTV cameras were secretly installed at Delhi Cantonment and Sonapat railway stations, and the accused



shared the feed with handlers abroad in real time. A case was registered under BNS sections 61(2) and 152 and sections 3 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act, police said. According to the police, the accused had installed a special application on their phones for transmission of GPS coordinates, and had been trained virtually by the foreign handlers.

Police said the network was also engaged in another fraud. Members would share OTPs using Indian SIM cards — obtained through snatching, purchase from agents, or using ones registered in their own or family members' names — enabling the foreign handlers to run WhatsApp accounts linked to Indian numbers. Payment for each task ranged from Rs 500 to Rs 15,000, and was routed through UPI, but collected as cash from Jan Seva Kendras and shops, to make sure there is no financial trail. Police said the gang specifically recruited "technically skilled but financially desperate" young men, mobile mechanics, CCTV operators and computer technicians. "The network had planned to plant hidden cameras at 50 more locations across the country. Investigators are trying to identify these spots," said an officer.

Tata Steel commissions Rs 3,200-cr project in Punjab, adds EAF route to produce steel

GNS News Agency, March 23

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday inaugurated Tata Steel's scrap-based electric arc furnace (EAF) built with an investment of nearly Rs 3,200 crore. "This is a momentous day as history has been created to give a major fillip to the economic development of the state. Today, Punjab has become the first state in India to start steel production using green energy through this electric arc furnace-based plant. It is a red-letter day for Punjab as Tata Steel has taken responsibility to illuminate the future of 2,600 to 2,700 families directly, and 8,000-10,000 indirectly. This world-class plant is equipped with cutting-edge green energy technology," Mann said.

The 0.75 million tonne per annum (mtpa) scrap-based facility is designed to achieve CO2 emissions less than 0.3 tonnes per tonne of steel, Tata Steel said in a statement. It said, Friday marked a historic milestone in the company's journey toward sustainable steelmaking with the introduction of its scrap-based EAF facility at Hi-Tech Valley, Ludhiana. "As India accelerates its transition towards a climate-resilient future, sustainability has become a national imperative — one that demands urgent, collective action. The EAF reflects Tata Group's long-term commitment to building a greener, more resilient industrial future," Tata Steel chairman N Chandrasekaran said. TV Narendran, CEO and managing director of Tata Steel, and other senior government officials and company representatives were present at the event. "The Ludhiana EAF marks a defining milestone in Tata Steel's journey towards achieving net zero by 2045. It reflects how Tata Steel is rethinking capital investment for the circular economy by backing technologies that reduce resource intensity, while remaining globally competitive," Narendran said, thanking the Punjab government for its support. Designed to support low-carbon steelmaking, the plant will use nearly 50 per cent renewable energy.

The facility will use 100 per cent steel scrap as raw material, sourcing 40 per cent scrap from the company's steel recycling plant in Rohtak, Haryana. The plant would produce construction-grade steel rebar under the company's flagship retail brand, "Tata Tisco", which would enable Tata Steel to further augment its market presence in the construction segment. Speaking on the occasion, Mann drew a sharp contrast with previous governments, asserting that industries that once left Punjab due to "flawed policies" are now returning under a "pro-industry regime". Congratulating



the Tata Steel team, he said, "When a company like Tata Steel invests in a state, it reflects trust, confidence and belief in its future. Tata Steel's presence sends a clear message that Punjab is ready for the next phase of industrial growth. This investment is not just a project, but an opportunity for the youth of Punjab, our engineers, our skilled workforce and for Punjab's manufacturing sector to grow stronger".

Emphasising the future vision, the chief minister said, "Punjab has always been a land of entrepreneurs and cities like Ludhiana are globally recognised for their entrepreneurial spirit, hard work and manufacturing strength. With modern facilities like this Tata Steel plant, we are strengthening our legacy and preparing Punjab for the future of manufacturing". Reiterating the government's industrial vision, he asserted, "We want Punjab to become one of the most preferred industrial destinations in India. We want companies to see Punjab not just as a market, but as a long-term manufacturing partner. "Tata Group is globally known for its social responsibility, and Ratan Tata had always led from the front in this regard." Recalling a personal example, he shared that Ratan Tata had even started a dog shelter at Bombay House for stray dogs after seeing them struggle during the monsoon. Describing him as the 'Desh ka Beta', Mann said that when he passed away, the entire nation mourned. Punjab is proud to be the first state to start steel production using green energy, he added. "Punjab is ready, it welcomes investment and supports industry that creates jobs and strengthens the economy. Every new factory and investment helps the state move closer to generating employment. When industries grow, Punjab grows, and when Punjab grows, the country grows," he added.

Two protected Indian roofed turtles rescued in Baddi, shop owner booked

GNS News Agency, March 23

A local shop owner in Himachal Pradesh's Baddi was booked on Thursday for unlawfully keeping two Indian roofed turtles, protected under Schedule-1 of The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, police said on Friday. The turtles were rescued and handed over to the Wildlife Department, they said.

Police said the accused shop owner, Charanjit Arora, was booked under sections 9, 39, 40, 51 and 57 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, at the Baddi police station. Schedule 1 of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, provides the highest level of protection to endangered species against hunting, poaching, and trade. Violations involving these species attract the harshest penalties, including 3-7 years of imprisonment and significant fines. According to officials, the turtles, kept in highly unsuitable conditions in a small aquarium, lacked essential provisions like basking space and UV light. As a result, both animals showed visible signs of health deterioration, including shell-related infections. One of the turtles is a juvenile, only a few months old, while the other is an adult, around 10 years old. The action was initiated based on an online complaint by Sahil Sharma, an environmentalist and wildlife rescuer from Rajpura, Punjab, who has actively been involved in rescuing and protecting wildlife and raising awareness against illegal wildlife trade



Upon verifying the information, Sahil promptly took up the matter with Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Vikalp Yadav, who deputed Range Officer Negi to assist in the operation.

across the north region, officials said. Upon verifying the information, Sahil promptly took up the matter with Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Vikalp Yadav, who deputed Range Officer Negi to assist in the operation.

'No street vendors shall be allowed...': SC orders status quo at Bhadra Plaza

out an eviction drive at the Bhadra Plaza area during which street vendors were evicted. Highlighting public safety, traffic and law and order implications of permitting vending at Bhadra Plaza area, one of the most congested and historic parts of Ahmedabad, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the AMC, urged the apex court to intervene in the matter, said a lawyer connected with the matter. Posting the matter for further hearing on April 6, the Supreme Court bench ordered, "In the meanwhile, status quo, as on date, shall be maintained by the parties. No street vendor shall be allowed to operate from the carriageway." HC order The High Court on March 13 had directed that the 586 certified street vendors be "immediately placed" back in the designated vending zone at the Bhadra Plaza area by March 21. The court had also rejected the submissions of the AMC that the interim arrangement for relocation of street vendors, made following the HC order of October 16, 2025, had to be continued till the survey and preparation of a new plan for identification of the Bhadra Plaza area as a vending zone and rehabilitation/relocation of the certified street vendors are completed by the corporation. The High Court had also directed the Municipal Commissioner of the AMC to file a personal affidavit of compliance with the directions of the court. The HC order came on two PILs moved by Self Employed Labour Organisation (SELO) and Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). The petitioners had submitted that almost 506 street vendors had been carrying on their trade of selling goods in and around the three gates of Bhadra Fort for about 45 to 50 years — and that it was a 'natural market'.

GNS News Agency, March 23

In a relief to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), the Supreme Court has ordered status quo at the Bhadra Plaza area while adding that "no street vendor shall be allowed to operate from the carriageway". A three-judge bench of the Supreme Court comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Justice Vipul Pancholi passed the order while considering the petition moved by the AMC challenging a March 13 order of the Gujarat High Court.

Acting on two public interest litigations, a division bench of the High Court had given a range of directions to the AMC including to put up all the certified street vendors at their designated places in the vending zone at Bhadra Plaza area latest by March 21. In October 2025, the AMC had carried

Gurgaon clubs grenade attack case: Delhi Police arrest sharpshooter from Rajasthan after multi-state chase

GNS News Agency, March 23

A key accused and sharpshooter linked to the Rohit Godara-Jitender Gogi gang has been arrested for his alleged involvement in the Gurgaon nightclubs grenade attack case, the Delhi Police said. The police identified the accused as Karamvir alias Kaju, 38, and said he was apprehended from Rajasthan on March 11, after an extensive chase across multiple states. Narra Chaitanya, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell), said that Karamvir is accused of playing a crucial role in the December 2024 grenade attack on two clubs in Gurgaon, allegedly carried out as part of an extortion plot targeting business owners. He said the attack was orchestrated on the instructions of foreign-based gangsters Rohit Godara and Goldy Brar. The case was later taken over by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the stringent provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Explosive Substances Act. Karamvir, a resident of Jhajjar in Haryana, is an alleged close aide of Godara and is involved in over 15 criminal cases, including murder, attempt to murder, extortion, and Arms Act violations across Delhi and Haryana, the police said.

According to the police, Karamvir was granted interim bail in a murder case in June 2024 but failed to surrender after the bail period ended. He was declared a proclaimed offender in May 2025 and had been absconding since then.



During this period, he allegedly changed locations frequently, even fleeing to Nepal for nearly a year before returning to India in September 2025. Acting on intelligence inputs, a Special Cell team led by Inspector Neeraj Kumar tracked his movements across several states, including Haryana and Rajasthan. He was arrested from a hotel along NH-08 in Kotputli, Rajasthan, and was travelling in a Hyundai Venue, the officer said. The police said they recovered a fake passport from his possession, along with two forged Aadhaar cards and a fake voter ID, which Karamvir allegedly used to evade detection. Officials said he was planning to flee abroad after carrying out further criminal assignments.

Timely March rain rescues Punjab wheat crop, raises bumper harvest hope



GNS News Agency, March 23

A timely intermittent spell of rainfall across Punjab and Haryana since March 15 has brought major relief to wheat farmers, significantly improving crop conditions and raising hopes of a bumper harvest. The change in weather comes after an intense heat wave around March 12, when temperatures had surged to unusually high levels for this time of the year. Around March 12, several parts of Punjab recorded daytime temperatures between 34°C and 37°C, nearly 5–6°C above normal, while night temperatures remained relatively high at 15°C to 19°C. These conditions had started to resemble late April rather than early March and had raised concerns among farmers, as the wheat crop was in the crucial grain-filling stage. Such high temperatures during this phase can lead to shrinking of grains and early ripening, ultimately affecting yield.

However, the weather has changed sharply over the past few days. As per the latest observations on March 20, maximum temperatures in Punjab have dropped significantly, ranging mostly between 18°C and 24°C, which is 6°C to 10°C below normal in many areas. For instance, Chandigarh recorded a maximum of 18.8°C, Ludhiana 21.6°C, and Ferozepur around 24.1°C. At the same time, minimum temperatures have also declined, falling to 10°C to 16°C, with Gurdaspur recording as low as 10°C.

This sharp fall in temperatures, around 13°C to 18°C from March 12 to March 20, has been accompanied by widespread rainfall. Several districts have received light to moderate showers, with places like Rupnagar receiving 33.5 mm rain on Friday, Chandigarh receiving around 9.4 mm, while other regions also reported measurable precipitation. The rain, combined with cooler temperatures, has created ideal conditions for wheat growth at a critical stage. According to Dr Gurjeet Singh Brar, Director of the Punjab Agriculture Department, no crop loss has been reported so far except lodging in few patches which can improve if proper sunshine is witnessed in coming days. Instead, the rainfall has proved highly beneficial. He explained that the earlier heat in the second week of March could have caused grain shrinkage, but the timely rain helped stabilize temperatures and supported proper grain filling. Another major benefit of this rainfall has been significant water savings. During the heatwave around March 12, farmers would have needed frequent irrigation to protect their crops from stress. However, the recent rains have reduced the need for irrigation, improved soil moisture, and lowered evaporation losses.

This has helped conserve groundwater, which is a critical concern in Punjab.

At present, crop conditions across the state are reported to be healthy, and experts believe that if the weather remains stable, Punjab could be heading towards a bumper wheat crop this year. The combination of early heat followed by timely rainfall has, in fact, created favourable conditions for better yield. However, experts have also issued a word of caution. If this rain spell continues beyond March 25, it could become harmful. Excess rain in the later stages of crop maturity, especially if accompanied by strong winds, may lead to lodging of the crop, increased moisture, and delayed harvesting. Farmers, particularly in low-lying areas, have been advised to ensure proper drainage to prevent waterlogging. Overall, the current weather has acted as a timely intervention, protecting the wheat crop from heat stress, saving irrigation water, and strengthening the prospects of a good harvest, provided the rainfall does not extend for too long.

ED attaches Pearls Group assets worth Rs 5,046 cr

GNS News Agency, March 23

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday claimed to have executed its highest attachment in a single case, worth over Rs 22,000 crore, with fresh freezing of properties in its money laundering investigation against Chandigarh-based PACL (Pearls Group), accused of orchestrating a Rs 48,000 crore ponzi scheme.

The federal agency said it has attached 126 immovable properties located in Punjab and Delhi. A provisional order has been issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach the assets valued at Rs 5,046.91 crore.

With this attachment, the agency has, so far, attached properties worth a total of Rs 22,656.91 crore, including assets located in India and abroad, belonging to PACL and its related entities and persons, it said. This is the highest attachment in a single case and a major milestone for ED as part of the anti-money laundering regime, agency officials said.

The ED probe stems from an FIR registered by the CBI in 2014 against PACL Ltd, its late promoter Nirmal Singh Bhango and other individuals. The CBI FIR came on the directions of the Supreme Court. Bhango died in August 2024.

"Charge-sheets filed by the CBI named 33 accused, including individuals and companies, for orchestrating an illegal collective investment scheme," the ED said. The accused entities and individuals of PACL operated an "illegal" collective investment scheme, fraudulently mobilising more than Rs 60,000 crore from lakhs of investors across India under the guise of sale and development of agricultural land, according to the ED.

2 Punjabi men deported from Canada amid crackdown on extortion networks



GNS News Agency, March 23 Two men from Punjab, allegedly linked to a violent extortion network targeting South Asian businesses in Edmonton, Canada, have been deported from the country, even as a nationwide crackdown has led to 35 deportations since August 2025. The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) has stepped up enforcement since August 2025, initially focusing on the Pacific and Prairie regions before expanding operations to the Greater Toronto Area by November. The agency said on Wednesday that as of March 12, 2026, it had initiated 372 immigration investigations related to extortion networks, issued 70 removal orders, and enforced 35 deportations.

Arshdeep Singh, 22, an Indian national who entered Canada on a study permit in 2022, was deported on January 19, 2026, while Sukhnaaz Singh Sandhu, 25, who had been in Canada since 2016 and was previously linked to the Ruffians gang in Surrey, British Columbia, was sent back on February 3, 2026. Both had been detained in November 2025 and were later found inadmissible by the Immigration and Refugee Board for membership in a criminal organisation involved in extortion, arson, drug trafficking and firearm offences. The deportations were carried out by the Canada Border Services Agency under escort, with offi-

cials opting for immigration enforcement over criminal prosecution in these cases to expedite the disruption of the network. The action is part of 'Project AI Extortion', a joint operation launched in 2025 by the Edmonton Police Service in collaboration with the Alberta RCMP, Alberta Law Enforcement Response Teams, and the CBSA, following a resurgence of extortion-related incidents in the city. Investigators have identified a wider network of over 50 individuals allegedly linked to the scheme.

According to police, the network employed intimidation tactics through messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, often escalating to arson attacks, shootings or other forms of violence when demands were not met. Authorities said the group actively recruited newly arrived foreign students and temporary workers, particularly from South Asian communities, as low-level operatives, warning that involvement could lead to criminal charges, imprisonment and deportation. Project AI Extortion builds on an earlier crackdown, 'Project Gaslight', which concluded in 2024 after targeting similar extortion and arson activities against Edmonton's South Asian community and resulting in multiple arrests and convictions. While incidents had briefly declined after that operation, police said there was a resurgence in spring 2025, prompting fresh coordinated action.

