

## Harish Rao to visit illegal quarry in Neopolis on Thursday

Hyderabad: BRSLP deputy leader T Harish Rao will lead a BRS fact-finding team to Neopolis and Rajendranagar on Thursday, to inspect the alleged illegal quarrying activities and crushing unit, reportedly belonging to kith and kin of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy. Geographic Reference

During an informal interaction with media at Telangana Bhavan here, Harish Rao stated that while regulations permit only mobile crushing units near quarries, a fixed crushing plant had been established. Mining was being carried out over 15 acres despite permissions for only 10 acres, with royalty allegedly evaded on 15 lakh cubic metres of rock, he said, adding that there was no approval for a ready-mix unit at the site.

## US sub sinks Iranian navy vessel near Sri Lanka, war edges closer to Indian waters

US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth on Wednesday confirmed that a US submarine fired a torpedo and has sunk Iranian Navy vessel IRIS Dena west of Sri Lanka.

In a way the Iran and US -Israel conflict has reached close to Indian coast. The strike today at sea was almost 4000 kms away from Iran , significantly expanding the radius of war.

Already , fearing Iranian missile strikes, several US warships has moved eastward towards India. These ships are in international waters.

The Iranian ship, hit today, was returning after participating in the international fleet review and exercise Milan hosted by India at Vishakapatnam.

The Iranian ship went down with almost 140 sailors on board missing. The Sri Lankan Navy , acting on a distress call rescued 32 of the Iranian sailors.

Hegseth confirmed the act by the US forces saying the ship was hit in the Indian Ocean, saying "an Iranian warship that thought it was safe in international waters...Instead it was sunk by a torpedo".

Hegseth did not name the Iranian ship that was attacked. But earlier the Sri Lankan navy reported the distress call from IRIS Dena when it was some 40 kms west of Galle, located on the south-western part of the Island country.

On February 16, the Iranian had sailed into the port of Visakhapatnam where Seventy-four nations participated. Warships from Australia, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and dozens of others were anchored alongside the now sunk Iranian vessel

Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani held talks with India's Chief of Naval Staff on strengthening maritime security cooperation. The theme was "United through Oceans."



Notably the US Navy was supposed to send the guided-missile destroyer USS Pinckney to the exercise Milan, how we the ship was diverted to Singapore on Feb 15. US did not field it's warship in Milan which had ships from Russia and Iran.

The exercise ended February 25. Three days later, on February 28, the United States and Israel launched Operation Epi Fury.

The IRIS Dena was transiting home. This morning at 5:08 a.m. local time, the IRIS Dena issued a distress call.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath informed parliament that two navy vessels and an aircraft were deployed. Thirty crew members were rescued and admitted to Karapitiya Hospital in Galle. The Straits Times reported 32 critically wounded survivors. Reuters, reported 101 missing and 78 wounded.

The Sri Lankan Navy spokesman said the operation was conducted in line with the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue.

## Holi celebrated with enthusiasm in Kothagudem, Warangal

Kothagudem/Warangal: The festival of colours Holi was celebrated in a vibrant manner in Kothagudem and Warangal on Wednesday.

A joyous Holi celebration was organised by Sulakshya Seva Samithi NGO at Sri Vyasa Avasam in Hanamkonda using eco-friendly colours to ensure that the festivities were both safe and environmentally conscious.

## Rang Barse.. Mallareddy danced



Secunderabad Cantonment. March. 4 (Indian Chronicle):"Celebrations on the occasion of Holi festival are in full swing in Bowenpally. The street has become a medley of colors. Holi celebrations were held grandly at the residence of former Minister Medchal MLA Mallareddy in Jayanagar Colony under the leadership of Tinku Goud. Mallareddy leaders and activists participating in these celebrations sprinkled colors and wished Holi to his fans and fed sweets. Later, they spent a lot of time doing Teenmar

dances with Teenmar drums. In this backdrop, children, adults, young women and youth who reached there sprinkled various colors and wished Holi. Former Beverages Corporation Chairman Gajjela Nagesh, former Board Vice Chairman Jakkula Maheshwar Reddy, former member Pandu Yadav, former Chairman of Bowenpally Market Yard TN Srinivas, Teamku Goud, Ajay Yadav, Suleman, and others participated in this program. In addition, Holi celebrations were held grandly at Mallareddy Gardens, KJR Gardens, and Imperial Garden within the cantonment area. The police made arrangements to prevent any untoward incidents during the celebrations.

## Haphazard Parking Causes Trouble Near Sattibabu Hotel Motorists Face Difficulties Due to Hotel Management's Negligence

KISHORE, VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 4 (Indian Chronicle):"Motorists are facing severe inconvenience due to indiscriminate parking near Sattibabu Biryani Hotel located close to the Survey of India area in Uppal."As there is no proper parking facility available at the hotel, customers are parking their vehicles recklessly on the main road. The hotel management, which is responsible for addressing the issue, appears to be ignoring the situation."Due to vehicles being parked on the roadside, commuters and motorists passing through the area are facing significant difficulties. In addition to Sattibabu Biryani Hotel, nearby establishments such as Pista House and Raghavendra Hotel are also contributing to the parking congestion, further worsening the situation for pedestrians and drivers."Motorists are urging the management of Sattibabu Hotel to respond promptly and take necessary measures to ensure proper parking arrangements. Locals also believe that traffic police authorities have a responsibility to ensure that the public does not face inconvenience in this area.



## Sharad Pawar it is: MVA to field Maratha veteran in RS poll from Maharashtra

The opposition camp has decided to field NCP SP chief Sharad Pawar from the lone seat it is in a position to win from Maharashtra.

The call was taken today with Pawar expected to file the nomination on Thursday.

Pawar, 88, continues to command absolute control over Maharashtra opposition politics despite his party currently having the lowest number of MLAs in the state assembly --

Just ten out of 288 as against 20 of the Congress and 16 of the Shiv Sena UBT.

The Congress had wanted the seat for itself citing the strength this time around but Pawar decided to press his claim, said sources.

Having lost electoral foothold in the state and also the larger NCP cadre to nephew late Ajit Pawar and how his deputy CM wife Sunetra, Sharad Pawar needs a Rajya Sabha presence to stay relevant to state politics and to retain his heft.