Investigators have also pointed to inter-provincial links, including connections to extortion cases elsewhere in Canada and a Canada-wide warrant linked to a shooting at an acreage in Parkland County. Officials said the crackdown is part of a broader strategy to dismantle transnational extortion rings, many of which are believed to have links across provinces such as British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, and often target South Asian-owned businesses through threats and violence. The police have urged victims to come forward, saying community cooperation has been critical in advancing investigations and curbing the networks.

UT proposes changes to property Act to curb building violations

GNS News Agency, March 23

It also aims to strengthen enforcement and regulate property misuse across the Union Territory. The Chandigarh Property Act amendment proposes stricter penalties to curb building violations. The Chandigarh Administration has proposed amendments to The Capital of Punjab (Development & Regulation) Act, 1952, aiming to strengthen control over property misuse and building violations across the Union Territory. The proposal introduces a structured penalty mechanism under Section 13, backed by a newly inserted Third Schedule. Titled The Capital of Punjab (Development and Regulation) (Amendment) Bill, 2025, the proposal seeks to address long-standing concerns over unauthorised construction, misuse of residential and commercial properties, and weak enforcement mechanisms.

Penalties will be graded based on the nature of violations and type of property, ranging from Rs 3 to Rs 10 per sq ft per day. The total penalty will be capped at 20 per cent of the property value assessed at prevailing collector rates, except in cases related to Sections 11 (trees) and 12 (advertisements). Violators will be required to pay penalties within 30 days, failing which interest at 1 per cent per month will be levied. The administration will also have the power to recover dues as arrears of land revenue, strengthening enforcement.

The Third Schedule specifies category-wise penalties, with higher rates for industrial and commercial properties and relatively lower slabs for residential, institutional and apartment buildings. Separate provisions were also included



for tree-related violations, where penalties may go up to Rs 1 lakh, and for advertisement violations as per existing control orders. Apart from introducing stricter penalties, the amendment aims to bring clarity by defining categories such as residential, commercial, institutional, apartments, and industrial/warehouse buildings. UT officials say the move is part of a broader effort to curb rising violations and bring greater discipline in urban planning and land use. If approved, the amendments are expected to significantly enhance enforcement, deter misuse through financial penalties, and strengthen regulatory oversight in the city. The proposal, vetted by the Law Department and approved by the UT Administrator, was forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Additional information sought by the Ministry has already been furnished.

Mohali wedding house theft: police arrest domestic help, three others



GNS News Agency, March 23

According to the complaint, the family had gathered in Mohali to attend a wedding when a case with gold jewellery and valuables was stolen from a room. According to the complaint, the family had gathered in Mohali to attend a wedding when a case with gold jewellery and valuables was stolen from a room. Police in Mohali cracked a high-value theft case involving a wedding house in Sector 77 and arrested four accused including a domestic help who allegedly masterminded the crime on Friday. City SP Dilpreet Singh told the media the incident took place on February

14, 2026, at House No 484. A case was registered at Sohana police station the following day based on a complaint by one Parshottam Vashisht. According to the complaint, the family had gathered in Mohali to attend a wedding when a case with gold jewellery and valuables was stolen from a room.

During investigation, police found the help, Neha Dhamija, was providing inside information about the valuables to her associates. Dhamija was working as the caretaker of a baby in the house for the past four to five months. Special teams of CIA staff and local police were constituted on the directions of senior officers, the SP said, adding that "the accused were traced and arrested from McLeodganj (Himachal Pradesh) and Ludhiana". Police have seized around 37 tolas of gold jewellery, Rs 1.5 lakh in cash, a .30 bore pistol along with two live cartridges and a Swift Dzire car which was used in the crime, the officer said. The SP said, "The case highlights how insider involvement played a key role in the crime. Swift coordination and technical surveillance helped us crack the case." According to the SP, police investigations also revealed that part of the stolen money was used to purchase an illegal weapon. During questioning, it was revealed that the accused threw some of the stolen items into the Neelon canal to mislead investigators and destroy evidence.

'I was unaware of his other side': After stepping down as women's panel head, Rupali Chakankar denies wrongdoing amid Ashok Kharat row

She denied any wrongdoing and called for a fair investigation. Rupali Chakankar has resigned as Maharashtra Women's Commission chief amid the Ashok Kharat controversy. Rupali Chakankar, who resigned as the chairperson of the Maharashtra State Women's Commission on Friday amid a controversy over her alleged links to self-styled godman Ashok Kharat, who was arrested on charges of rape, claimed that she was "unaware of his other side" and that she was being targeted because she was a woman. Speaking to reporters after submitting her resignation to Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar, Chakankar claimed that her association with Ashok Kharat's trust was rooted in her family's long-standing connection to the Warkari tradition. "However, I was unaware of his other side. How can anyone know what a person will do or how they will act in the future? Many people have photos with Kharat,

but it hurts that I am being specifically targeted and accused because I am a woman," the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader said. Kharat was arrested on March 17 after a woman accused him of sexually assaulting her multiple times between 2022 and 2025 after gaining her trust by claiming divine powers. Following his arrest, photos surfaced showing Chakankar with Kharat, including one where she is seen holding an umbrella over him and another where she is allegedly performing a ritual. She has also been accused of threatening a local reporter who had earlier exposed Kharat. Chakankar admitted to considering Kharat and his wife as spiritual gurus, but emphasised that the videos currently circulating are nearly six years old. "The video of the padya-pujan (washing of feet) is from five to six years ago. My husband and I attended programmes at the trust out of spiritual faith.

How Trump's stated reasons, goals and timeline for Iran war have shifted



GNS News Agency, March 23

U.S. President Donald Trump and his top officials have offered shifting objectives and reasons for the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, which critics say shows a lack of planning for the conflict and its aftermath. Stated objectives and expected timeline have varied, including toppling Iran's government, weakening Iran's military, security and nuclear capabilities and its regional influence, as well as supporting Israeli interests. The Iranian people should "take over" governance of their country, Mr. Trump said in a video on social media as the U.S. and Israel launched their attacks. "It will be yours to take," he added. "This will be probably your only chance for generations."

Mr. Trump said Washington would deny Iran the ability to have a nuclear weapon, although Tehran has insisted its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. Iran does not have nuclear weapons while the United States does. Israel is also widely believed to be the only Middle Eastern country with nuclear weapons. Mr. Trump insisted he would end what he described as Tehran's ballistic missile threat. "We're going to destroy their missiles and raze their missile industry to the ground," he said. "We're going to annihilate their navy." Mr. Trump claimed Iran's long range missiles "can now threaten our very good friends and allies in Europe, our troops stationed overseas, and could soon reach the American homeland." His remarks echoed the case of President George W. Bush for the Iraq war, which had false claims. Neither experts nor U.S. intelligence support Mr. Trump's assertions and both assess that Iran's ballistic missile program was years from threatening the U.S. homeland.

"We're already substantially ahead of our time projections. But whatever the time is, it's okay. Whatever it takes," Mr. Trump said at the White House. In a social media post, Mr. Trump said there was a "virtually unlimited supply" of U.S. munitions and that "wars can be fought for-

ever," and very successfully, using just these supplies." In a notification to Congress, Mr. Trump provided no timeline. Mr. Trump earlier told the Daily Mail the war could take "four weeks, or less," then told The New York Times four to five weeks and subsequently said it could take longer. March 2: Rubio says U.S. attacked Iran because Israel did. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters Israel's determination to attack Iran forced Washington to strike. "We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action, we knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn't preemptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties," Mr. Rubio said. March 3: Trump contradicts Rubio. Mr. Trump said he ordered U.S. forces to join Israel's attack on Iran because he believed Iran was about to strike first. "I might have forced their [Israel's] hand," Mr. Trump said. "If we didn't do it, they [Iran] were going to attack first." March 4: Call to 'destroy' security infrastructure. Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth said the goal was to "destroy Iranian offensive missiles, destroy Iranian missile production, destroy their navy and other security infrastructure." March 6: 'Unconditional surrender' call. "There will be no deal with Iran except UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER," Mr. Trump wrote on social media.

March 8-11: Just the start but also 'pretty much complete'. Mr. Hegseth told CBS News in an interview aired March 8 strikes on Iran were "only just the beginning." A day later, Mr. Trump told the same network "I think the war is very complete, pretty much." "We've already won in many ways, but we haven't won enough," Mr. Trump told reporters later on the same day. When asked if the war was beginning or complete, he said: "Well, I think you could say both." On March 11, Mr. Trump again said he thought the U.S. had won but: "We've got to finish the job." March 13: Softens call for internal uprising. In a March 13 interview, Mr. Trump told Fox News the war will end "when I feel it in my bones." Mr. Trump softened his call for Iranians to topple their government. "So I really think that's a big hurdle to climb for people that don't have weapons," Mr. Trump said. Mr. Hegseth said Washington was not setting a time frame for the war and Mr. Trump would decide when to stop. "We wouldn't want to set a definitive time frame," the Pentagon chief said. "It will be at the president's choosing, ultimately, where we say, 'Hey, we've achieved what we need to.'" March 20: Trump considers winding down but no ceasefire. Mr. Trump posted on Truth Social that "we are getting very close to meeting our objectives as we consider winding down our great Military efforts" in the Iran war. Earlier in the day, Mr. Trump told reporters "I don't want to do a ceasefire" when asked about the war.

U.S. judge blocks restrictive Pentagon press access policy

GNS News Agency, March 23

A federal judge on Friday blocked the Trump administration's restrictive Pentagon press access policy, which threatens journalists with being "branded security risks" if they seek information not authorized for public release. The lawsuit by the New York Times in Washington, D.C., federal court alleged that policy changes by the Defence Department last year gave it free rein to freeze out reporters and news outlets over coverage the department did not like, in violation of the Constitution's protections for free speech and due process. The government disputed that characterisation and said the policy is reasonable and necessary for national security. U.S. District Judge Paul Friedman said in his ruling that he recognized the importance of protecting troops and war plans but that it was "more important than ever that the public have access to information from a variety of perspectives about what its government is doing" in light of President Donald Trump's recent "incursion" into Venezuela and war with Iran.

The Pentagon and the New York Times did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the ruling. The government is likely to appeal. The changes approved under Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth in October 2025 state that journalists can be deemed security risks and have their press badges revoked if they solicit unauthorised military personnel to disclose classified, and in some cases unclassified, information. Of the 56 news outlets in the Pentagon Press Association, only one agreed to sign an acknowledgment of the new policy, according to the Times' lawsuit. Reporters who did not sign surrendered their press passes.

The Pentagon assembled a new press corps consisting of pro-Trump outlets and media personalities after the exodus of reporters, which the Times said was evidence that the policy was aimed at stifling unflattering coverage. The policy states that publishing sensitive information "is gen-



erally protected by the First Amendment" but says soliciting that information could be considered by officials when determining whether a reporter poses a "security or safety risk." In its lawsuit, the Times said the policy unlawfully restricts essential newsgathering techniques and gives the Pentagon "unfettered" discretion to revoke passes, permitting it to impose the type of "viewpoint-based" press restrictions forbidden by the Constitution. Justice Department lawyers acknowledged the policy was partly subjective but said press credentialing decisions were still governed by neutral, objective criteria. The government also said soliciting military personnel to commit a crime by disclosing unauthorised information was not legally protected speech. The policy change was criticised by journalism advocates, who called it another "attack on the free press by Mr. Trump and his administration. The Associated Press has a pending lawsuit against Trump administration officials over its removal from the White House press corps after the news agency decided to continue using the Gulf of Mexico's established name, while acknowledging Mr. Trump's executive order calling on U.S. institutions to refer to it as the Gulf of America. The AP said the decision was illegal viewpoint-based discrimination, while the government countered that it had wide discretion over press access decisions for non-public spaces.

Unofficial President's rule imposed in West Bengal claims Mamata

"President's rule has been imposed in West Bengal. Modi ji (Prime Minister Narendra Modi) has to hold elections in West Bengal under President's rule. It is such a shame. They fear the people of the Bengal so much. Though the Centre has not pronounced it, but their actions point at the reality," Ms. Banerjee said while releasing her party's manifesto for the upcoming Assembly elections in West Bengal.

Reiterating her displeasure over the transfer of officers of the State by the Election Commission, she asked how will officers from other States alien to language, culture and geography of the State will conduct elections. About 50 senior officers including, State's Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, Director General of Police and about a dozen of District magistrates and Superintendent of Police have been transferred by the Election Commission over the past few dates since the model code of conduct came into force. Ms. Banerjee claimed that the Centre was planning to "take away people's citizenship" in the name of NRC (National Register of Citizens) and Census after the upcoming assembly elections in the state. She also said that there were plans to divide West Bengal, by creating a separate state craving out parts of north Bengal and Bihar. "They do not want West Bengal to exist," she said. Ms. Banerjee expressed apprehension that the judicial adjudication of about 60 lakh electors will not be completed before elections.

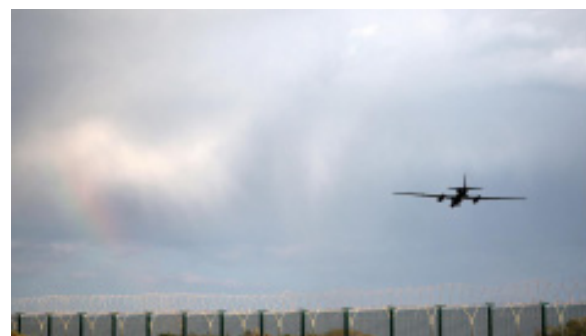
"I have heard that only 22 lakh cases have been adjudicated so far, out of which 10 lakh names have been de-

leted," she said. The Trinamool Congress said that a particular community has been targeted through the exercise and said that she had knocked every door from the judiciary to the Election Commission. "Right to vote is the biggest right," she said, adding that the right is being snatched away by the Election Commission at the behest of the BJP. Do not look elsewhere if you want to save Bengal

The Trinamool Congress made an appeal to the electorate of the State, not to look elsewhere if they want to save West Bengal. "It is not the time to look elsewhere, if you want to save Bengal," she said. Releasing her party's manifesto the Chief Minister who is seeking to return to power for the fourth consecutive term said that the West Bengal Assembly polls was an opportunity "to save the country from the hands of Narendra Modi." She urged the people not to accept money from the BJP and said that they should give a fitting reply to the saffron party. Ms. Banerjee claimed that lakhs of central forces will descend on West Bengal during elections. "Who will feed them. We are already facing shortage of LPG cylinders," she said. The Trinamool Congress chairperson said that she will start campaign after Id-ul-Fitr which will be observed on Saturday.

The Trinamool Congress has already announced the list of candidates for the upcoming assembly polls. Elections to the 294 member West Bengal Assembly will be held in two phases on April 23 and April 29. The votes will be counted on May 4.

U.K. approves U.S. use of British bases to strike Iran missile sites targeting ships



GNS News Agency, March 23

The British government gave authorisation on Friday (March 20, 2026) for the United States to use military bases in Britain to carry out strikes on Iranian missile sites that are attacking ships in the Strait of Hormuz. British Ministers met on Friday (March 20, 2026) to discuss the war with Iran and Iran's blocking of the Strait of Hormuz, according to a Downing Street statement. "They confirmed that the agreement for the U.S. to use U.K. bases in the

collective self-defence of the region includes U.S. defensive operations to degrade the missile sites and capabilities being used to attack ships in the Strait of Hormuz," the statement said. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said this week Britain would not be drawn into a war over Iran. He initially rejected a U.S. request to use British bases for the strikes on Iran, saying he needed to be satisfied that any military action was legal.

But Mr. Starmer modified his stance after Iran conducted strikes on British allies across the West Asia, saying that the United States could use RAF Fairford and Diego Garcia, a joint U.S.-U.K. base in the Indian Ocean. President Donald Trump has repeatedly attacked Mr. Starmer since the conflict started, complaining he was not doing enough to help him. On Monday, Mr. Trump said there were "some countries that greatly disappointed me" before he singled out Britain, which he said had once been considered "the Rolls-Royce of allies." The Downing Street statement on Friday (March 20, 2026) called for "urgent de-escalation and a swift resolution to the war." Opinion polls in Britain suggest widespread scepticism about the war, with 59% of those surveyed by YouGov saying that they were opposed to the U.S.-Israeli attacks.

Refiners in India, elsewhere in Asia look to buy Iranian oil after U.S. waives sanctions



GNS News Agency, March 23

Refiners plan to resume buying Iranian oil while refiners elsewhere in Asia are examining such a move after Washington temporarily removed sanctions to alleviate an energy crunch caused by the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, traders said. Image used for representation purpose only. Refiners plan to resume buying Iranian oil while refiners elsewhere in Asia are examining such a move after Washington temporarily removed sanctions to alleviate an energy crunch caused by the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, traders said. Image used for representation purpose only. | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Refiners plan to resume buying Iranian oil while refiners elsewhere in Asia are examining such a move after Washington temporarily removed sanctions to alleviate an energy crunch caused by the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, traders said on Saturday (March 21, 2026). Three Indian refining sources said they will buy Iranian oil and are awaiting government directions and clarity from Washington on details such as payment terms. Refiners in India, which has much smaller crude stockpiles than other big Asian oil importers, rushed to book Russian oil after the U.S. recently lifted sanctions temporarily. The Indian government could not be immediately reached for comment outside office hours. Other Asian refiners are making checks to see if they can purchase the oil, several people with knowledge of the matter said. The Trump administration on Friday is-

Price of premium petrol up 2 per litre, government says no impact on common man



In what could be the first sign of cracks due to the fiscal stress brought on by skyrocketing global oil prices, Indian oil-marketing companies on Friday (March 20, 2026) increased the price of the premium variant of petrol and industrial diesel by approximately ₹2-3 and ₹22 per litre, respectively. The government, however, assured that this is limited only to the premium variants and that the prices of the normal grades of petrol and diesel remain unchanged.

In a social media post on Friday (March 20, 2026) evening, State-owned IndianOil confirmed the price of its premium petrol XP-95 which increased by ₹2 for every litre from ₹99.87 to ₹101.89. Hindustan Petroleum also announced a similar increase. "IndianOil has ensured no increase in regular automotive fuel prices in India, even amid rising international costs," the post said. "A limited revision

applies only to premium petrol XP-95, with minimal impact on overall consumption."

The refiner said that the premium variant of petrol accounts for about 5% of the overall petrol sales. Other than the car fuel, the price of industrial diesel was revised upwards from ₹87.67 to ₹109.59 per litre. The hike in the price of premium petrol and industrial diesel contrasts with the OMCs' actions when oil prices were low. A previous analysis by The Hindu found that the OMCs did not lower the price of any form of petrol or diesel over the past two-and-a-half years, even when oil prices fell to an average of \$64 a barrel. As of Friday (March 20, 2026) evening, Brent crude futures were trading at \$108.1 for every barrel, continuing an upward trajectory as tensions continue to mount in West Asia. Further, according to data from the Petroleum and Planning Analysis Cell, India's crude oil basket – the average price at which India imports oil – was averaging \$117.09 for every barrel in the current month. Earlier in the day, addressing queries about the increase in petrol prices, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said the hike would not impact the common man. "That is [the premium variant] hardly represents 2-4% of the petrol which is sold every day in the country," she said. "It is not that price of petrol has been increased [affecting] the common man." The increase in the price of premium car fuel also brought barbs from the Opposition. "While people are already troubled by the gas shortage, now they will also be made to pay on petrol," the Indian National Congress said in a social media post.

Iran ready to let Japanese vessels transit Strait of Hormuz, say reports

GNS News Agency, March 23

Iran is ready to let Japanese-related vessels pass through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital artery for global oil supplies. Kyodo news reported, citing Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. Tehran has started talks with Tokyo about possibly opening the strait, Mr. Araghchi told the Japanese news agency in a phone interview on Friday (March 20, 2026). Japan's Foreign and Trade Ministries and the Prime Minister's Office did not pick up calls from Reuters on Saturday (March 21, 2026) seeking comment on the report. Japan gets around 90% of its oil shipments via the strait, which Tehran has largely closed during the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran. A spike in global oil prices sparked by the war, which enters its fourth week on Saturday (March 21), has prompted Japan and other countries to release oil from their reserves. U.S. President Donald Trump met Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Thursday (March 19), urging her to "step up" as he presses allies



— so far unsuccessfully — to send warships to help open the strait. Ms. Takaichi told reporters after the Washington summit that she had briefed Mr. Trump on what support Japan could and could not provide in the strait under its laws.

India's Iran stance does fuel a foreign policy debate



A debate, for the most part civilised, is going on in India about foreign policy. The provocation for the debate is the ongoing Israeli-American war on Iran, now in its third week and India's response to it. I belong to the tribe of 'professional' diplomats. We consider ourselves experts with special skills to propound on foreign policy issues. It is true that we are trained to read between the lines and to research whatever issue occupies the attention of the international community at a given time. However, it is not as if we are born with a particular gift for foreign policy; the gift or expertise is cultivated over a period of time. Almost anybody can handle foreign policy with experience and exposure to the issues. Everyone has an opinion on foreign policy, and it would not be correct to dismiss those opinions as ill-informed or irrelevant.

The debate is argued between those who generally support the government's stand on the war, which began on February 28, and those who criticise it as weak-kneed or surrendering to the Americans, or as hostile to Iran, a close and civilisational friend. The deliberate decision not to condole the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has come in for particular criticism. Foreign policy is an instrument in the hands of the government to protect and promote the country's national interests. It follows that it is within the province of the government of the day to define what the national interests are and how to protect them. Some interests are sui generis, such as defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. For a country such as India, the improvement in the standard of living of its citizens is an extremely important objective.

In a highly globalised and interdependent world, this task imposes on the government the duty to chart its policy with deliberation and calculation. A government led by one party may take one position whereas a government led by another party may take another. The same party may take one position when in opposition but might pursue that very policy when in power. The Congress-led government under Manmohan Singh decided that obtaining the nuclear deal with America was in India's interest whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party at the time opposed the deal. Once in power, it went beyond what even the previous government had not agreed; it absolved the suppliers of nuclear reactors from any liability, for accident or defect in the reactors.

Foreign policy often is, but should not be, influenced by the ideological orientation of the ruling party. If it is to adhere strictly to the objective of promoting national interest, it cannot afford to be too concerned about principles or rights and wrongs. At times, a particular position might offend our sense of justice or morality, but the government of the day will have to make an objective decision, even if it is

not popular. Equally important, the government must explain to the people the rationale for its decision. In a democracy, this is extremely important. People, certainly the Indian people, are fully capable of understanding and approving or disapproving of the government's actions.

Much time and intellectual energy is spent on giving a label to foreign policy. The one currently in fashion is 'strategic autonomy'. By adding the word 'strategic', it sounds profound and gives the impression of a concept beyond the understanding of ordinary citizens. But then, why 'autonomy'? Why not 'independent'? Is not independence more precious than autonomy? P.V. Narasimha Rao used to say that Kashmiris can have as much autonomy as they want, but not independence. In any case, why give any label at all? How many countries have given adjectives to their foreign policy? If a name has to be given, just call it 'independent'.

The best definition of foreign policy was given by Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter to Einstein written a few weeks before India's independence. Foreign policy, Nehru wrote, essentially is selfish. The only principle it follows is the principle of national interest. The Narendra Modi government is essentially following Nehru's foreign policy, that is 'selfish' foreign policy. Its approach to the Iran war seems to be based on a cold calculation that India has too much at stake with America and the Gulf states. America is India's largest trading partner, and India needs its support for state-of-the-art technology, especially for developing India's defence capabilities. As for the Gulf countries, nearly 10 million Indians are working there. Their welfare is of overriding concern. They send hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of remittances back home. Collectively, the Gulf countries are a most valuable source for India's energy needs.

Application of 'strategic autonomy' These are valid considerations. Nevertheless, within the parameters of these factors, the government could and should have shown some 'strategic autonomy'. No harm would have been done if the assassination of Ayatollah Khamenei had been condoned or if the External Affairs Minister rather than the Foreign Secretary had signed the condolence book in the Iranian Embassy in Delhi. Since the Prime Minister did speak to the Iranian President to press for the safety of the 9,000-strong Indian community in Iran, would it not have been proper for him to also express condolences for the assassination? His telephone conversations with the leaders of the Gulf states would surely have ensured their support to take care of India's citizens living there. The fact that Iran has allowed oil tankers destined for India safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz speaks not so much to the success of India's diplomacy as to the graciousness of the Iranians. Despite India's unfriendly attitude, Iran took a friendly approach towards India. In the final analysis, India needs to be on the winning side. The government has obviously concluded that the Israeli-American coalition will come out the winner and that Iran will be defeated or surrender. There is also the question of the Prime Minister's visit to Israel (February 25-26, 2026), its timing more than the visit per se. It was evident from watching his address to the Israeli Knesset that he was deeply moved by the warm reception that was accorded to him by its members. His visit was a demonstration of the ideological affinity that he feels with Israel and, more so with its Prime Minister. That Israel and the U.S. were going to attack Iran any day was known to all those following such matters. The timing of the visit was unfortunate.

Gulf dreams turn sour for Konaseema women



With dreams of building a better life for themselves and their families, Kamala (32) boarded a sleeper-class private bus on May 12, 2025, along with her younger sister Raji (30), from Amalapuram—the administrative headquarters of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema district—bound for Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad. Along with the sisters were several other women on board the bus, all sharing the same destination: Muscat. The group arrived at Muscat International Airport (MCT) in Oman the following evening via Mumbai.

Recalling the initial excitement of taking the first step towards her dream, Kamala said that their Muscat-based agent, who was also a native of Konaseema, had sent a driver to pick them up from the airport. The driver identified the sisters using their photographs, collected their passports immediately after the introduction, and then dropped them off at the agent's office. For the next fortnight, the sisters, along with other young women, were trained by the agent to work as 'housemaids'. "Like us, there was another group of 13 young women, mostly from our area, who were brought by our agent with the promise of the same work—as housemaids," said Kamala, a mother of two boys aged 7 and 5.

Kamala, who had worked as a nurse in a private hospital, quit her job, while Raji, an intermediate dropout, gave up tailoring for their shared dream—to fly to the Gulf, earn money, and return to build their own house in their village. Kamala and Raji, also a mother of two children, live in separate rented houses with their families in the same village on the outskirts of Amalapuram, part of Konaseema district—a land of coconuts in Andhra Pradesh, where the river Godavari meets the Bay of Bengal. The sisters said that an opportunity came their way after their husbands supported their decision and helped them find agents recruiting women for jobs in the Gulf.

"By December 2025, nearly 15,000 unemployed workers from Dr B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema district had migrated to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. More than 70% of them were young women, most of whom found employment as housemaids," said G. Ramesh, Manager, Konaseema Centre for Migration (KCM).

Overwork and isolation Kamala said that her ordeal began within a fortnight after their grooming session ended. "Once our grooming session was over, all of us were presented to visitors who came to select women of their choice to be appointed as housemaids. My sister Raji was the first to be chosen by a sponsor for a five-day trial assignment in his house before being offered full-time work," said Kamala. However, Kamala added, "Five days after the first assignment, which tested my sister's physical endurance, Raji decided not to continue. Frightened by the labor involved, she returned to India within a month." As per an unwritten condition observed by both agents and employers, the sponsor is entitled to retain the woman as a housemaid if satisfied with her work. At the same time, she is allowed to reject the offer if she is unwilling to continue.

Kamala, who chose to stay back, was hired by another sponsor under a two-year work agreement with a monthly salary of 100 Omani rials (₹24,152). The sponsor obtained a 'Resident Card' (issued by the Oman government) and a two-year work visa for Kamala by signing a 'guarantee of responsibility,' as mandated. By November, however, Kamala began to suffer repeated illnesses, reportedly due to overwork, and was also subjected to isolation. "When I complained of sickness, my sponsor gave me medicines meant for body pain. Suspecting that I might quit, he cut off my internet access to prevent communication with my family. I had to continue working while on medication," said Kamala. "When I asked my sponsor to return my passport, he told me that I had to pay money for my freedom. It was then that I learned my agent had supplied me to him for a commission of ₹1.5 lakh, which I was required to repay in order to secure my freedom and retrieve my passport. I never knew such a transaction existed between my agent and the sponsor," she said. Migrants turn on-site agents

Allegedly, this is the modus operandi of unregistered

T.N. government amends maternity leave rules to benefit women employees

The Tamil Nadu government recently amended the service-related rules governing its women employees to allow relaxation in availing of maternity leave. Under the amendment, maternity leave of 365 days may be granted for one additional delivery, even if a married woman government servant already has two surviving children born as twins in her first delivery. Earlier, in such cases, maternity leave of only two weeks could be granted, and no more than six weeks could precede the expected date of delivery. The Tamil Nadu government's decision, issued through a G.O. dated March 13 this year, followed orders of the Supreme Court dated May 23, 2025, and the Madras High Court dated January 21, 2026.

However, as per the amendment, in the case of a married woman government servant having two or more surviving children, maternity leave on full pay shall be limited to a period not exceeding 12 weeks, which may be availed of from pre-confinement rest to post-confinement recuperation, at the option of the government servant.

"Based on the observation made by the Supreme Court of India, it is clear that the restriction of grant of maternity leave to women employees is violative of Article 21 of the Constitution of India and entitlement of maternity benefits without restricting the number of children, by the women employees are recognised by the various International treaties and Conventions," the G.O. issued by Chief Secretary N. Muruganandam for the Human Resources Management Department said. Referring to the Supreme Court order, the Tamil Nadu government said it carefully considered the order and the provisions under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and has further decided to grant maternity leave to the

agents recruiting young women aspiring to work in the Gulf countries. The price for housemaids varies depending on the duration of employment, ranging from one month to two years. Officials highlight that many unauthorised agents are personally known to the victims. Complaints reveal that job offers often come through relatives or acquaintances settled in Gulf countries. Many former migrants themselves act as on-site agents, offering commissions to local contacts to recruit women. Referring to the e-Migrate portal data of the Ministry of External Affairs, the KCM stated that about 1,100 agents are registered to recruit people from Andhra Pradesh for overseas jobs. However, in Dr B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema district alone, at least 165 unauthorised agents—including 30 women—are active, none of whom are registered on the portal. A deposit of ₹5 lakh and a registered office are basic requirements for authorisation.

The KCM repatriated Kamala on December 18, 2025. The process began after her sponsor returned her passport once the ₹1.5 lakh commission was arranged and paid by her family. Her one month's salary is still pending, she said. The Government of Andhra Pradesh established the KCM in Amalapuram in March 2025, after District Collector R. Mahesh Kumar urged the government to set up the centre following several online appeals for repatriation from victims in GCC countries. KCM Manager G. Ramesh said, "Since March 2025, we have secured the repatriation of 78 victims from GCC countries. Of these, 76 are women whose families approached us to free them from the clutches of unauthorised agents. Seven bodies of workers, including two women who died due to accidents or illness, were also brought back." "Most repatriated workers reported excessive workloads beyond their contracts, health issues due to lack of rest, and physical abuse. They are often abandoned by both local and on-site agents," he added.