The Congress and Sena UBT camp sources had yesterday said if Sharad Pawar continues to seek Rajya Sabha entry they would not be able to say no.

Out of seven Maharashtra seats falling vacant NDA



camp will get six with BJP today naming minister Ramdas Athawale and national general secretary Vinod Tawde among its four nominees.

Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde will field two candidates and NCP, the third NDA ruling partner has fielded late Ajit Pawar's son Parth.

Elections are on March 16. Thursday is the last date for nominations.



## Rs 8.45 cr sanctioned for road works

Vijayawada: In a major boost to infrastructure development in Nandigama and Jaggayyapeta Assembly constituencies of NTR district, the State government has sanctioned Rs 8.45 crore for road works following persistent efforts by Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni.

Of the total amount, Rs 3.35 crore has been sanctioned for Nandigama constituency and Rs 5.10 crore for Jaggayyapeta constituency. The funds have been released by the Roads & Buildings (R&B) Department under the Major District Roads (MDR) and State Highways (SH) upgradation programmes. The MP had made repeated representations to R&B Minister BC Janardhan Reddy, seeking immediate allocation of funds for the repair and upgradation of damaged roads and bridges.

On November 25 last year, Kesineni Sivanath, along with Nandigama MLA and Government Whip Tangirala Sowmya and Jaggayyapeta MLA Sriram Rajagopal alias Tataiah, met the Minister at the Secretariat and submitted a detailed memorandum highlighting the poor condition of key roads and rural connectivity routes. They stressed the

need for urgent intervention to ensure smooth and safe transportation.

Acting on their request, the government has issued administrative approvals for multiple works. According to the MP, Rs 2.10 crore has been sanctioned for the development of the NH-65 to Kanchikacherla-S Amaravaram Road and Gandepalli Rangapuram Road, and Rs 30 lakh for the NH-65 to Kanchela Road in Nandigama constituency. An additional Rs 1.25 crore has been sanctioned for six other roads in the constituency.

In Jaggayyapeta constituency, Rs 1.05 crore has been sanctioned for the Anigandlapadu-Kakaravai road and Rs 1 crore for the NJ Road to Anigandlapadu road via Gummadiurru. Another Rs 3.05 crore has been approved for seven additional roads in the constituency.

MP Sivanath said the upgradation works would enhance connectivity, ensure safer travel and support agricultural and commercial activities.

## Telangana man injured in attack near Abu Dhabi airport; parents seek safe return

A man from Telangana suffered minor injuries following an attack by Iran near the Abu Dhabi airport, amid the ongoing conflict in West Asia, his parents said on Wednesday.

N Rajeswara Rao, a native of Pothreddypalle village in Rajanna Sircilla district, was injured in the incident, his father Prabhakar Rao said.

Rao, who works in the housekeeping section at the airport, informed his parents that he and several others

escaped with minor injuries.

"My son has been working there for a year. He works at the airport. He sustained injuries in the attack. He spoke to us over a video call, but he is not showing us the injuries. I want my son to return home soon," Prabhakar Rao told PTI Videos.

Rao's parents urged the Indian government to take steps to ensure their son's safe return.

A group of passengers who arrived at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, said they did not face any difficulties due to the prevailing situation in the Gulf region.

Pilgrims who had travelled to Madina expressed satisfaction with the facilities and arrangements.

Mohd Abdul Razak told PTI Videos that his return to Hyderabad was delayed due to flight cancellations. However, he said the travel agency had taken care of his accommodation and other arrangements.



# Indian Chronicle

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## On the Indian rupee

Between late November 2024 and now, the rupee has depreciated about 7%, sliding from roughly ₹83.4 a dollar to about ₹89.2. This is not unprecedented as in 2018, it slid 11%-12% against the dollar. The comparison is instructive because the political and trade backdrops have echoes of that earlier period. In 2018, during the first term of U.S. President Donald Trump, global dollar strength, rising U.S. interest rates and trade tensions pressured emerging market currencies, including the rupee. The RBI used its first longer-term currency-swap as a systemic liquidity check. In 2019, it completed a \$5 billion three-year dollar/rupee swap.

And in February 2025, it carried out a \$10 billion dollar/rupee buy-sell swap auction to infuse long-term rupee liquidity into the banking system under global stress. Such swaps are a standard tool by central banks to supply liquidity, shore up forex reserves and prevent disorderly currency depreciation when the dollar surges or capital flows reverse. The steep rupee slide in November arises in a context of external pressures — a widening current-account deficit, driven partly by higher imports of bullion, as a hedge in uncertain times, and exporters scrambling to maintain competitiveness amid high U.S. trade tariffs. In such a hostile global macro-environment, the RBI's mandate is limited: under the floating-but-managed regime, it can only 'smoothen volatility' rather than fix the exchange rate.

Between November last year and now, the RBI sold a net of roughly \$50 billion in forex to stabilise the rupee. Even so, the slide has proceeded, highlighting the external pressures. That said, there is room for cautious optimism. India's foreign exchange reserves are comfortable — close to \$693 billion. On the domestic front, retail inflation has slumped: headline CPI inflation came in at just 0.25% in October 2025, well below the RBI's target-band of 2%-6%. This gives the RBI space to tolerate modest currency depreciation without triggering aggressive rate hikes especially as India transitions from cheaper Russian crude to relatively costlier U.S. oil imports. With crude accounting for over a fifth of total imports in FY25, rupee depreciation combined with costlier oil imports could exert upward pressure on inflation. Given this environment, monetary stabilisation alone cannot suffice. The Centre must address India's long-standing vulnerability: heavy dependence on oil. Steps such as faster transport electrification must be treated as strategic imperatives and pursued with urgency. These must be done with a well thought-out trade policy, as opposed to a raft of bilateral trade deals that India has focused on, in the hope that these would diversify trade routes. If anything, trade agreements with Japan, the UAE and ASEAN have tilted the trade balance against India.