Most victims are not repatriated through Indian embassies. "We try to facilitate repatriation through the recruiting agent. In this model, the agent is required to return the commission to the sponsor in order to retrieve the victim's passport. This makes the process faster; otherwise, the victim has to repay the commission," said Mr. Ramesh. Of the 76 victims repatriated since March, only two were assisted through Indian embassies. Currently, the KCM is handling nearly 180 grievances related to fraud and workplace abuse. Awareness

Another victim, G. Padma, 36, a mother of two children aged 16 and 14, was repatriated on March 13, 2026. A native of Uppalaguputam mandal, she had flown to Muscat in June 2023 and completed a two-year term. "My sponsor forcibly renewed my contract for another year. I was not allowed to contact my family after the renewal. I was finally freed after my family approached the KCM. However, I was not paid for four months, during which I was also subjected to physical abuse," she said. Padma's husband works as an agricultural labourer. Suma, who was repatriated from Oman, said, "In my sponsor's house, I survived on one meal for nearly two months. My agent blocked my number, leaving me alone".

According to the Special Branch of Konaseema police, at least 48 cases have been registered against unauthorised agents in the district under the Emigration Act, 1983. Over the past 12 months, ten such cases have been filed. District Superintendent of Police Rahul Meena said that many repatriated victims were unwilling to pursue legal action against the agents. Police personnel are part of the KCM and help trace agents and facilitate repatriation based on complaints filed by victims' families. According to an official release by District Collector R. Mahesh Kumar, the Protector of Emigrants (PoE), Hyderabad, has been approached to strengthen coordination with Indian embassies. PoE official D. Anand and his team have conducted awareness programmes on safe overseas recruitment practices. Andhra Pradesh Non-Resident Telugu Society (APNRTS) president Vemuru Ravi Kumar said that the State government had prohibited recruitment of housemaids through private agents and mandated hiring through OMCAP for better protection. "Over 90% of abuse complaints come from those not recruited through OMCAP," he said, adding that contracts are often in Arabic, making them difficult to understand. Surge continues amid tensions He noted that migration from Konaseema is largely driven by economic need, with many women entering on tourist visas and later struggling to obtain work permits.

Even as agents temporarily slow recruitment due to the war, the Post Office Passport Seva Kendra in Amalapuram is witnessing a surge in applications. Passport Verification Officer G. Yuga Kiran said, "We receive around 600 applications every month. Over 90% are from women aspiring to migrate to Gulf countries." Meanwhile, the KCM continues to receive distress calls daily from migrant workers seeking help. Even as the repatriation of 11 victims, including nine women, has been delayed due to disruptions in airport operations in GCC countries due to the ongoing tensions in the West Asia.



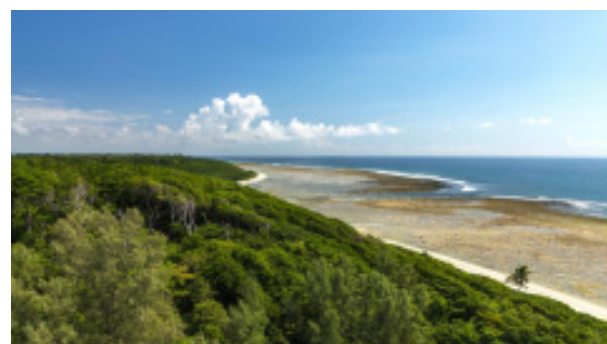
Under the amendment, maternity leave of 365 days may be granted for one additional delivery, even if a married woman government servant already has two surviving children born as twins in her first delivery

women government servants having two or more than two surviving children and make suitable amendments to this effect in the Fundamental Rules of the Government of Tamil Nadu, 1922.

'Undemocratic' politics in Great Nicobar over land

On January 18 this year, a Great Nicobar Island based online news portal, www.nicobartimes.com, published an important news item related to the mega-infrastructure project on the island that has been headline news across the country for many months now. This particular issue has, however, barely been noticed, leave alone creating anything close to even a ripple. The report, "DEF-GNI Objects to Low Minimum Circle Rates Fixed for Villages of Campbell Bay Tehsil, Seeks Revision Ahead of Airport Land Acquisition", highlighted the grievances of the Great Nicobar's settler (non-tribal) community in the matter of the compensation being awarded for their land that is being acquired for the mega-project under the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (RFCTLARR) Act, 2013. About 300 families of ex-servicemen were settled in Great Nicobar between 1969 and 1975 for which about 40 square kilometres were denotified from the Tribal Reserve. The descendants of these settlers now form the majority of the population here. "The Dependents and Ex-Servicemen Forum for Equitable Negotiation, Compensation & Entitlements – Great Nicobar Island (DEF-GNI)", the report noted, "has raised strong objections to the minimum circle rates fixed for villages under Campbell Bay Tehsil, terming them unreasonably low and unjust." Inadequate compensation At the heart of the matter is the low rates of compensation, ranging from ₹113 to ₹180 per square metre, they are being offered as against the ₹11,370 - ₹20,500 per square metre offered in the Andaman islands when land is acquired for tourism projects. The forum requested that the rates be fixed in a manner that ensures a minimum compensation of not less than ₹1 crore per acre of agricultural land to affected landowners.

The matter has also been raised regularly by the lone Member of Parliament (MP) from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bishnu Pada Ray of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In December, he had written to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister making a number of related points: that the land was being acquired from ex-servicemen settler families who were originally brought here by the government to serve strategic and national security purposes; these families had already faced two major displacements, one during the initial settlement and then again after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami; there were major procedural violations in the land acquisition process; there were serious deficiencies in the social impact assessment carried out for this land, and that compensation being offered should be ₹32 lakh per hectare as against ₹9 lakh being offered currently. There are two things that stand out: first the claim makers — the MP included — are explicit that they, the settler families, are not opposing the project. Their only request is adherence to due process and ensuring that no family is left without land or livelihood. The second is the deep contradiction at the heart of (un)democratic representation and politics here: the settler community and their representatives, while seen seeking fairness and justice over their own land, are also collaborating with the same authorities in alienating land, livelihood and the resources of Great Nicobar's tribal communities (the Shompen and the Great



Nicobarese) to make it available for the same project. Alienating tribal lands

In a process marked by serious substantive and procedural impropriety, nearly 84 sq.km of legally notified tribal reserve is sought to be denotified and handed over to project authorities. Everyone from local agencies such as the Andaman and Nicobar Tribal Welfare Department, to the local settler communities, to national level bodies such as the Union Ministries of Environment and of Tribal Affairs have been complicit. Evidence of this can be seen in the near-complete absence of the Shompen in discussions, the pressure being exerted on the Nicobarese to 'voluntarily' surrender their lands for the project, the public and vociferous support expressed by settlers and authorities, and the explicit violation of provisions of the Forest Rights Act, in which representatives of the settler community have signed documents freeing up tribal reserve land for the project.

Pertinent issues being ignored No one can deny the right of the settlers to adequate compensation. But what about the original islanders such as the nomadic hunter gatherer Shompen that is notified as a particularly vulnerable tribal group, a PVTG? They may not want compensation because they have no use for the money we offer. What about the Nicobarese who wish to return to their traditional pre-tsunami lands and settlements but are not being provided the means to do so? And what of the impact on lives, livelihoods and cultures of these communities that are completely dependent on the sea and the forests? What also of the pristine forests and unique biodiversity that will be lost forever? This situation underlines multiple things at the same time. On the ground it highlights the stark nature of (un)democratic local politics as adjacent communities are forced into competition and conflict over land and resources. At the macro level, it highlights how local communities and rights to resources are only minor pawns in the larger geopolitical and development agendas of the state, of its larger political economy, and indeed the rhetoric of national sovereignty and strategic autonomy. The contradictions might not be visible to the local settler communities or perhaps they do not have the agency or the choice. The same surely cannot be said for the state, the nation and for society at large. There is much for us to think about and ponder over. Pankaj Sekhsaria is the author/editor of seven books on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the latest being '

How dust from India's growing construction sector is impacting our health



India's construction industry is a burgeoning sector projected to reach INR 36.58 trillion by 2028. It currently contributes 8% to the GDP, and employs over 40 million people, according to the India Construction Industry Report 2024. However, rapid construction growth seems to have significantly increased dust pollution. According to a CEEW (Council on Energy, Environment, and Water) study, construction site dust lowers air quality locally and regionally. In cities like Delhi, Amritsar, and Chandigarh, this re-suspended dust accounts for about 18% to 20% of PM_{2.5}, leading to frequent criticism of the sector for poor air quality. According to CEEW, excavation, earthwork, roadwork, and vehicle movement are significant sources of dust pollution at work sites. Unpaved site roads can raise PM_{2.5} levels during vehicle movement by about 2.5 times compared to when no work is done.

Dust is an invisible hazard, and so the risk of its ill health effects is grossly underperceived. Research shows that construction dust causes serious health issues not only among workers, but also to residents living near construction sites. Respirable silica (airborne crystalline silica) is small enough to reach the lungs' gas exchange areas, called alveoli. High concentrations, especially from quartz, can cause lung diseases such as silicosis, pneumoconiosis, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), chronic bronchitis, emphysema, lung cancer, as well as renal disorders. At construction sites, the risk is even greater. Poor ventilation leads to dust concentration, increasing the workers' risk of respiratory diseases as they inhale polluted air throughout the day. Research shows silica levels in the atmosphere are especially elevated during finishing, brick-laying, carpentry, concrete drilling, demolition, mortar mixing, block wall laying, core drilling, cutting, grinding, and grinding—much higher than in typical ambient particulate matter. Construction workers face elevated risks particularly when cutting concrete. The problem is especially severe in developing countries like India, where many labourers work in unsafe environments, without safety gear or without information provided about the risks they may incur.

What is needed to assess dust and the health risks it poses, is a tool called as COSHH (control of substances hazards to health), a specific form of risk assessment. There is no better time than now, with the Central Pollution Control Board and the Union government having introduced new Construction & Demolition (C&D) Waste Rules and standardised dust mitigation standard operating procedures

for on-site materials. These measures are designed to establish consistent protocols for containment, covering, and disposal at both local and municipal levels across all States. The flaw here, is that while the expectations of the government for self-regulation by industries may work in developed countries with a responsible mindset, India is still not yet ready for the culture of self-regulation: there is a need for stringent enforcement.

The provision of adequate respiratory protective equipment (RPE), continuous health monitoring every six months as required by law, and practical training of workers in ways and means of protecting themselves against dust hazards has become essential. Mandatory health check-ups by the employers for their employees above the age of 40, are also part of the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHW) Code that became fully enforceable in November 2025. What is also critically needed is a focus on primary controls to begin to reduce the exposure of dust hazards in the workplace. This approach will not only protect workers' health, but will also help keep healthcare costs low in the long-term, and sustain productivity in a sector fundamental to India's economic progress.

There are several effective ways to control dust emissions on construction sites. The most important of these are dust control through covering stockpiles of materials, using water sprays or misting systems in cutting and demolition works, and providing wheel washes. Ensuring that roads are either paved or stabilised with temporary materials further reduces dust emissions. Using localised extraction vacuums in cutting and grinding work, as well as simple windbreak fencing or barrier systems, can significantly help control dust emissions in the surrounding area. Prioritising these measures, from design and procurement to daily operations, avoids dust becoming a hazard to the workers and the surrounding community. Training and behavioural interventions play a supportive role. Employers and principal contractors should also integrate dust control measures into tender requirements and performance audits, ensuring subcontractors are evaluated on environmental performance as well as on other project metrics. Similarly, when contractors are evaluated for technical competence, appropriate weightage must be given to their environmental performance to ensure they take it seriously during construction. Cities should embed construction dust control within broader air-quality management strategies. Targeted management of construction dust can lead to measurable reductions in residents' daily exposure to pollution.

Long-term progress depends on incentivizing best practices and building industry capacity to manage dust risks. Improving access to workplace health services, such as regular medical check-ups and compensation, will particularly benefit migrant labourers, who face the greatest risks. Tackling construction dust is an imperative task, not only for the environment but also for public health. Effective construction dust management solutions can help protect workers' health, while also helping Indian cities meet cleaner air targets. The key to success is in the collaborative efforts of developers, the government, and society to ensure India's progress is clean, healthy and sustainable.

The India-EU trade deal is also a strategic turning point



The unprecedented frequency of meetings, which included the India-EU leaders' summit in 2021, allowed for a frank exchange of perspectives that built trust and enabled the pursuit of the highest-hanging fruit despite repeated failures since 2007

Last week, India and the European Union (EU) achieved what, until just a year or two ago, many observers considered impossible: meeting halfway to conclude a long-elusive trade agreement. Negotiated, stalled, revived and reimaged over a quarter of a century, the deal represents far more than a technical breakthrough on tariffs. It marks a strategic inflexion point in what could become one of the most consequential partnerships to stabilise an international order that is marked by rapid, uncertain and conflictual transition.

A meeting point with a risk-averse BrusselsThe commercial breakthrough did not emerge from a vacuum. It is the result of two drivers — one political and the other geopolitical. First, in an example of how summit diplomacy does pay off, both sides have been engaging at the highest level for the last 10 years, beginning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Brussels in 2016.

The unprecedented frequency of meetings, which included the India-EU leaders' summit in 2021, allowed for a frank exchange of perspectives that built trust and enabled the pursuit of the highest-hanging fruit despite repeated failures since 2007. This mutual political trust mattered at home because it empowered the Indian and European leadership to invest significant personal and political capital to overcome a variety of internal obstacles and risks.

The Modi government worked with, rather than against or around, various domestic stakeholders and their protectionist impulses to explain why the EU offers a qualitatively different economic partner than next-door China. Previous trade deals with the United Kingdom or Australia helped create momentum, assess roadblocks and build industry support. And on the EU side, the tandem between the Commission and the Council laid clear political guidelines that pushed the otherwise risk-averse Brussels bureaucracy to move beyond rigid free trade agreement templates. With this political direction, negotiators finally found common ground. Second, and more importantly, this deal is driven by the urgency of responding to an international system that is shaking, if not collapsing. The agreement is the most tangible product of the extraordinary geopolitical churn unleashed by U.S. President Donald Trump's commercial offensives, but also the continued coercion and economic

security threats posed by China and Russia.

The larger pictureDriven by political and geopolitical factors, the resulting economic agreement is best understood not as the culmination of a mere trade negotiation but also as the foundation of a broader EU-India strategic realignment. But trade alone will not sustain this convergence. If the India-EU partnership remains confined to tariffs and market access, it risks becoming a tactical adjustment rather than a durable strategic shift.

To avoid this fate, New Delhi and Brussels must now move quickly to flesh out the other dimensions of their strategic partnership enunciated during last week's summit, most notably in defence and security, energy, technology and mobility. In defence and security, the logic for deeper cooperation is increasingly compelling. India and the EU have a stake in ensuring maritime stability and freedom of navigation. There are growing opportunities for joint military exercises, information sharing, and the development of security capacity among Indo-Pacific states. The agreement reflects an interest in moving beyond ad hoc engagement toward institutionalised cooperation, coupling defence industrial interests with financing, trade and technology priorities.

Energy cooperation is equally critical. Europe's push for energy diversification and decarbonisation intersects with India's need for affordable, scalable, and sustainable energy solutions. Joint investment in green hydrogen, renewable technologies, and resilient energy infrastructure could anchor long-term interdependence while advancing shared climate goals. Technology represents perhaps the most consequential frontier as global technology governance fragments along geopolitical lines. India and the EU have an opportunity to shape standards and norms that reflect values without stifling innovation. Cooperation on semiconductors, digital public infrastructure, artificial intelligence and data governance could reduce mutual vulnerabilities and enhance strategic autonomy on both sides.

Finally, the mobility of students, researchers and skilled workers will be essential to translating political alignment into societal and economic depth. Addressing long-standing frictions over visas and professional recognition would not only strengthen people-to-people ties but also support innovation ecosystems across both partners. Taken together, these sectors offer a path toward genuine India-European interdependence. Without such multi-sectoral investment, the current alignment risks remaining contingent on external pressures rather than internalised interests.