## Exam Pads Distributed to 10th Class Students – Under the Leadership of Uppal BRS Leader and Sahaya Foundation Founder Akula Mahender

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 4 (Indian Chronicle):” As per the instructions of Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy, an exam pad distribution program for 10th class students was organized grandly on Wednesday at Sir Mount School, Uppal, under the leadership of Uppal BRS leader and Sahaya Foundation Founder Akula Mahender. Speaking on the occasion, Akula Mahender encouraged students to study hard, achieve good results, and bring pride to their parents, teachers, and the constituency. He assured that they



would always extend their support towards the development of education. “He also recalled that under the leadership of MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy, fees were provided to students who secured MBBS ranks under the concept ‘Ranaku Meedi – Feeju Naadi,’ and credited the MLA for that achievement. The school management, BRS leaders, and others participated in the program.

# Farmers Encouraged to Adopt Organic Farming

“Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), February 4.” “An awareness program on organic farming was organized for farmers at the Kagaznagar Agriculture Office on Wednesday.” Assistant Director of Agriculture (ADA) Manohar, who attended the event as the chief guest, explained the benefits of adopting organic farming practices to the farmers. He informed that Kosini village in Kagaznagar has been selected for promoting organic farming, where 125 farmers will be trained in preparing organic inputs such as organic fertilizers, Jeevamrutham, Vermicompost, and Ghanamrutham. “He advised farmers to reduce the use of chemical fertilizers and instead adopt organic fertilizers to improve soil fertility. Farmers were also encouraged to use nano fertilizers and take advantage of the various government subsidy schemes to achieve better agricultural results.” Agriculture Officer Ramakrishna said that both the Central and State Governments are supporting farmers in cultivating organic crops. He also advised farmers to contact the Agriculture Department if they have any doubts or need guidance regarding farming practices. “Agriculture Extension Officers (AEOs) Srinivas, Durgabhavani, and Srujana, along with CRPs and farmers, participated in the program.



## Fee Cheques Distributed to Medical Students by KTR MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Extends Support to Medical Students



deprived of education due to poverty. He stated that the BLR Charitable Trust has been consistently organizing such service programs with that objective. He assured that the trust would continue to support medical students by easing their financial burden and expressed hope that they would become successful doctors and serve society in the future. The 16 medical students and their family members who attended the program expressed their heartfelt gratitude to MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy for supporting their education and to KTR for his encouragement and blessings.

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 4 (Indian Chronicle):” “Reaffirming his commitment to supporting higher education for underprivileged students, Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy once again demonstrated his generosity. Under the aegis of the BLR Charitable Trust, financial assistance was provided to 16 selected MBBS students towards their annual tuition fees. “The cheques were formally distributed by BRS Party Working President Shri Kalvakunta Taraka Rama Rao (KTR). On the occasion, KTR handed over the cheques to the students and conveyed his best wishes for their bright future. He specially appreciated MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy for extending support beyond politics and helping economically disadvantaged students pursue medical education and become doctors. “KTR praised Lakshma Reddy's service-oriented approach, stating that his continuous financial assistance to several students every year is lighting up many young lives and setting an inspiring example for society. “Speaking at the event, Bandari Lakshma Reddy said that no student should be

## Ayyappa Swami is the embodiment of Power may his blessings be with the municipal council

“- Municipal Chairperson Vani” Jagtial Staff Reporter, March 4 (Indian Chronicle): “Jagtial Municipal Chairperson Samiandra Vani Srinivas prayed that Ayyappa Swami's blessings be with the municipal council always, saying the deity is the embodiment of power. On Wednesday, Vani, her husband Srinivas, and ward councillors performed special puja at the Ayyappa temple. Later, they were felicitated by the Ayyappa Service Trust members with Vedic blessings. “Speaking on the occasion, Chairperson Vani said entering the temple filled them with great energy, which she attributed to Ayyappa Swami. She expressed gratitude for the peace and joy they experienced at the temple. Vani prayed for the well-being of Jagtial's people and the development of the municipality under Ayyappa Swami's blessings. “Councillors present included Boyinipelli Prasanth Rao, Korukanti Ram, Varanasi Mallava Thirumalayya, Arava Lakshmi Raju, Manapuri Pavithra Mahesh, Allala Saritha Ramesh Rao, Gajula Lavanya Mahesh, Dayyala Chandrakala Shankar,



Bairneni Bhagya, Konda Rama Lakshman, Mamatha Ramakrishna Reddy, Pitta Dharmaraju, Kyadasu Naveen, and senior guru swamis Bandari Lakshminarayan, Neelam Dasaratha Reddy, Manala Kishan, Diti Satish, Mar Kailasam, Srinivas, Sankoji Venkata Ramana, Pampatti Ravinder, Pujari Lakshmpathi, and Ayyappa Service Trust members.

## Exam Pads Distributed to 10th Class Students by Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Program Organized Under the Leadership of BRS Women Leader Rajitha Reddy



program.

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 4 (Indian Chronicle):” “An exam pad distribution program for 10th class students was conducted grandly at the Government School located at Street No. 1, Habsiguda. “The program was organized under the leadership of BRS Party Habsiguda Division leader Rajitha Reddy. Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy attended the event as the chief guest and distributed exam pads to the students. “Speaking on the occasion, the MLA encouraged students to study hard, achieve excellent results, and bring pride to their parents, teachers, and the constituency. He assured that he would always extend his support for the development of education. “BRS Party State leaders Pasula Prabhakar Reddy, Lakshmi Narayana, Kailash Pathi Goud, Manohar, Dinesh Kumar, Lakshmi, Nalini Reddy, Shruthi, along with other party leaders and workers, participated in the

## Grand Holi Celebrations Held at Venkat Reddy Nagar Under the Leadership of Fevicol Champion Club President Chellozu Ellachari

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 4 (Indian Chronicle):” “On the occasion of the Holi festival, grand celebrations were organized at the bus stand premises in Venkat Reddy Nagar under the leadership of Fevicol Champion Club President Chellozu Ellachari. “During the event, all club members joyfully applied colors to one another and exchanged festive greetings. Speaking on the occasion, President Chellozu Ellachari said that ev-



everyone should celebrate Holi with happiness and enthusiasm. He expressed that the festival of colors should bring new light into people's lives and described Holi as a symbol of brotherhood and friendship. “He encouraged everyone to celebrate the festival together in unity and harmony. He further wished that the arrival of spring, marked by the festival of Holi, would fill everyone's lives with happiness and prosperity. Club members who participated in the program included Vishwanadhula Ramakrishna Chari, Venuoori Venu Chari, Ketozu Raghavulu Chari, Anantozu Srinivas Chari, Bejjanki Raju Chari, Polozu Naresh Chari, Vadla Srinivas Chari, Venkatesh Mahender Chari, Matta Aravind, Venkatesh Gupta, representatives Vidyasagar, Mahesh, and others.