Foundation to build onIndia and the EU now have a rare opportunity to give practical meaning to their old mantra of multipolarity that dates back to the 2000s. In coordination with other middle powers, New Delhi and Brussels can help deliver growth and security that is rooted in openness, resilience and shared democratic values. This will have to be a partnership that delivers tangible public goods across the Indo-Pacific — to keep China in check — and across the Global South, which seeks reliable development partners. In an era defined less by alliance blocs than by issue-based coalitions, the India-EU convergence — if sustained and deepened — may finally emerge as one of the pillars of a more stable international system. The economic deal is a start. The strategic test now lies in what follows. India-EU Free Trade Agreement explained: Biggest trade deal in India's historyConstantino Xavier is Senior Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP). The views expressed are personal

Bengal's SIR hearing woes continue as voters line up at centres



Three months into the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process in West Bengal, there are still long queues outside hearing centres as lakhs of electors wait to respond to what the Election Commission (EC) terms "logical discrepancies" in the electoral roll. With the draft electoral roll scheduled to be published on February 14, the hearings are required to conclude by February 7, as per the stipulated deadlines. Officials say this has added to the pressure at hearing centres, where hundreds of voters are being called each day. Both voters and election officials are racing against time, amid widespread confusion over surname variations, clerical errors and automated system-generated notices. Common surnames like Bandhopadhyay, Chattopadhyay and Gangopadhyay were anglicised over time to Banerjee, Chatterjee, and Ganguly. However, lakhs have received hearing notices for these. The issue was recently flagged by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the Supreme Court. "My grandfather and father used the Chattopadhyay surname because places like Calcutta University and government schools in Bengal for the longest time did not recognise 'Chatterjee' as a surname. But we have always used it. Yet both my sister and I have gotten hearing notices," said a voter from south Kolkata who did not want to be named. Lakhs like her are facing the same issue.

Minor errors in names like Kumar shortened to Kr or Ray as Roy, Mallick as Mallik have caused immense har-

assment, as many are still running pillar to post to find documents to prove that these people are one and the same. "We do not wish to harass anyone. We also know that Kr and Kumar are the same and Chattopadhyay and Chatterjee are the same. But the hearing notices have been system-generated. Once someone gets a notice, they have to appear for the hearing," a senior officer who has been involved in the hearing process told The Hindu. In some cases, age gaps within families have also raised red flags. A 30-year-old Sripama Ghosh got a hearing notice because her age difference from her father was 54 years. Standing outside the Sree Jain Swetamber Terapanthi Vidyalaya in north Kolkata, M. Bhatti said all their siblings were called for hearings. "We have all the necessary documents. We will show whatever they need. Our father had six children," Mr. Bhatti added. This issue has been raised by both the Congress and the Trinamool Congress. West Bengal Congress president Subhankar Sarkar flagged the 'arbitrary' threshold setting by the EC and pointed out that the number of electors with six or more electors linked to them as children stood at 2,06,056, whereas, if the threshold is raised to 10, the number was only 8,682. Syed Shahab Alam, a 58-year-old man who has spent all his life in the civil defence and served the nation, came out of the hearing centre at Sree Jain Swetamber Terapanthi Vidyalaya and waits for his daughter to turn up. He submitted 14 documents to prove that the wrong father's name on his daughter's birth certificate is a clerical error and not a fake voter issue. They wrote my name as Mohammad Shahab Alam in my daughter's birth certificate. When a small child is born people are more worried about well being of the child and mother. Who cared to check the names," Mr. Alam said. However, since he served as a Booth Level Officer till 2024, it made him familiar with the electoral process and hence kept the records intact. After the completion of the first phase of the SIR, about 58 lakh names were deleted in West Bengal, bringing the number of electors in the State to 7.08 crore from 7.66 crore. About 1.36 crore such notices of logical discrepancies have been issued. The Supreme Court directed that the list of logical discrepancies be made public, but the lists still remain inaccessible and are only available to the Electoral Roll Officers.

What is the Zeigarnik effect?



The Zeigarnik effect is a phenomenon which hypothesizes that one has a higher tendency to remember things, actions, or events that were left unfinished than those that were completed. It is something that one probably experiences on a daily basis. The effect can be experienced when you have an unreturned phone call, unfinished chore, or even a partially eaten breakfast that only filled a portion of your tummy. If it is unfinished or was interrupted, there is a high chance that you will remember it. The Zeigarnik effect was first studied and introduced by Lithuanian-Soviet psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik, after whom it was named. She first looked into it following an observation made by her academic advisor and psychologist Kurt Lewin, wherein he had noticed that a waiter could easily memorise orders that were still unpaid for. But after the customers had paid for their meals, the waiter failed to recall any details of the same order. Following this incident, Bluma Zeigarnik began conducting experiments that would further explain this phenomenon. Her research was published in the journal Psychological Research: An International Journal of Perception, Attention, Memory, and Action.

Within the mindNow here's a question. Why do unfin-

ished tasks tend to linger in our memory with far more stubbornness than those that are finished? Zeigarnik had stated that the brain can distinguish between tasks that were completed and those that were unfinished. Whenever we start a task, there is a type of tension that builds up in the mind. Information is sent to the sensory memory (information taken in through the five traditional senses), where it is momentarily stored before being transferred to short-term memory. The information here is soon forgotten. However, when a task is left incomplete, it becomes an open loop and is constantly replayed in the short-term memory region of the brain, so the information is not lost. This brings out a cognitive tension (mental discomfort when an individual is faced with conflicting situations).

Utilisation and preventionYes, those two opposing words definitely fit this phenomenon. Similar to how scissors in the wrong hands can lead to injuries, but can create marvellous paper crafts in the right ones, it is important to understand some cases in which the Zeigarnik effect can be utilised for benefits. Like during study sessions, where strategic interruptions, or short breaks, are taken in between to relax the mind with the last-read information stored safely within. Then there are times when the effect needs to be prevented since it can cause the mind to be cluttered with a large list of unfinished tasks. In this case, prevention can be achieved by 'not procrastinating'. If you have a short task (making your bed, returning a phone call, etc), do not stop until it is complete. The controversyWhile experiments have been performed in the making of the study of this phenomenon, it has been met with its fair share of controversies. Since there are many external factors to take into account: the mindset of the person performing the task, the nature of the interruption, etc. In a systematic review conducted in 2025 on both the Zeigarnik and the Ovsiankina effect (the urge to finish incomplete tasks), the validity of the latter was chosen over the former.

Rethinking battery strategy in India: the case for sodium-ion technology

Batteries have become deeply embedded in modern life. From laptops, mobile phones, wearable devices such as smartwatches and wireless earphones, to power tools, electric vehicles (EVs), and large-scale battery energy storage systems, batteries now underpin both personal convenience and critical infrastructure. A newer trend is also emerging, with batteries being integrated directly into household appliances, ranging from induction cooktops to refrigerators, alongside the rise of energy storage systems. These developments collectively point to a future saturated with batteries, making energy storage a foundational pillar of economic growth, energy security, and the clean energy transition.

Dominant, not a perfect solutionAmong the various battery chemistries that have existed or are still in use, such as nickel-cadmium, lead-acid, and others, lithium-ion batteries have emerged as the dominant global technology. This dominance is largely driven by their high energy density, low self-discharge rates, and long cycle life. Sustained global focus on lithium-ion technology over the past two decades has resulted in steady improvements in performance, manufacturing efficiency, and large-scale capacity build-out. By 2024, global lithium-ion manufacturing capacity had reached nearly 2.5 times annual demand, further accelerating cost reductions through economies of scale. As a result, costs have fallen dramatically, from nearly \$1,100 per kWh in the early 2010s to about \$108 per kWh in 2025.

However, the success of lithium-ion batteries masks several structural challenges. These batteries are highly resource-intensive and depend on critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and graphite. The availability of these materials is unevenly distributed across a handful of countries, while refining and processing capacities are even more geographically concentrated. This creates vulnerabilities related to supply security, price volatility, and geopolitical risk. As global demand for batteries accelerates, these constraints are likely to intensify, reinforcing the need for alternative technologies that can support a more resilient and equitable energy transition.

Ambitions and structural constraintsIndia provides a compelling case for rethinking battery technology choices. The Government of India has made sustained efforts to build domestic battery manufacturing capacity, most notably

through the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cells launched in 2021. Under this scheme, around 40 GWh of manufacturing capacity has been allocated so far. While this represents meaningful progress, deployment remains at an early stage, with just over 1 GWh commissioned to date and additional capacities expected to come online gradually. More critically, India's upstream ecosystem, from raw material availability and mineral processing to cathode and anode active material production and separator manufacturing, remains underdeveloped. Domestic reserves of lithium are limited and yet to be proven commercially viable, while processing infrastructure is still nascent. Consequently, import dependence for lithium-ion batteries is likely to persist for a considerable period. This reality underscores the importance of parallel investments in alternative battery technologies that can reduce material risk and strengthen long-term energy security. Sodium-ion batteries (SiBs) represent one such technology, offering significant promise for India in the medium to long term.

Energy density: sodium vs lithiumFrom a fundamental perspective, sodium-ion batteries exhibit lower specific energy (Wh/kg) than lithium-ion batteries, largely because sodium has a higher atomic mass than lithium, which intuitively leads to more mass per unit of stored energy. However, this performance gap is often overstated. In practice, it can be significantly narrowed if the mass of other cell components in sodium-ion batteries is reduced, thereby compensating for the higher mass of sodium itself. Moreover, among commercially available sodium-ion chemistries, layered transition-metal oxide cathodes already deliver higher specific energy than polyanionic compounds and Prussian blue analogues, underscoring the growing competitiveness of sodium-ion technology. Importantly, layered oxide sodium-ion batteries are now approaching the specific energy of lithium iron phosphate (LFP) batteries, as illustrated in Figure 1. Although their volumetric energy density (Wh/L) still trails that of LFP, ongoing materials and cell-level optimisations are expected to substantially narrow this gap and potentially lead to meaningful overlap. It is also important to emphasise that this comparison is based on commercially available products, whereas laboratory-scale and pilot-level research results suggest even greater performance potential.

West Asia War Fallout: Premium petrol price hiked by Rs 2 a litre, bulk diesel up Rs 22



With the West Asia war leading to a surge in international crude oil and fuel prices and burdening India's public sector refiners and fuel retailers, prices of premium petrol and bulk diesel consumed by industrial users were hiked Friday. The price of regular petrol and diesel remained unchanged. The price of premium 95-octane petrol was hiked by Rs 2 per litre in Delhi to Rs 101.89 per litre, with corresponding changes in other parts of the country. The price of industrial diesel went up by around Rs 22 per litre to Rs 109.59 in Delhi, from Rs 87.67 per litre.

According to a senior government official, the premium petrol caters to a minuscule segment of Indian consumers, and the interests of the common consumer have been so far protected. Sources indicated there was no immediate plan to increase retail prices of regular petrol and diesel, with public sector fuel retailers continuing to absorb the losses. International crude oil benchmark Brent had touched \$119 per barrel Thursday and as of Friday evening, it was around \$108 per barrel, still 48% higher than the last price before the start of the West Asia war on February 28. Crack spreads, or margins between oil and petroleum products, have also surged globally for fuels like diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the country's largest refiner and fuel retailer, in a post on X, said, "As global crude prices surge, stability at home matters more than ever. IndianOil has ensured no increase in regular automotive fuel prices in India, even amid rising international costs. A limited revision applies only to premium petrol XP-95, with minimal impact on overall consumption. Through evolving global conditions, the focus remains clear:

consistent supply, responsible pricing, and service you can rely on." Petroleum Ministry Joint Secretary Sujata Sharma told reporters: "Some increase is reported in the premium category which hardly makes up for 2-4% of the entire petrol (consumption)... There is no increase in price for the common man." She declined to comment on whether retail prices of regular petrol and diesel will remain at the current levels despite the volatility in global prices. The government's current priority, she said, is to ensure energy availability for consumers amid a "concerning" global situation, and the public-sector fuel retailers have resisted increasing fuel prices so far.

According to IOC, premium petrol sales account for just about 5% of total petrol sales. As for regular petrol and diesel, they continue to be priced at Rs 94.77 per litre and Rs 87.67 per litre in Delhi. Fuel prices vary across states due to different levels of state taxes. Normal petrol usually has an octane rating of around 92, while premium petrol has an octane rating of 95 to 98, which helps increase performance particularly in luxury cars with high-performance engines. Public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) IOC, Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) have a cumulative market share of around 90% in India's fuel retail market, giving them undisputed control on fuel pricing. India depends on imports to meet over 88% of its crude oil requirement, which makes the Indian refiners extremely vulnerable to global oil price volatility. A continued freeze in pump prices is expected to blunt the inflationary impact of the oil price spurt. Petrol and diesel prices have effectively been flat since April 2022, with the public sector oil retailers taking losses when global prices jump, and recouping them when they fall. "The OMCs have done well financially over the past few years and they are in a comfortable position to take some temporary pain to protect the Indian consumer from high energy prices... Is the price of petrol or diesel at the retail outlet going to rise in the foreseeable future? It is unlikely to happen," a senior government official had said earlier this month. Two Indian LPG carriers ready to sail Two Indian-flagged LPG tankers are preparing to sail through the Strait of Hormuz in coming days after a pause in voyages with no crude oil tankers leaving the waterway in the past 24 hours, according to shipping data and sources. The two tankers were currently anchored in Gulf waters, according to data from Kpler and shipping sources. —

'Aaj toh main gaya': Karan Tacker opens up about experiencing panic attacks; experts react



The urban environment presents significant psychological challenges. As competition within the global job market intensifies, professionals are increasingly susceptible to chronic stress and anxiety—conditions that often manifest in a spectrum of physiological health issues, most notably panic disorders. Recent data suggests these episodes are no longer confined to specific demographic cohorts or high-pressure industries; rather, they have become a pervasive cross-sectoral phenomenon affecting a diverse range of age groups. Over the years, several celebrities and public figures have also come out to talk about it, sharing their own experiences. Recently, actor Karan Tacker opened up about panic attacks, stressing that such episodes are temporary and are not life-threatening. Speaking at We Are Yuva, hosted by Nikhil Taneja, Tacker shared his "biggest" learning from his experience. "Panic attacks almost mimic that you are dying," the actor said, adding, "You cannot die from it. The biggest fear when you are getting a panic attack is like 'aaj toh main gaya', this is it."

"You will find yourself checking into an emergency, which you only saw, a very elderly person doing," the Special Ops actor added. Based on his experience, Tacker said, "The one thing that I want to leave everybody with is you can't die of it. If you're getting a panic attack, you'll live through it. Having that chord in your hand, knowing that this won't kill you is so-so important." Experts shared their insights into panic attacks, shedding light on their causes, symptoms, and myths, and, above all, ways to manage them. Verifying the claims made by Tacker, Dr Murali Krishna, Consultant – Psychiatry & Counselling Services, Aster RV Hospital, Bangalore, said panic attacks are extremely distressing, but not life-threatening. "The body's response during a panic attack is essentially an exaggerated 'fight or flight' reaction, driven by the autonomic nervous system," he explained. "The symptoms may feel like a serious condition, like a heart attack, which is why many people

fear they might die. However, panic attacks do not cause physical harm. That said, recurrent episodes should not be ignored, as they may indicate conditions like Generalised Anxiety Disorder or panic disorder, which benefit from professional support," he added. Dr Pavitra Shankar, Associate Consultant, Psychiatry, Aakash Healthcare, noted that rising stress levels and constant pressure often take a toll on mental health, triggering panic attacks. She explained that a panic attack is fuelled by intense fear or discomfort that escalates within minutes. These sudden episodes occur without warning.

"Panic attacks and anxiety-related issues are becoming increasingly common, yet many people still struggle to understand them. Sudden episodes of breathlessness, racing heart, and intense fear are often mistaken for a heart attack, while in reality, they may be panic attacks," Dr Shankar said. Common triggers of panic attacks include high stress or emotional pressure, lack of sleep, excess caffeine, certain medications, fear of crowded or closed spaces, and past trauma or distressing memories are some of the common triggers of panic attacks, Dr Shankar shared. Panic attack vs. anxiety attack: What's the difference? Many people confuse panic attacks with anxiety attacks. Dr Krishna explained that one can distinguish the two episodes simply by observing the symptoms. While a panic attack is intense and peaks within minutes, an anxiety attack is a gradual build-up of worry and distress. "Panic attacks are often accompanied by physical symptoms such as chest pain, breathlessness, dizziness, or a sense of impending doom," he said, adding, "An anxiety attack is not a formal clinical term but is used to describe a gradual build-up of worry or distress, typically linked to a specific stressor. Anxiety tends to be more prolonged, whereas panic attacks are sudden and episodic."