## CC Road Construction Worth Rs 1.82 Crore in Swaroop Nagar Former Corporator Mandumula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 4 (Indian Chronicle):” “Former Corporator Mandumula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy stated that CC road construction works worth ₹1.82 crore have been undertaken in Swaroop Nagar under the Uppal division. She informed that underground drainage works worth ₹69 lakh have already been taken up in the area. On Wednesday, Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy inspected the ongoing CC road construction works in Swaroop



Nagar along with colony residents. Speaking on the occasion, she said that the state is witnessing people-centric governance under the leadership of Revanth Reddy. She added that the government is giving top priority to development and welfare under this administration. She further stated that development works in the Uppal constituency are being carried out with the initiative of Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy. “Colony President Srinivas Goud, Venkateshwar Reddy, Siddeshwar, Poojari Hanumanth, Salla Prabhakar Reddy, Amarendra Rao, Srinivas Reddy, Gnaneshwar, Satyanarayana, Anand Prabhu, Kumar, Pisati Anji Reddy, Venkatesh, Rakesh Naik, Suresh, Pawan, Srinivas, and others participated in the program.

## Singireddy Padma Reddy Participates in Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple Consecration Ceremony - Ankurarpana and Yantra Pratishtha Rituals Held on Day One



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 4, (Indian Chronicle):” “The consecration ceremony of the newly constructed Sri Bhu Neela Venkateswara Swamy Temple commenced on a grand note at PNT Colony under Boduppal Circle of Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation. The three-day religious event is being conducted from March 4 to 6, with Vedic scholars performing the rituals as per traditional customs. On the first day, the Ankurarpana (sowing of sacred seeds) and Yantra Pratishtha (installation of sacred yantras)

Chinna Srimannarayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swamy. Former Boduppal Corporator Singireddy Padma Reddy attended the inaugural ceremony and offered special prayers. He called upon residents of Boduppal and Peerzadiguda to actively participate in the three-day celebrations and seek the blessings of the deity. Members of the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Devasthanam Committee and local devotees were present during the ceremony.

# Visiting Lalita Mata Temple will wash away sins



### Chandi Havana today at Polasa, Shiva-Parvati Kalyanam on 6th Temple Founder Chairman Chellam Swarupa reveals

"Jagityal Correspondent, March 4 (Indian Chronicle):"Visiting Lalita Mata Temple in Polasa absolves all sins, says Founder Chairman Chellam Swarupa Sattayya. The 3rd annual festival of the temple, which has 108 Sri Chakra, is being held today and tomorrow, and devotees are invited to attend."Swarupa explained that the temple's deity, Lalita Mata, represents the combined power of all gods and is revered as a complete form with 27 stars and 108 names. Visiting the temple will absolve sins. Today, Chandi Havana will be performed, and on the 6th, Lalita Sahasra Nama Parayana will be followed by the marriage of Shiva and Parvati."The festival is being conducted under the guidance of Sri Nambi Venugopal Charya and Brahmasri Tigulla Visnu Sharma.

# Additional Collector flags off solar awareness vehicle in Karimnagar.

Khaja Sikander Mohiuddin Staff Reporter, Indian Chronicle Karimnagar, Mar 04: Additional Collector Ashwini Tanaji Wakade on Tuesday flagged off a solar power awareness campaign vehicle from the Collectorate as part of the Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana.



The initiative forms part of the State government's 99-day outreach programme, "Praja Palana - Pragathi Pranalika," scheduled from March 6 to June 12, aimed at creating extensive awareness among the public about various welfare schemes.

Under the supervision of the Telangana State Renewable Energy Development Corporation Limited (TSREDCO), awareness activities will be conducted across 16 mandals in the district to educate residents about the benefits of rooftop solar installations under the Central scheme.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Wakade said domestic consumers could install rooftop solar plants and generate up to 360 units of electricity per month for household consumption. The government provides subsidy support for the installation of solar systems, she noted.

She further explained that surplus power generated through rooftop units could be exported to the grid, enabling beneficiaries to earn additional income. Urging citizens to avail themselves of the opportunity, she said wider adoption of solar energy would not only reduce electricity bills but also promote clean and sustainable energy use in the district.

Officials from TSREDCO and district administration were present.

# World Hearing Day Observed at Uppal Primary Health Centre



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 4 (Indian Chronicle):"World Hearing Day was observed at the Uppal Primary Health Centre (PHC) under the supervision of Medical Officer Dr. Saushilya Rani. On this occasion, TGS Tarnaka RTC Nursing students created awareness among the public about hearing health. Speaking at the event, the Medical Officer stated that excessive sound pollution and prolonged use of headphones can lead to hearing problems. She advised people not to insert sharp objects into their ears."TGS RTC Nursing students including Mounika, Geetha Rani, Sri Sai, Keerthana, Shwetha, Srija, Vaishnavi, Harshitha, Navya, Ajrai and others participated in the programme.

# Congress leaders celebrate Holi at Minister's camp office in Karimnagar.



Khaja Sikander Mohiuddin Staff Reporter, Indian Chronicle Karimnagar, Mar 04: Holi celebrations were organised at the camp office of Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar in Karimnagar on Tuesday under the aegis of the Congress party leaders of the Municipal Corporation.

The programme was held at Ponnamp Complex in the city, where party leaders and public representatives participated in the festivities and exchanged greetings on the occasion.

Among those present were SUDA Chairman Komatireddy Narendra Reddy, corporators Mallikarjun Rajender and Parvathala Mallesham, DCC Working President Komatireddy Padmakar Reddy, District Congress BC Cell chairman Puli Anjaneyulu Goud, District Mahila Congress president Satya Prasanna Reddy, District Congress ST Cell president Shrawan Naik, and several Congress leaders including Akula Narasaiah, Padala Ajay Goud, Vangala Vidyasagar, Yagandla Anil Kumar, Anand, M.D. Saleemuddin, Bomma Eshwar Goud, Gaddam Sriramulu and Muniganti Anil.