Dr Shankar stressed that managing a panic attack is crucial, using simple techniques: deep breathing, reminding oneself that it is temporary, shifting focus to something else, and splashing cold water on the face or sipping water. "Focusing on controlled breathing can significantly reduce the intensity of a panic attack. It helps calm the nervous system and brings the body back to balance," she said. Can wellness practices help treat panic attacks? To reduce regular episodes of panic attacks, Dr Shankar advised several lifestyle and wellness practices: Yoga and pranayama, meditation and mindfulness, regular physical exercise, adequate sleep, and reducing caffeine and screen time. "In some cases, doctors may also recommend therapy such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or medications, depending on the severity," he said.

Aadhaar app's pre-installation proposal faces industry pushback on account of technical infeasibility

UIDAI launches the 'Selective Share' feature on the new Aadhaar app, enabling secure and paperless identity sharing. Know how it works and key benefits. The app enables features such as QR-based offline identity verification, consent-based sharing of limited Aadhaar data, and biometric lock/unlock for security. The Aadhaar agency had pitched smartphone makers to pre-install its revamped biometric identification mobile application to enable a single sign-on feature for all online services that require Aadhaar authentication or identity verification. However, the proposal had received pushback from the industry on account of technical infeasibility.

The new Aadhaar app — launched by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) in January — is designed as a next-generation digital identity platform that allows users to manage and verify their Aadhaar credentials through their smartphones. The app enables features such as QR-based offline identity verification, consent-based sharing of limited Aadhaar data, and biometric lock/unlock for security. It also allows users to manage multiple family Aadhaar profiles on a single device and update certain details such as the mobile number or address directly through the app, reducing the need for physical documents or visits to Aadhaar centres.

"We tried explaining to smartphone companies that having the Aadhaar app preinstalled would be a good thing for them. There are many services which need Aadhaar authentication, and increasingly, some laws like the Data Protection Act require verification of a user's age. We believe the Aadhaar app was a good way to allow such options seamlessly," a senior government official said. The discussion on the pre-installation of the app, which the official quoted above said was "exploratory" in nature and "not binding at all," was met with pushback from Manufacturers' Association for Information Technology (MAIT), an industry body representing manufacturing companies, Reuters had first reported. Queries sent to UIDAI and MAIT remained unanswered until publication. MAIT argued that mandating



the pre-installation of a government application would create manufacturing and operational complications for global smartphone companies. Manufacturers said they typically produce devices for multiple markets using common software builds, and a requirement specific to India could force them to create separate firmware or production lines, increasing costs and complexity.

The association also flagged privacy and security concerns, noting that government-mandated apps tied to sensitive identity data could raise risks if devices are compromised. MAIT further warned that such a mandate could set a precedent for compulsory installation of other government apps, potentially affecting the openness of smartphone ecosystems and user choice. Though these discussions are understood to have moderated, industry executives said it pointed towards a growing point of friction between the government and hardware manufacturers: an increasing insistence to pre-load state-sponsored software on devices. Last year, the Department of Telecommunications had asked smartphone companies in India to preinstall Sanchar Saathi, a state-developed cybersecurity application that allows users to report fraudulent calls and messages, and stolen mobile phones. However, upon facing pushback from smartphone companies, it revoked the direction.

Iran's strikes on Qatar's Ras Laffan could impact some of QatarEnergy's LNG supplies to India

With the Iranian attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City damaging part of QatarEnergy's mega liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility there, LNG supplies to India even after the West Asia war subsidies could get impacted. India is a major importer of LNG, depending on the super-chilled gas to meet around half of its natural gas demand. Qatar alone accounts for over two-fifths of India's LNG imports, and almost all of India's Qatari LNG comes from Ras Laffan. "Qatar's (LNG) capacity has been hit, and that will hit us also," said Petroleum Ministry Joint Secretary Sujata Sharma, without elaborating further. According to Commerce Ministry data, India imported 27 million tonnes of LNG in 2024-25, of which 11.2 million tonnes, or 41.4%, came from Qatar. India has long-term LNG contracts totalling 8.5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) with QatarEnergy; India also buys Qatari LNG from the spot market. QatarEnergy's primary LNG production units, liquefaction plants, and export infrastructure are all concentrated in Ras Laffan, making it the world's largest LNG hub that accounts for roughly a fifth of global LNG supply. The attacks by Iran damaged two LNG producing trains totaling 12.8 mtpa of production, representing approximately 17% of Qatar's LNG exports, and could take up to five years to repair, QatarEnergy said in a statement. Although QatarEnergy has so far not specifically mentioned the impact on supplies to India, there have been concerns that long-term LNG flows to India could be impacted. With LNG from Qatar and other sources in West Asia unable to come to India due to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz and production suspension by QatarEnergy, India had already cut natural gas supplies to certain industries. "The damage sustained by the LNG facilities will take between three to five years to repair. The impact is on China, South Korea, Italy and Belgium. This means that we will be compelled to declare force majeure for up to five years on some long-term LNG contracts," Saad

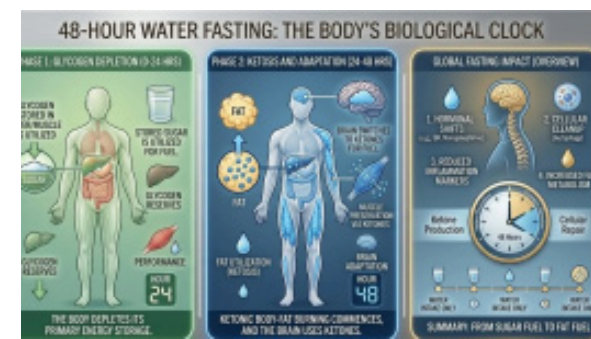
Sherida Al-Kaabi, the Minister of State for Energy Affairs, the President and CEO of QatarEnergy, was quoted as saying in the company statement. Industry sources in India expect the curtailment in LNG supplies, if any, from Qatar to not be too significant, since the specific LNG trains from where LNG is supplied to India were not damaged in the recent strikes. QatarEnergy has an LNG production capacity of 77 million tonnes per annum, which is under expansion. In 2025, QatarEnergy exported around 81 million tonnes of LNG. The strikes on Ras Laffan could cost QatarEnergy about \$20 billion a year in lost revenue, the company said. The attacks also targeted a gas-to-liquids facility, which converts natural gas into drop-in fuels and produces base oils used to make premium engine oils and lubricants, and paraffins and waxes. The attack on Ras Laffan came just hours after Israel hit the world's largest natural gas field South Pars—which Iran shares with Qatar. These attacks have marked a major escalation in the raging conflict in West Asia, with specific energy infrastructure now being targeted, raising prolonged supply disruption risks. LNG production at the facility had already been suspended by Qatar following an attack—evidently smaller in scale than the recent strikes—earlier this month. Experts had been expecting LNG flows from Ras Laffan to be reinstated rather quickly once the conflict subsided, but with the latest strikes by Iran, those hopes have been dashed. Beyond LNG, India, like some other countries dependent on West Asia for a bulk of their energy imports, would be extremely worried at the prospect of escalation in attacks on critical energy infrastructure in West Asia. So far, the supply disruption due to the conflict was largely a supply chain problem due to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, as numerous tankers carrying energy supplies are stuck in the Persian Gulf with only a few managing to trickle out.

This is how your body responds to a 48-hour water-only fast

Fasting for extended periods has gained popularity for weight loss and metabolic health. But what actually happens inside the body when someone stops eating for two days and survives only on water? According to Dr Vijay Negalur, HOD – Diabetology at KIMS Hospitals, Thane, the body undergoes several metabolic changes as it tries to maintain energy levels without food. "When a person consumes only water for about 48 hours, the body begins to shift the way it produces energy," explains Dr Negalur. **DISCLAIMER:** This article is based on information from the public domain and/or the experts we spoke to. Always consult your health practitioner before starting any routine. * Here's what happens during this period.

The body switches its energy source in the early hours of fasting, the body still relies on stored carbohydrates. "During the first 12–24 hours, the body mainly uses stored glucose from the liver," says Dr Negalur. However, once these glucose reserves are depleted, the body looks for alternative energy sources. "As these reserves get depleted, the body gradually turns to stored fat for fuel. During this phase, insulin levels fall, and the body may begin producing ketones, which act as an alternative energy source," he adds. This metabolic shift allows the body to continue functioning even without food. Common symptoms people may experience while the body adapts to fasting, many people notice certain physical and mental changes. "Some individuals may experience tiredness, irritability, headaches, or trouble concentrating as the body adjusts to the lack of food," says Dr Negalur.

These effects often occur because the body is adjusting to lower blood sugar levels and reduced calorie intake. According to Dr Negalur, a 48-hour fast may be manageable for some healthy adults, but it should not be considered universally safe. "A short fast like this may be manageable for some healthy individuals, but it is not suitable for everyone," he explains. The body's response to



fasting can differ depending on several factors such as overall health, hydration levels, and daily activity. "Some individuals may experience dizziness, weakness, low blood sugar, or dehydration during a prolonged fast," he adds. Some people adopt fasting as part of weight management strategies. "During a fast, the body may rely more on stored fat for energy," says Dr Negalur. However, the drawbacks can also be significant. "Going without food for such a long period can lead to fatigue, headaches, mood changes, and difficulty carrying out regular daily tasks," he explains. This is why fasting approaches should be carefully considered rather than followed as a trend.

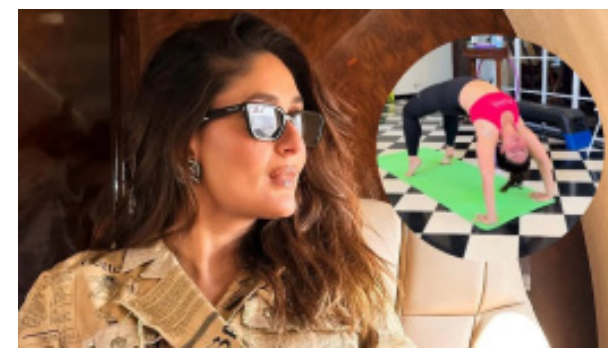
Who should avoid a 48-hour water fast?

Dr Negalur stresses that certain individuals should not attempt prolonged fasting because it can lead to serious health complications. "Pregnant or breastfeeding women, people with diabetes, individuals taking medications that influence blood sugar, those with a history of eating disorders, and people living with chronic health conditions should avoid extended fasting," he says. For these groups, going without food for long hours can disrupt blood sugar balance and create potentially dangerous health risks.

Kareena Kapoor Khan gets into the yoga flow with a 'Chakrasana and a pout'

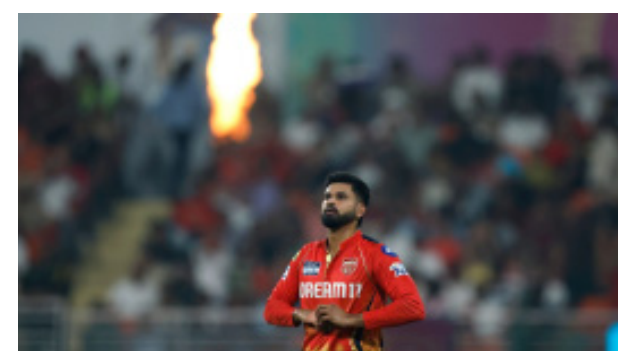
Kareena Kapoor Khan's fitness trainer, Anshuka Parwani, has shared a peek into the poses she does regularly to stay fit and healthy. "Yoga flow ?? @kareenakapoorkhan ?????? with a chakrasana and a pout ??," she mentioned in the caption of her Instagram post. We reached out to experts to understand their benefits for the body. Wheel Pose — Chakrasana Tushar Bisht, wellness and yogic science expert at Veda Rehabilitation and Wellness, explained that Chakrasana, or the wheel pose, is a back-bending yoga posture in which the body arches to resemble a wheel. This pose offers several health benefits, including improved flexibility, strengthened muscles, and an open chest. It also stimulates the endocrine system, enhancing overall vitality. According to him, there are a few things to keep in mind while doing Chakrasana (wheel pose), such as avoiding it if you have injuries or conditions, i.e., spinal issues, wrist problems, and shoulder injuries; and maintaining proper alignment. The warrior pose and its variations, in particular, strengthen the chest, lungs, belly, and groin. It also improves the muscular strength of the posterior muscles, the shoulders, and the arms cumulatively. The asana strengthens the thighs, calves and ankles. Tree Pose — Vrikshasana Vrikshasana is a combination of two Sanskrit words, 'vriksha' meaning tree and 'asana' meaning pose; it is also known as the 'Tree Pose'. Since this posture involves leg balance, it is advised to perform it near a wall so one can use it to regain balance and avoid falling to the ground.

Natarajasana, or Lord of the dance, is a difficult pose



that requires practice, dedication and consistency. The pose will stretch your shoulders, chest, hips, and inner thighs and improve body posture. Previously, Parwani had taken to social media to share a glimpse of the Bollywood actor performing Eka Pada Rajakapotasana, which is known for its numerous health benefits. Shrutika Jain, founder of YoniTara Birth, an online yoga and wellness studio, explained that the deep stretch to the hip flexors, thighs, and abdomen can help in flexibility and relieve tension. The posture not only stimulates the abdominal organs, potentially enhancing digestion, but also enhances blood circulation throughout the body, improves posture, strengthens muscles, and aligns the spine," she had said. Beyond the physical benefits, this yoga pose promotes mental well-being, too. "It can help release tension and stress that has accumulated within the body by inducing a state of relaxation and a sensation of serenity," she had added.

Keeping eye on trophy, Iyer focuses on building team bond as Punjab Kings gear up for new season



"This is the period where we live as a family for two months. The more time we spend together, the more we get to know each other. Now is the time where we build that camaraderie." Iyer said while speaking with reporters at Mohali on Friday. "We spend most of our time in the game room, playing FIFA and other games. The planning and plotting for matches usually happens a day or two before the game, but building this bond off the field helps us get better results eventually." Speaking on the challenges of making a comeback after an injury, the Punjab Kings skipper said that he had lost around seven kilos and it took a lot of effort to gain that weight back.

"But I love challenges. I am glad I overcame that part of my life, and I am back here proudly representing the team. Expectations are high, which is fun. But the important thing is that whenever we step in, we have to win. My eye is on the trophy," he said. Indian pacer and local lad Arshdeep Singh, who was also part of the T20 World Cup winning squad earlier this month, spoke about getting the support from the home crowd and also shared about his long association with the team. "When you feel the pressure, it is a privilege. It is a lot of fun when you get so much support from the crowd. When people cheer for you, you feel that 30,000 people are running in with you at that time. We will try our best to win all our home matches this year. The journey with Punjab Kings has been amazing," Arshdeep said. "When I came here for the first time, they gave me full support and showed me my potential. They trusted me a lot when no other team did. I really appreciate that, and I want to stay here for a long time. I am looking forward to winning a lot of trophies for the team," the pacer added.

GNS News Agency, March 23

Shreyas Iyer speaking on the challenges of making a comeback after an injury, the Punjab Kings skipper said that he had lost around seven kilos and it took a lot of effort to gain that weight back. (file) Having led Punjab Kings to the IPL final last season, skipper Shreyas Iyer made sure that the team reached the final for the second time since the inception of the franchise tournament. While Kings lost the final to Royal Challengers Bengaluru by six runs in a tense final at Ahmedabad, the Iyer-led side will be looking to repeat the heroics of 2025 and also to go one step further to win the title.