Addressing the gathering, Mr. Narendra Reddy said that under the leadership of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, the State was progressing towards prosperity. He said Ministers Duddilla Sridhar Babu, Ponnamp Prabhakar and Adluri Laxman Kumar, along with legislators from the erstwhile Karimnagar district, would strive for the region's comprehensive development.

He expressed hope that under a people-centric government, the lives of citizens would be filled with "colours of progress and welfare."

# Health Mission – 100 Days Campaign (04.03.2026 to 09.06.2026).

Kukkadapu Naresh Kumar, Bhadradi Kothagudem Staff Reporter, March 04, Indian Chronicle: The "Health Mission – 100 Days Campaign" program, specially designed for the protection of the health of the people in the Bhadradi Kothagudem district, will be organized from 04.03.2026 to 09.06.2026. This program will be implemented in a phased manner under the supervision of the district collector & magistrate and district medical & health department officer. Phase I (1-30 days) 04.03.2026 – 31.03.2026 Services of 6 specialists will be available in all PHCs and UPHCs of the district: Pediatrician, Gynecologist, General Physician, Dentist, Ophthalmologist, Orthopedic Surgeon, RBSK teams will visit all residential schools and colleges. Screening and counseling of students by 3 specialists: Gynecologist or physician, Dentist, Ophthalmologist. Phase II (31-45 days) 01.04.2026 – 15.04.2026 Screening, treatment, referral, and follow-up of non-communicable diseases. Establishment of Cancer Registry. Cancer screening, treatment, referral, and follow-up programs through DCCC. Phase III (46-75 days) 16.04.2026 – 15.05.2026 Communicable disease screening and public health preparedness measures. Heatstroke rooms are to be opened. Phase IV (76-100 days) 16.05.2026 – 09.06.2026 Establishment of 8 specialist clinics in all urban primary health centers to reduce the burden on tertiary hospitals. Special programs to be continued for 100 days. Health profiling of women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) – 30 basic tests. Standardization of health centers (IPHS, NQAS, Kayakalp). District Collector & Magistrate, Bhadradi Kothagudem, Ankit, and District Medical & Health Officer, Bhadradi Kothagudem, Dr. Tukaram Rathod appealed to the people of the district to utilize these special health camps and protect their health. They stated that the health of the people of the district is our goal.



# The upcoming Ramzan festival should be celebrated in a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere:- Additional Collector of Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao

"(Mandava Srisailam..Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 4):- Additional Collector of Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao said that the upcoming Ramzan festival should be celebrated in a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. On Wednesday, the Additional Collector Peace Committee meeting was held at the mini meeting hall of the Collectorate along with Additional SP Lakshmi Narayana along with officials of various departments, Muslim religious leaders and leaders of various caste groups. "Speaking on the occasion, the Additional Collector said that the Ramzan festival should be celebrated with brotherhood and without disturbing peace and security. He ordered that basic facilities like drinking water, sanitation, electricity, traffic control and parking should be arranged at places of worship in coordination with the relevant departments. Police officials should take special security and traffic management measures during the festival days. He appealed to celebrate the festival happily by following the government guidelines. The Additional Collector suggested that the officials should be vigilant to prevent any untoward incidents from taking place in the district. He wanted the festival of Ramzan to be celebrated successfully with the cooperation of the people and in full coordination. Minority Affairs Officer Jayamma, Municipal Chairman Tangellapalli Srivani Ravikummar, officials of the concerned departments, members of the Peace Committee, and others participated in this meeting.



# Public Governance - Progress Plan program to be held from March 6 to June 12 should be made a success:- District Collector Anurag Jayanthi

"(Mandava Srisailam..Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 4):- District Collector Anurag Jayanthi has instructed the concerned officials to make the "Public Governance - Progress Plan" program to be held from March 6 to June 12 a success. On Wednesday, the Collector, Additional Collector of Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao, and Additional Collector of Revenue Venka Reddy held a meeting with the district officials of various departments at the Collectorate Conference Hall and gave directions. "Speaking on this occasion, the Collector said that an action plan should be prepared for 99 days. He said that the welfare schemes being implemented by the government should be taken to the people. Complete reports should be prepared to take necessary steps for this. Officials of various departments like sanitation, pending files, pending files in the revenue department, health, housing, education, anganwadi, agriculture, hostel, grain purchase, etc. should inform the public about the procedures." District Rural Development Officer Nagi Reddy, District Revenue Officer Jaya, RDOs Krishna Reddy, Shekhar Reddy and relevant officials participated in this program.



# Intermediate examinations are being held in a peaceful atmosphere in the district:- Additional Collector of Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao



"(Mandava Srisailam..Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 4):- Additional Collector of Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao said that the intermediate examinations are being held in a peaceful atmosphere in the district. "On Wednesday, the Additional Collector made a surprise inspection of the intermediate examination center being held at the Government Junior College in Yadagirigutta. He closely observed the manner in which the students were writing the examinations. Speaking on the occasion, the Additional Collector said that the intermediate examinations in the district are being conducted in a strict and transparent manner. The facilities and the CCTV camera system set up in the examination centers were inspected. The attendance percentage of the students was checked. He wanted to ensure that the students write the examinations in a peaceful atmosphere. He ordered to take strict measures to prevent malpractice. He said that strong security measures should be taken for the transportation of answer sheets. They wanted to ensure that the students did not face any difficulties until the exams were completed. Staff and others participated in this program.

# President Meets Medchal Leaders to Plan Kanshiram Jayanti Celebrations

"Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, March 4: "Today, Ibrahim Shekar, the State President of Bahujan Samaj Party, held a meeting with party leaders from Medchal district. "During the meeting, it was decided to celebrate the 92nd birth anniversary of Kanshiram India", founder of BAMCEF and Bahujan Samaj Party, on a grand scale with a festive atmosphere across the state. "A large public gathering will be organized at Badangpet under the supervision of the State Committee, and district leaders were assigned specific responsibilities to ensure maximum public participation. "All district members, assembly committee members, mandal committees, sector, and booth committee members were instructed to work together to make the Kanshiram Jayanti celebrations a grand success. In this programme Uppal constituency Prisedent Mindala Narsigh rao, Dist leaders Ravindra naik, Gouda shudarshan and other were participated.