Following an injury, Iyer has returned to the cricketing action as he attended the preparatory camp of the Punjab side and shared his thoughts on this year's campaign during the team's new jersey launch at Mohali on Friday. Kings will open their IPL campaign this season facing Shubman Gill-led Gujarat Titans at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh PCA New International Stadium at Mullanpur on March 31.

The drunk, the dead football club, and the giant they killed

GNS News Agency, March 23

On a drinking binge for days, Rob Smethurst had finally collapsed. He relives that dark night in detail on BBC's Life Less Ordinary podcast. He had sat lifeless, leaning against the wardrobe, tears flowing and the hazy images of three beautiful boys floating in front of him. He closed his eyes with a depressing thought — What have I done? A self-confessed "functional alcoholic" in his 40s, he had been living on the edge for a while. Doing what he pleased was his character, being unreasonable a habit. He would hit the bottle early, spend hours at the bar. In that state, he bought a dead and buried football club for half a million pounds. That atrocious business call, taken in an inebriated state, would one day save his life.

Early this year, five years after the intoxicated whim-purchase, Smethurst's Macclesfield FC knocked out Crystal Palace, a Premier League team, from the FA Cup, the oldest national tournament in the world. After climbing from the ninth to the sixth tier on the English football pyramid in record time, Macclesfield toppled an elite London club — even David's sling-shot had a better chance of hitting giant Goliath than Macclesfield of bringing down a team ranked 117 places above them. A team of part-timers — plumbers, bricklayers and even a candle-maker — defeated a side with England internationals. On that day, amateurs making 250 pounds a week were better than stars who earned the same in seconds. This wouldn't have happened had Smethurst not survived the night he thought was his last.

In the BBC podcast, the Macclesfield FC owner talks about his past. Born with ADHD, school was hell for him. Teachers, back in the day, weren't sensitive to slow learners. Red marks on test sheets and snide remarks on the report card were discouraging. He was classified as "thick." At 16, he left school but the experience prepared him for one thing: facing failure. Macclesfield FC's fans and players celebrate on the pitch after defeating Crystal Palace in the 3rd round of the FA Cup. (PHOTO: Reuters) Smethurst's Macclesfield FC's fans and players celebrate on the pitch after defeating Crystal Palace in the 3rd round of the FA Cup.

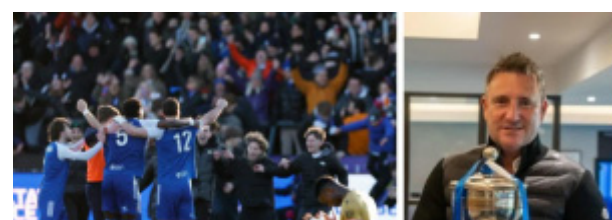
He sold cars, like his father. That didn't work. He started a garage that lost money. He ventured into stocks and shares. Another misadventure. He moved back to selling cars but this time, on the side, he started building an app that tracked movement of cars around the country. But it was tough. There was this one time he left his car at a petrol station and walked home. He had a couple of pounds in the bank, not enough to fill the tank. When home, he would hide under a duvet and drink. The kids were taken out of school. Parents and in-laws helped the family survive.

'You'll come after 7 matches, take 1 crore & leave': Former India cricketer rips into Lockie Ferguson over IPL 2026 absence

GNS News Agency, March 23

Former India cricketer Aakash Chopra has slammed Lockie Ferguson after the New Zealand pacer said he won't take part in the initial phase of the Indian Premier League 2026, opting to spend more time with his family and newborn baby. Punjab Kings had retained Ferguson at his base price for INR 2 crore. While Chopra said there's nothing wrong with giving priority to family and spending time with them, once a commitment is made by someone, it's not right to just break it.

"I'm thinking about Lockie Ferguson. Actually, that's a serious one. Is he injured... I don't know, is he injured or not? What I read is, he's not available for seven matches. He said, 'I want to spend some time with family.' He was picked at base price, right? Bought for 2 crores. He's playing for his team, playing for New Zealand, then he'll take a break. He'll go home and spend time with family. It's not a bad thing. Again, don't judge anyone. You should never judge anyone. I love spending time with my family. If someone tells me to take a holiday, I say, I'll take it, I'm going to sit at home. I love my family. Whether it's kids, parents, wife... spending time with everyone. I love doing that. But if you've made a commitment and you're leaving seven matches just for that in the IPL, then teams will have to realise that this isn't right," said Chopra on his YouTube channel. "Because you'll come after seven matches, take 1 crore on a pro-rata basis, and leave. What's the point? Your team's season might already be ruined by then," he



Suddenly, his life turned one day. The app worked. It would become the largest platform in the car-moving category. Tens of millions landed in his bank account. But constant travelling had deepened the drinking. He had money now, but nothing to do, no purpose. It was during those days that he saw an ad in the paper about the sale of Macclesfield FC. Mortals send stupid texts when drunk. Greats buy clubs. Having found purpose, Smethurst called his friend Robbie Savage — a fierce Welsh footballer and reputed Premier League midfielder. After mocking his pal's decision, Savage agreed to coach. Together they built the team brick by brick, player by player. The owner made the football club the town's hub — gyms, parks, a place to be. On Christmas there were meals for those who couldn't afford them. Five thousand walked onto the turf for the first game under Smethurst. He got a standing ovation. That year they won the league. In four years, they were promoted three times.

Then Savage put in his papers and switched clubs, taking three top players with him. Smethurst says they are still friends but don't talk that often. The Smethurst story is never smooth. Macclesfield FC fan holds a tin foil replica FA Cup before the match against Crystal Palace. (PHOTO: Reuters) Macclesfield FC fan holds a tin foil replica FA Cup before the match against Crystal Palace. (PHOTO: Reuters) Days before the club's biggest ever match — an FA Cup tie against Crystal Palace — the team's 21-year-old forward Ethan McLeod died in a car crash. His Mercedes collided with a barrier as he was returning from a game.

The team was shattered. Smethurst says they would sit in silence for hours. Then someone would sob uncontrollably or let out piercing screams. No one was in the mood to play. They lost games. But when Crystal Palace came around — the biggest day in the club's history — they decided to play for Ethan. They ran as if possessed. They scored without getting overawed by the occasion. In the final minutes they defended as if Ethan was on the sidelines egging them on to save the lead. The owner, who had seen so much in life, didn't cry that day. He was too proud, he says. After the game, he and his family left much before the party peaked. They had a Chinese meal. They all went to sleep with a smile.



added. "Hard part is deciding when to take rest"

Ferguson, who has no injury concerns, welcomed a baby with his partner. He said he will spend time at home before linking up with the Punjab Kings squad in the "later stages" of the tournament. "Just had a son, trying to spend as much time as I can at home and help the wife out. I'll have a few weeks off after this, before heading to the later stages of the IPL and away for the winter," Ferguson said ahead of the third T20I against South Africa. "Really looking forward to some time at home and then back into some cricket after that. Sometimes the hard part is deciding when to take a rest. This feels like the right time, especially since my wife was looking after the baby while I was at the World Cup," he added. Ferguson took part for New Zealand in the first three T20Is against South Africa at home before heading home.

Irfan Pathan on Rinku Singh: 'Couldn't fully capitalize on the chances he got'



GNS News Agency, March 23

Rinku Singh burst onto the scene in the 2023 season, where he established himself as a designated finisher for the Kolkata Knight Riders. However, in the last couple of seasons, his form has dipped quite sharply. In fact, after a breakthrough season in which he managed to churn out 474 runs from 14 innings, his returns went down to 374 runs from 22 innings in the last couple of seasons. Former Indian cricketer Irfan Pathan pointed at the dip in the form of Rinku and said the southpaw could not make use of the opportunities he got. "We will have to see how much opportunity he gets to play. His 2023 season was outstanding.

He scored 400-450 runs with a strike rate of 150. But after that, his performance dipped, and many times he didn't get enough opportunities. He will have to maintain his standard and maximize the opportunities he gets. Even in the World Cup, he played five matches, but he couldn't fully capitalize on the chances he got. This is another problem that Kolkata needs to rectify, and Rinku Singh is one of them," Pathan said on his YouTube channel.

Brutal finisher In the IPL Rinku's 414 runs in the last-four stage have only been bettered by Tim David (463) in the IPL since 2023, but his 201.95 strike rate even eclipses the towering Aussie (197.25). Rinku does not beam explosively like David, or MS Dhoni and Heinrich Klaasen, who have also reached the 400-run mark at the death in the same period. And yet, he frequents boundaries quicker than the sturdy trio at the death, at every 3.15 deliveries. The 28-year-old has already translated this ballistic charge for India in the death-overs, which has contributed to 51 per cent of his career runs at an explosive 214.68 strike rate. The numbers grow otherworldly as the pressure stiffens. Rinku has already gathered 213 of his 594 career runs in the last two overs of an innings alone, striking at 287.83. The scoring rate skyrocketed to 302.63 in the 20th over, the highest among all Full-Member batters who have aggregated at least 100 runs within the final-over sequence.

'What is Cricket Australia even doing?': Ex-India cricketer slams CA's workload management plan as Starc, Cummins & Hazlewood set to miss IPL 2026 start

GNS News Agency, March 23

With just a few days left for the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026, there has been a growing list of players who are set to miss out on the initial phase of the tournament due to various reasons, but it's the omission of the ace Australian pace trio of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc that has made the biggest headline.

Cricket Australia (CA) is reported to be taking a cautious approach to managing its pacers ahead of a gruelling international schedule, which means Sunrisers Hyderabad, Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bengaluru will be without their star fast bowlers for the first few games because of CA's workload management plan. Former India cricketer Aakash Chopra slammed CA for their conservative approach, saying the IPL franchises would, at some point, need to take a call on this.

He said, "I'm thinking, now if Mitchell Starc is also not coming at the start, what is Cricket Australia even doing? You didn't let Josh Hazlewood come. Pat Cummins isn't coming. And now you're holding Mitchell Starc back too. He is absolutely fit. He's already said goodbye to international T20 cricket. What has he even done in the last two months? After the Ashes, he hasn't played any cricket at all. Despite that, you told him, 'No, let him be, we're not making him play, you take your rest because there's a big Test season ahead, five Test matches against India.' That's right before the next IPL. Why are you doing this now?" said Chopra on his YouTube channel. "Although they (DC) have options like Ngidi, Chameera, Jamieson. But Mitchell Starc is Mitchell Starc. If Starc isn't there, then I see this as a bit of a problem... teams will have to start thinking about what to do. Because if there's no actual injury and it's just



workload management, which you anticipate because injuries might increase, so let's manage workload and skip the IPL for a few days, then the franchises will have to take a call. What are we supposed to do and why are we doing this?" added Chopra. Starc, picked up by DC for INR 11.75 crore, was a vital cog in their pace attack. Cummins was SRH's captain and the leader of their pace attack. Similarly, Hazlewood was influential in RCB's maiden title-winning run in 2025. Chopra pointed out that if IPL is the biggest employer in the cricketing world, then something has to be done to stop this. "When we're hiring players from all over the world, in fact, we're the ones providing the most employment to players, but when our marquee league comes around, you're not available. So that won't sit well at all. Why are you leaving?" "This is something Indian franchises will have to think about. If we're providing so much employment, but then players aren't available for us, how will it work? I'm not saying anyone's doing this intentionally," he added.

Matheesha Pathirana to miss IPL 2026 start through injury; Lockie Ferguson opts for paternity leave, to rejoin later

Joining a long list of pacers unavailable for the start of the Indian Premier League 2026, Sri Lankan fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana and New Zealand quick Lockie Ferguson are set to miss the initial phase of the tournament. Kolkata Knight Riders head coach Abhishek Nayar confirmed on Friday that Pathirana, who was ruled out of the 2026 T20 World Cup due to a calf strain, is currently undergoing rehabilitation and will only be available from mid-April.

Pathirana sustained a calf injury during Sri Lanka's 2026 T20 World Cup game against Australia and was helped off the field, appearing in only three games for Sri Lanka in the tournament. "The latest update is that he is with the Sri Lankan cricket board for his rehab. Somewhere mid-April is when they feel he'll be match fit," Nayar said during KKR's pre-season press conference. Pathirana was bought by KKR for INR 18 crore at the IPL 2026 mini-auction. Meanwhile, Ferguson has no injury concerns. But the New Zealand pacer, who welcomed a baby with his partner, said he will spend time at home before linking up with the Punjab Kings squad in the "later stages" of the tournament.

"Just had a son, trying to spend as much time as I can at home and help the wife out. I'll have a few weeks off after



this, before heading to the later stages of the IPL and away for the winter," Ferguson said ahead of the third T20I against South Africa. "Really looking forward to some time at home and then back into some cricket after that. Sometimes the hard part is deciding when to take a rest. This feels like the right time, especially since my wife was looking after the baby while I was at the World Cup," he added. These omissions mean a long list of foreign players will miss out on the initial phase of the IPL, such as Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran and Jack Edwards.

Kagiso Rabada on Virat Kohli, why Warner was his most dangerous batting opponent — and the T20 challenge every fast bowler now faces

SA vs IND 1st Test: Kagiso Rabada celebrates with teammates the wicket of India's Virat Kohli during the first day of the first Test cricket match between India and South Africa, at SuperSport Park Stadium, in Centurion, Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2023. (PTI) Kagiso Rabada has lifted the lid on what made Virat Kohli the relentless Test batter he ever bowled at, while also sounding the alarm for fast bowlers in the modern T20 era. Speaking on the Fast Bowling Cartel podcast, the South African spearhead rated Kohli's sheer consistency under pressure. "He was probably the most conventional — he wouldn't necessarily hurt you, but you'd look up at the scoreboard and he'd made an impact. When you got him out, you'd really earned his wicket." Rabada grouped Kohli alongside Steve Smith, Joe Root, and Kane Williamson as the four batters who had been "the most consistent for the longest time" during his international career. However it was David Warner who he reserved a special mention for as the most dangerous. "If you weren't on, he could hurt you. He scored in funny areas. You had to be really on it to earn his wicket."



Out of T20, Rabada warned, painting a stark picture of what modern white-ball cricket demands from pace attacks. "With 60-metre boundaries and no real bounce, skidding on — you almost have to have some sort of mystery." He pointed to technology as having fundamentally shifted the balance of power. "People are literally analyzing everything you do. Batsmen get on bowling machines and just learn how to slog a length."

SS Rajamouli reviews Dhurandhar 2: Aditya Dhar 'hit it out of the park' with the 4-hour long film, Ranveer Singh serves 'masterclass' in acting



yet hard-hitting portrayal. He wrote, "I loved Dhurandhar-1, but The Revenge surpassed the original in both scale and soul. The writing, casting, technical execution, music, world design and direction are flawless.... But it's the emotional stakes that really ground it. The writing manages to weave plot twists that create genuine tension charged with emotion. @AdityaDharFilms, you hit it out of the park. It takes guts to make and release a film 4 hours long. The audience is glued to the seat till the last frame." He added, "?? @RanveerOfficial, what a performance man... The sequence with the sister in the shed is a masterclass in acting. From that beginning to the heart-wrenching climax, you mesmerized us both as Hamza and Jaskirat. @ActorMadhavan garu, you carried the helplessness and frustration of a nation so well that we felt your success as ours.. Congratulations to the entire team for the resounding success... ??????????????". I loved Dhurandhar-1, but The Revenge surpassed the original in both scale and soul. The writing, casting, technical execution, music, world design and direction are flawless.... But it's the emotional stakes that really ground it.

Meanwhile, it isn't Rajamouli alone – several South superstars have also publicly praised Aditya Dhar's film. Allu Arjun, Vijay Deverakonda, Jr NTR, Mahesh Babu, and Ram Charan have all taken to social media to sing praises for Ranveer's juggernaut. However, actor Prakash Raj did not agree with the South actors praising the film when no major Bollywood actor has done so. He wrote on X, "Dhurandhar 2 has been praised so far by Allu Arjun, Vijay Deverakonda, Jr NTR, Mahesh Babu and Ram Charan. Any Bollywood star tweeted kya (Has any Bollywood star also tweeted)? (sic). Signs of obligations are spreading to South too." This article provides entertainment news and box office analysis for informational purposes and reflects the personal views of industry figures; it does not constitute financial advice or professional recommendations.

Dhurandhar 2 is breaking all box office records. The film has collected over Rs 350 crore worldwide within just two days of release, including paid previews. The film is also benefitting from the glowing reviews it has received from industry figures. Recently, RRR director SS Rajamouli took to X (formerly Twitter) to laud Aditya Dhar's film.

The director praised Aditya Dhar for setting a precedent by 'hitting it out of the park' with a four-hour-long blockbuster. He called Ranveer Singh's performance in the film a 'masterclass' and also highlighted R Madhavan's subtle

BTS shuts down Seoul with 260,000 fans expected for ARIRANG concert; 3.9 million copies sold since release

BTS ARIRANG: Seoul's Gwanghwamun Square has not seen anything quite like this since the 2002 World Cup. After a four-year break, K-pop supergroup BTS is returning with a massive, free comeback concert in Seoul on Saturday, where police has locked down a central boulevard for the Netflix-exclusive spectacle expected to draw thousands of fans. The show, titled BTS The Comeback Live | ARIRANG, kicks off at 8 pm KST (4:30 pm IST), streaming live on Netflix to audiences across the globe. For the first time in three years and nine months, RM, Jin, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook will be performing live together as a unit, sharing the first live performances of songs off their new studio album, ARIRANG.

A day before the reunion concert, BigHit Music announced that RM suffered an ankle injury and was taken to a hospital for a detailed examination and treatment, with the singer expected to be on stage but with choreography that would be partially limited. 250,000 fans expected to be in attendance

As per Korea Times, while 22,000 ticketed fans have access to the primary venue near the main stage, local authorities anticipate that an additional 240,000 spectators will occupy the surrounding areas, stretching over a kilometer toward the historic Sungnye Gate. It would mark one of the largest crowds in the area since the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup, when around 200,000 to 250,000 people gathered to cheer for the home team. Fans are not waiting for the gates to open. Concertgoers began queuing by midday to secure spots along nearby roads, passing through metal detectors at designated checkpoints. By Friday afternoon, ARMY members had already started gathering around central Seoul, signaling just how much pent-up anticipation had built over four years. More than 50 million viewers across approximately 190 countries are expected to watch the return of the group from the heart of Seoul on Netflix. South Korea's approach to crowd safety this weekend reflects how much the country's thinking has changed since tragedy struck three years ago. South Korean officials have taken crowd safety more seriously since the deadly 2022 Halloween surge that killed nearly 160 people.

Authorities deployed about 15,000 personnel for safety management, including 6,700 police officers. A total of 6,500 police officers, including riot police units, are deployed alongside 5,400 pieces of safety equipment such as high-altitude observation vehicles and foldable fences. The Seoul city government has deployed 3,400 personnel, with 102 fire trucks and 803 firefighters positioned around the area, as reported by Korea Times. The crowd management itself is structured in three stages. Police has established a "crowd management line" outside the viewable concert area, limiting capacity to approximately 100,000 people, with entry to be completely blocked if that number is exceeded. The plan centres on phased management based on "hot zone density," with Stage 1 allowing 1 person per square metre and Stage 2, at 2 persons per square metre, triggering partial entry restrictions. The 1.2 km perimeter from Gwanghwamun to City Hall is designated as a controlled access zone. From 7:00 am KST, entry was permitted only through 31 designated entrances, with security checkpoints equipped with metal detectors at each gate. The government stepped up anti-terror monitoring, citing global tensions and large crowds of international fans, while police deployed surveillance vehicles and jamming equipment to block unauthorized drones. Subway lockers at 17 stations, including Gwanghwamun and Gyeongbokgung, were made unavailable on Saturday due to concerns over possible terror activity. In a first for South Korea, the Seoul local government sent out a public safety alert in English for the first time as part of its safety measures ahead of the concert. Anti-vehicle ramming barriers were placed around the perimeter, while traffic on Sejong-daero is suspended from 9:00 pm the night before through Sunday morning. Following the performance, police will also be stationed in popular districts like Itaewon, Hongdae, and Seongsu to manage the expected outflow of crowds. Not everyone is welcoming the scope of the measures. Critics have said the controls are excessive and undercut the symbolism of performing in Gwanghwamun, seen as Seoul's spiritual heart and most prominent gathering space.

ARIRANG: Records broken within 24 hours BTS re-



leased ARIRANG on March 20, the day before the concert, and the numbers that followed were immediate and striking. According to the Hanteo Chart, ARIRANG sold a staggering 3.9 million copies on its first day alone, breaking BTS's previous first-week sales record of 3.3 million, which had been set by their 2020 album Map of the Soul: 7, in under 24 hours. By the morning of March 21, the title track "SWIM" had hit No 1 on major domestic charts including Melon, Bugs, Genie, and FLO. "SWIM" and fan-favourite B-side "Body to Body" were still holding top positions as of 11 am KST. Presales for ARIRANG had likely surpassed 4 million copies within one week of the album being announced. For context, BTS's last release, the 2022 compilation Proof, sold 314,000 copies in its first week in the United States alone. ARIRANG is BTS's fifth Korean-language and tenth overall studio album, and their first release in over three years following the hiatus for military service. The 14-track record features contributions from Grammy-winning producers including Diplo, Ryan Tedder, and El Guincho, a lineup widely seen as strengthening the album's appeal among Recording Academy voters. The concert at Gwanghwamun is only the beginning. South Korea's SK Securities said the group's ARIRANG world tour is likely to become the biggest K-pop tour ever by scale and revenue, with 82 shows planned globally in stadiums of around 50,000 seats. Within just a few days of tickets going on sale, all of the North America, Europe, and UK stadium dates sold out. The total number of tickets sold, according to Live Nation, was close to 2.4 million. The Korea Tourism Organization reported that hotels in the Jongno and Jung-gu districts reached 98% occupancy, with a significant portion of guests arriving from North America, Europe, and Southeast Asia. In 2018, BTS received the Hwangwan Order of Cultural Merit, a South Korean government honour for contributions to promoting Korean culture. In 2021, the group became the first K-pop act to earn a Grammy nomination and perform solo at the ceremony, and later that year made history as the first Asian act to win artist of the year at the American Music Awards.

Babil Khan misses late father Irrfan Khan, shares unseen childhood pictures

Mumbai: Actor Babil Khan, on Thursday, remembered his late father Irrfan Khan as he shared a series of unseen childhood pictures, reflecting on their beautiful bond. The post struck an emotional chord with fans who took to their comments section of the post, as Babil reflected on memories while revisiting moments from his early years with his father. Sharing the pictures, Babil wrote in the caption, "To begin again, remembering you. With my feet planted firm in my roots." Reacting to the post, Babil's mother Sutapa Sikdar commented, "What beautiful pictures both with same expression. Mashaallah". The pictures shared by Babil, capture intimate and candid moments between Irrfan and a young Babil. In one picture, Irrfan is seen holding baby Babil in his arms, both looking upward. In another picture, the late actor is seen sitting closely with his son

Karan Johar dismisses K3G 2 rumours, says revival of Takht is 'not on the cards'; hints at his next: 'Nobody is talking about what I'm developing'



There has been some buzz around Karan Johar working on a sequel to his iconic film Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (K3G), with reports suggesting that the sequel could be a version of his shelved ambitious historical epic Takht. However, in a recent interaction, the filmmaker has dismissed all such claims. He also spoke about the possibility of Takht being revived in the future. Speaking to Hindustan Times, Karan addressed the possibility of K3G 2 and said, "There is no Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham 2 and there is no derivative of Takht being made." Talking about the reason why he can never imagine making a Part 2 of his iconic film, the filmmaker said, "I would never make a K3G 2 because I am not saying that it was the best film ever made, every film has its flaws, but what K3G has an abundance is nostalgia."

He added, "There are generations that has grown up,

watching that films, they love the film, and I'm very grateful for the universe that I got to create a film that still lives on, and I am very proud and happy with it, but I will never mess with that nostalgia, that love that that film has received. It is also because you are setting yourself up for disaster if you are making a film like a K3G 2." Karan shared his thoughts on his ambitious project Takht and how it was shelved after two years of research. "And there isn't a revival of Takht as of now on the cards, but that is a film I will definitely make while I can breathe and stand. I consider it the strongest screenplay that was developed with Sumit Roy, full credit to him. He is the writer of the film, and I believe it is the best piece of work in my career, and I hope to make that film one day."

Karan also hinted at a future project and how he is keeping it under wraps. "What I am actually developing, nobody is talking about that, and thank god for that. In the garb of the K3G 2 rumour, the film that I am actually writing and developing, nobody has any idea about that." Karan Johar had initially announced Takht in February 2020 with Ranveer Singh, Kareena Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Vicky Kaushal, Bhumi Pednekar, Janhvi Kapoor and Anil Kapoor. The film, at the time, was scheduled to release in December 2021. However, the pandemic caused many delays and the film was ultimately shelved. At the trailer launch of Mirai, Karan had said, "I was going to make a feature film (Takht) that was historical. As a result of various circumstances, including the pandemic, production on that film was halted. I researched that film for two and a half years and wrote that film." He added, "It was just very heartbreaking when I couldn't make it at that time. So I did dabble. Every film has its own time and fate... So hopefully in my trajectory there will be such a film."

Dhurandhar 2 is 'propaganda, huge disappointment': Kannada actor Ramya asks Aditya Dhar to move beyond 'jingoism'

Dhurandhar 2: The Revenge is on a rampage at the box office, drawing praise from both audiences and celebrities. However, a section of viewers has criticised the film for its alleged "propaganda." Kannada actor and former politician Ramya shared a scathing review of the film on her official X account, calling the sequel a "complete propaganda" and urging director Aditya Dhar to move beyond jingoism. She wrote, "Just watched Dhurandhar 2 and wow! What a masterclass in how to turn something promising into an endurance test. It's like reading a textbook of the most boring subject with never-ending chapters and at some point, your brain just gives up and starts laughing out of sheer despair at the atrocity unfolding in front of you. If you really want to watch it, do yourself a favor—don't waste your time or money in a theatre. This is strictly 'pause, scroll phone, question life choices' content—best consumed on a streaming platform where escape is just a click away."

Criticising the film's technical aspects, she added, "Direction, dialogues, editing, background score, acting—all consistently subpar. It genuinely feels like no one told them there was a March 19 release deadline approaching. Or worse, they knew and still said, 'haan perfect hai, bhej do.' In Dhurandhar (Part 1), people were hooting, clapping, vibing. There was energy. There was engagement. This one—the audience was having none of it. You could feel the collective disappointment in the theatre." Questioning the widespread praise for Ranveer Singh, she remarked, "Also, to everyone saying it's Ranveer carrying the film—what exactly is he carrying? Because all I could see was his hair. In the first part, his hair had personality, presence, character. In this one, it's just there. In the way. Of everything. Blocking scenes. Possibly eligible for a supporting role nomination."

She also took issue with the film's violence, writing, "And the violence!!! This isn't a movie, it's basically a visual handbook (one that absolutely should not exist) on how creatively violent you can get with literally any object lying around. Syringe? Used. Spanner? Used. Knives, spiked balls, machetes, reapers, chains, guns, bombs, bazookas, shutters—you name it, they've weaponized it." Taking a swipe at the director's vision, she said, "The director seems to be in a constant competition with himself: 'How do I make the next scene more violent/comical than the last?' And it just keeps escalating to the point where it stops being shocking and starts being hilarious. You chop off both legs, soak a torso in kerosene, and the guy is still delivering dialogues like he's mid-TED Talk. Medical science, zindabad. Forget Oscar, Nobel Prize incoming." She concluded, "Long story short: Dhurandhar 2 is a HUGE disappointment. Snoozefest/comedy at best. If Part 1 made you cheer, this one will make you question why Dhurandhar 2, why? Ranveer, you're better than this. Aditya Dhar—jingoism and



propaganda is so passé. Get over it."

Earlier, actor Prakash Raj had expressed a similar sentiment. Taking to X, he wrote, "Me... bahut door from Dhurandhar... are you? Just asking!" In another post, he appeared to take a dig at South stars such as Allu Arjun, Jr NTR, Mahesh Babu, and Vijay Deverakonda—all of whom had earlier praised the film—writing, "Signs of obligations are spreading South too." The criticism isn't limited to actors. Several politicians and association leaders have also slammed the film for allegedly spreading propaganda. Waris Pathan, spokesperson for All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), even called for a ban. Speaking to ANI, he said, "There are some cheap people who spread hatred and lies just to make a few rupees. They don't know how to make anything else. They are using real-world examples like demonetisation, even though everybody knows the truth about how people stood in lines. Make films for entertainment or to show real history. Make films to make people happy, not to spread hatred. The government should ban such films. Make a film on the Epstein Files or other topics. If you've made it against Pakistan, show it in Pakistan then. Why are you causing issues here?" Despite the backlash, Dhurandhar 2: The Revenge continues its strong box office run. The Ranveer Singh-starrer has earned Rs 330 crore worldwide, with its India net collection standing at Rs 240.29 crore, according to Sacnlic. Directed by Aditya Dhar, the film was released in multiple languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam. However, censorship delays pushed the Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada versions. While the Tamil and Telugu versions have finally hit theatres today, the Kannada version has been rescheduled to March 23. With the addition of these language markets, the film is expected to see a further boost in collections, potentially surpassing its Day 1 and Day 2 figures. The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the cited public figures and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of this publication. This content is for informational purposes regarding trending entertainment news and has not been independently verified for factual accuracy regarding the film's production or political claims.

Javed Akhtar had to step in to explain Gulzar's lyrics so Farah Khan could choreograph Dil Se song: 'Yeh kya likha hai?'

Mani Ratnam's film Dil Se was iconic in every way. Apart from its hard-hitting story, the film's songs were also legendary, with fans still swooning to those tunes composed by AR Rahman. Amid all this, it was Farah Khan who choreographed some of the film's most iconic tracks, including "Satrangi Re", which was pictured on Shah Rukh Khan and Manisha Koirala. Farah had the task of taking Mani Ratnam's vision forward in the choreography of the song, but she faced a challenge – understanding the lyrics penned by Gulzar.

In a recent interaction with Ranveer Allahbadia, Farah recalled that they were shooting for the song in Ladakh, but to conceptualise it, she had to understand the song's lyrics. For this, she reached out to her uncle and Hindi cinema's legendary writer Javed Akhtar. She said, "I did not understand the meaning of this song because Gulzar sahab had written some difficult words in it. You will not believe that I had to call Javed Akhtar to ask him to translate Gulzar's lyrics for me. On top of that Mani Ratnam did not know

Hindi, the cameraman didn't know Hindi, AR Rahman (the composer) didn't know Hindi. So from Ladakh, I was calling Javed uncle to understand the lyrics of the song. Javed Uncle asked, 'Yeh kya likha hai? Yeh kisne likha hai?' (Who has written this?)"

However, later, Farah asked Javed to write a nonsensical song inspired by Gulzar's writing in Om Shanti Om. She revealed, "After that, when we were doing 'Dard-E-Disco', I told Javed uncle that I want a nonsensical song, but I want it in Gulzar sahab's way. In 5 minutes, Javed uncle wrote that song." 'Dard-E-Disco' was sung by Sukhwinder Singh, composed by Vishal-Shekhar, and choreographed by Farah. For the unversed, Javed Akhtar's first wife Honey Irani is Farah Khan's aunt, which is why the two share a family connection. Earlier, while speaking on Take 2 podcast, Farah had spoken about how even Mani Ratnam was clueless about the "Satrangi Re" track. She said, "The funniest part was Gulzar sahab had written this part of the song that described the seven stages of love. Mani sir doesn't know Hindi, so he was asking us.