## Patients coming to government hospitals should be provided better medical treatment:- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Anurag Jayanti

“(Mandava Srisailam..Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 4):- District Collector Anurag Jayanti said that patients coming to government hospitals should be provided better medical treatment. On Wednesday, the Collector made a surprise inspection of the Government General Hospital in the district headquarters. Speaking on this occasion, the Collector asked the concerned officials how many departments there are in the hospital, how many doctors there are, how many staff there are. He wanted to know how many people are admitted as inpatients every day on an average. They toured the wards in the hospital, and while talking to the inpatients, the Collector inquired whether the medical staff is providing better medical services and good food. He inspected the medical services provided to the patients and the facilities available. He inquired whether all the necessary medicines are available. He said that expired medicines should be checked. He said that medicines should be checked twice before giving them to patients. He said that all types of medicines needed by patients should be made available. He said that pregnant women coming to government hospitals should undergo various tests in the government hospitals themselves. He said that pregnant women should be provided with better treatment. He said that the number of deliveries in government hospitals should be increased. He suggested that people should develop trust in government hospitals and follow time management. He said that the health profile of patients coming to the hospital should be checked. He said that strict action will be taken if they neglect their duties, and that all doctors and staff should perform their duties with dedication and responsibility. He suggested that steps should be taken to keep all departments and surroundings of the hospital clean.”The Collector inspected the construction work of additional rooms under construction in GGH. He said that the construction work should be completed quickly. He said that proposals should be sent for the necessary furniture.”The Collector was accompanied by hospital superintendent Pandu Nayak, doctors’ staff and concerned officials in this program.



## The Public Administration Progress Plan 99-day activity should be implemented effectively;Continuous monitoring of schools and hostels is necessary.District Collector Ankit.

Kukkadapu Naresh Kumar, Bhadradi Kothagudem Staff Reporter, March 04, Indian Chronicle: District Collector Ankit instructed the officials to implement the 99-day activity to be undertaken as part of the Public Administration Progress Plan in the district effectively and in a coordinated manner and make it successful. On Wednesday, he held a comprehensive orientation meeting with

dent attendance, and quality of teaching.He suggested that sports competitions, youth festivals, and skill development training should be conducted on the issue of youth and sports from May 18 to May 23.He ordered that from May 25 to May 30, women’s empowerment, self-employment, strengthening of self-help groups, and proper utilization of loans should be taken on the issue of women.He said that from June 1 to June 12, tree plantation, plastic control, and greenery increase programs would be organized on the issue of the environment.He said that these 99-day activities would be implemented in five phases at the village, mandal, constituency, district, and state levels. On March 6, it was revealed that a joint review meeting of the Honorable Ministers will be held at the Khammam district level on the activities. The officials of the concerned departments



the district officials along with additional collector Venugopal at the IDOC office conference hall. Later, a review meeting was held with the district officials, MPDOs, Tehsildars, MPOs, municipal commissioners, ward officers, etc. through video conference.Speaking on the occasion, the collector said that special programs will be organized on various issues from March 6 to June 12. He said that a special drive will be undertaken on environmental cleanliness and file resolution in government offices from March 6 to March 15. He ordered to take special measures aimed at cleanliness of offices, speedy resolution of pending files, proper management of records, and timely service to the people. He suggested that separate collection of wet and dry garbage, removal of weeds, eradication of garbage in public places, and cleanliness of government buildings should be widely carried out in villages and municipalities.He said that from April 6 to April 11, health camps, medical check-ups, special monitoring for pregnant women and children, and nutrition awareness programs will be organized under the auspices of the Health and Family Welfare Department and the Women and Child Welfare Department on the theme of Health—Healthy Beginnings, Promising Futures.He said that the Arrive Alive program will be organized under the auspices of the Home and Transport Departments from April 13 to April 18. He ordered the conducting of special checks on awareness of road safety, strict implementation of traffic rules, and use of helmets and seat belts.He said that from April 20 to April 25, reviews will be conducted on the implementation status of the SC, ST, BC, minority welfare departments, and the Indiramma Illu scheme on welfare issues, and steps should be taken to ensure that the beneficiaries receive the benefits of the schemes in a timely manner.He said that from April 27 to May 2, the Child Safety and Protection – No to Drugs program will be implemented in the form of awareness programs in schools and colleges.From May 4 to May 9, the Agriculture, Revenue, Irrigation, and Power departments were instructed to take action on the issue of farmers (agriculture), cultivation advice to farmers, availability of fertilizers and seeds, supply of irrigation water, and uninterrupted power supply.He said that from May 11 to May 16, reviews would be conducted on the issue of education, infrastructure, cleanliness, stu-

were instructed to be ready with full details.Giving special directions on the cleanliness programs to be organized from March 6 to 16, he ordered that sanitation programs be widely carried out in every village and municipality. He suggested that the removal of weeds, garbage disposal, and separate collection of wet and dry waste should be effectively implemented in Anganwadi centers, schools, government offices, bus stands, and along roads. He said that steps should be taken to achieve the target of 100 percent tax collection in municipalities.He ordered that the loan distribution targets of women’s groups should be fully achieved and special steps should be taken in mandals with low collections. He said that an action plan should be prepared for the establishment of Indira Mahila Shakti canteens, food processing units, and 100 percent collection of Srinidhi loans.Mandal-level officials were instructed to keep the schools under their jurisdiction under continuous supervision and inspect the quality of food and sanitation conditions in the hostels every day. It was clarified that the full responsibility of monitoring the schools lies with the concerned officials.Speaking to the ward officials, he instructed them to have complete understanding of the sanction status of Indiramma houses in their jurisdiction, ground-level progress, pending reasons, sanitation programs, garbage vehicles, and drainage expansion details. He said that sanitation is a very important issue and the officials should act responsibly.He instructed the officials to submit complete details of the programs conducted every day as part of these 99 days of activity in the form of daily progress reports. He advised that department-wise progress, problems, actions taken, etc. should be comprehensively included in the report. The collector said that continuous monitoring of the implementation of the program would continue.Additional Collector of Local Bodies Vidya Chandana; ZP CEO Nagalakshmi; CPO Sanjeeva Rao; Agriculture Department Officer Baburao; Civil Supplies Department Officer Prem Kumar; Civil Supplies Department Manager Trinath Babu; Mission Bhagiratha EEs Thirumalesh and Nalini; R&B Nageswara Rao; BC Welfare Department Officer Vijayalakshmi; SC Welfare Department Srilatha; and officials of related departments participated in this meeting.

## Students in the children's home should be provided with quality meals as per the menu:- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Anurag Jayanti



“(Mandava Srisailam..Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 4):- District Collector Anurag Jayanti said that students in the children’s home should be provided with quality meals as per the menu.”On Wednesday, District Collector Anurag Jayanti conducted a surprise inspection of the children’s home in Meenanagar in Bhuvanagiri. He checked how many staff members there were in the children’s home and the attendance register. He asked how many students there were and which classes the students were studying. The Collector interacted with the children in the children’s home. He asked the students if they were being provided with delicious meals. When the students were asked if they wanted anything, the children

said they wanted a music teacher and the concerned officials were directed to appoint a music teacher temporarily as per the children’s wish. He asked if all the students had a health profile. He instructed the concerned officials to get the water filter in the children’s home not working and immediately get it repaired. He suggested that new bed sheets be provided as the bed sheets were not in good condition. He then asked about the details of the children’s home building which is under construction. District Welfare Officer Narasimha Rao, Municipal Commissioner Ramalingam, Bhuvanagiri Tehsildar Jagan Mohan Prasad, BRB Coordinator Anantha Lakshmi, Yashoda, children of the children’s home staff and others participated in this program.

## Union. Petroleum..Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri should resign immediately:- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District DCC Mahila Congress President Neelam Padma

“(Mandava Srisailam..Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... March 4):- Under the auspices of Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District DCC Mahila Congress President Neelam Padma, a district executive meeting was held at the Bhuvanagiri Congress Party office under the chairmanship of District President Neelam Padma. Signatures were worn on white shirts. Holi program was held. Neelam Padma said “Hardeep Singh Puri is the Central Junior. Gas and Petroleum Minister with rapist Jeffrey Exten. What is the relationship between him and the file? What is the Exten file? They committed many anarchy when they were alive and after Naru died, the entire data of their relationship has been revealed in these emails, how US President Donald Trump is playing Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who collected email data 44, and how he took the girls and hid them in the Exten file. It is shameful for Union Minister for Petroleum and Gas Hardeep Singh Puri to speak like this, he said, we have met him 14 times. But I have met him 4 times and speaking like this is a wicked act, Neelam Padma said on behalf of the Mahila Congress, we condemn Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s support for such a person. We demand justice for those who sexually, physically and mentally harassed children, on behalf of the Mahila Congress. Hardeep Singh Puri should resign immediately, she said. Youth Congress National President Uday’s team was arrested and harassed, the central government should immediately release them, and Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri should resign, said Neelam Padma. Signatures and a Holi program were organized with women. State Secretary Pavani. Kavitha Mandal Presidents Rajitha. Town President D. Kavitha District Committee Members General Secretaries, Secretaries, Block Presidents, Mandal Presidents, Town Presidents. Women sisters participated in this program.



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 4, (Indian chronicle):”Leaders of the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) on Tuesday met Medchal-Malkajgiri District Congress Committee President Thotakura Vajresh Yadav in Boduppall and submitted a representation seeking allocation of a Rajya Sabha seat to a representative from the Madiga community from Telangana. Speaking on the occasion, MRPS leaders emphasized the need to ensure adequate political representation for the Madiga community. They stated that providing an opportunity in the Rajya Sabha would help bring the community’s issues to national attention and strengthen their voice at the policy-making level. Vajresh Yadav received the memorandum and assured the delegation that their request would be conveyed to the party’s higher leadership for consideration. Local MRPS leaders, Congress party representatives and party workers were present during the meeting.



## Leaders Join Telangana Rajyadhikara Party - Chakrapani Goud



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 4, (Indian chronicle):”Several leaders from different political parties joined the Telangana Rajyadhikara Party in Uppal constituency under the leadership of Medchal-Malkajgiri District President Panagati Chakrapani Goud. The induction took place in the presence of party chief Teenmaar Mallanna. Those who joined the party include senior TDP leader and former Shubhodaya Colony President Kasula Nandam Goud; Shubhodaya Colony Phase-3 President Teegula Ramachander; Singarapu Mahesh; Balaraju Goud; Ramu; Neela Ramesh; Ramesh Babu; Bikshapathi; Chidirala Sambaraju; Chidirala Prashanth; Chitukula Shobharani; Narsamma; Ellamma; Andalu; Chidirala Latha; and Chidirala Shrivani, among others. State Disciplinary Committee Chairman Bandharapu Narsaiah Goud, Medchal District Youth President Singam Arun Patel, District Vice President Abhiram, Joint Secretary Kamalakar, and District Secretary Rangirivar Narsing Rao also attended the programme.

## Advance Distribution of Three Months’ Ration a Historic Step, Says Koukuntla Chandra Reddy

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 4, (Indian chronicle):”NAGARAM: Former Nagaram Municipality Chairman and senior BJP leader Koukuntla Chandra Reddy stated that the people of Telangana will never forget Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the decision to distribute three months’ ration in advance to prevent hardship during the summer season. Speaking to the media on Wednesday, Chandra Reddy said the decision would greatly benefit poor families who otherwise have to stand in long queues at ration shops under scorching heat. He noted that distributing three months’ essential commodities at once would reduce crowding and ease the burden on beneficiaries. He further said that Narendra Modi has introduced several welfare schemes aimed at improving the lives of economically weaker sections and has earned a place in the hearts of the people through his pro-poor initiatives. According to him, the Prime Minister remains committed to launching more welfare measures in the coming days to ensure equal development and support for all sections of society. Chandra Reddy expressed happiness over the decision, stating that it reflects the government’s concern for public convenience and welfare, especially during the peak summer season.



## No risk that Mehul Choksi won't get fair trial in India after extradition: Belgian court



GNS News Agency, March 4

There is no risk that fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi will not get a fair trial in India after his extradition, a Belgian court has ruled, underlining that he has failed to demonstrate any "serious risk" of being subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment. A four-member indictment chamber at the Court of Appeals in Antwerp has found no infirmity in the orders issued by the pre-trial chamber of the Antwerp district court on November 29, 2024, allowing Choksi's extradition.

The district court had termed the arrest warrants issued by a Mumbai special court on May 23, 2018 and June 15, 2021 "enforceable", which has been upheld by the Court of Appeals in its order dated October 17. The third warrant, related to disappearance of evidence, was not accepted by the Belgian court. The Court of Appeals has held that the documents Choksi submitted do not substantiate his claims that he is the subject of a political trial. It said that it is up to the subject to provide evidence demonstrating substantial grounds to believe that there is a genuine risk of ill-treatment upon extradition. Rejecting the arguments put forth by Choksi that he may not get a fair trial if extradited to India, the Court of Appeals held that the documentation provided by him is insufficient to make it "concretely plausible" that he personally faces a real, present and serious risk of being subjected to flagrant denial of justice, torture or inhuman and degrading treatment in India. Choksi's claims that he was kidnapped from Antigua and Barbuda by Indian agencies and tortured in Dominica did not find support from the court, which said the records submitted by the fugitive businessman do not "conclusively indicate" that he was the victim of a kidnapping in Antigua ordered by Indian authorities.

The order of the Commission for the Control of Interpol's Files (CCF) an independent body that ensures that all personal data processed through the Interpol's channels conforms to the rules of the organisation — that allowed the Interpol Red Notice against Choksi to be dropped on the grounds of alleged kidnapping, was cited by the fugitive businessman in Belgium to buttress that he may be tortured in India. The Court of Appeals said the CCF's October 12, 2022 decision provides no clarity on the matter and is formulated cautiously and conditionally.

Choksi did not cite any substantial document that would allow the indictment chamber to conclude that there is a real risk of violation of his right to a fair trial due to the al-

leged lack of independence of Indian judges, it said. The court order gave a major jolt to the fugitive businessman, who is wanted in connection with a ₹13,000 crore fraud in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) allegedly orchestrated in collusion with his nephew Nirav Modi, who is lodged in a London prison. Modi too is facing extradition proceedings. Of the ₹13,000 crore, Choksi alone has siphoned off ₹6,400 crore, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has alleged in its chargesheet.

The Court of Appeals has held that Choksi's arrest by Belgian authorities on India's request was valid, officials in the know of the development said. The order has come as a strong validation for India's case seeking his extradition, with Choksi having the option of appealing against the decision in Belgium's Supreme Court, they said. "This is the first success for India in the ongoing extradition proceedings against Mehul Choksi in Belgium," an official said. Choksi (66) is in the Antwerp Prison since his arrest in April. His multiple bail petitions have been rejected after they were effectively countered by Belgian prosecutors, who were aided by the CBI. "The order has come in our favour. The court has termed his arrest by the Belgian authorities on India's request valid. The first legal step in getting him extradited is now clear," a senior official said. The Belgian prosecutors were aided by Indian officials from the Ministry of External Affairs and the CBI in putting forth strong arguments on Choksi's alleged role in orchestrating one of the biggest bank frauds. The prosecutors told the court that Choksi is a flight risk and cannot be released from the prison, the officials said. New Delhi has given a number of assurances to Belgium regarding Choksi's safety, the charges that he would face during trial in India, prison arrangements, human rights and medical needs. India has also assured Belgian authorities that if extradited, Choksi would be housed in Barrack No. 12 at Mumbai's Arthur Road jail, with no chance of overcrowding or solitary confinement, as at least one more economic offender is expected to share the cell with him. Daily newspapers in English and local languages, terrestrial TV channels, video-conferencing facilities and tele-medicine services are also available in the prison. The Union Home Ministry informed the Belgian authorities through a September 4 communique that the personal living space for each inmate in Barack No. 12 is in line with and fully meets the minimum space requirement of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) of Europe. The CBI has also invoked the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in its extradition request.

At least two open-ended arrest warrants, issued by the Mumbai court in 2018 and 2021, were shared by the Indian agencies with their Belgian counterparts as part of the extradition request, sources said. Choksi fled to Antigua and Barbuda in the Caribbean days before the scam was detected. He had taken citizenship there. The sources said he remains an Indian citizen as he has not renounced Indian citizenship, a mandatory requirement under the law. After Choksi was spotted in Belgium, the CBI, the MEA and the home ministry swung into action to get him extradited to India to face the law. Choksi and Modi are wanted for allegedly swindling ₹13,000 crore through fraudulent letters of undertaking (LoUs) in connivance with some officials at the PNB's Brady House branch in Mumbai, the officials said.

## Carabid beetles as potential bioindicators to track soil microplastics

GNS News Agency, March 4

The carabid ground beetles of the family Carabidae are as common as they come. These little nocturnal hunters are found in almost any terrestrial habitat on the planet. To some, they're simply pests — infamous for their pungent smell, which they emit when they're threatened. Others, but farmers in particular, are fond of them because they sate their voracious appetite by snacking on a variety of garden pests, including snails, caterpillars, slugs, and other small invertebrates. Unfortunately, their diet of late has also begun to include microplastics.

Small fragments, films, and fibres of this nuisance material are dispersed in our oceans and our lands. In soil, they have a tendency to accumulate, altering the soil's structure and the way it retains water, and reacting almost unpredictably with the microbes in their surroundings. The smaller a piece of microplastic is, the more easily it's digested by organisms. Researchers have found that their subsequent effects include deleterious effects on the surrounding tissue and metabolic stress. However, while the distribution and consequences of microplastics are well documented in aquatic environments, tracking them in terrestrial ecosystems has proven quite difficult. The primary challenge is the soil itself: unlike water, which can be filtered and analysed, soil is a complex, heterogeneous matrix. Here, microplastics become entangled with organic matter, clay particles, and mineral grains, rendering scientists' methods to extract them for study technically demanding. Even when scientists do recover them, they have difficulty distinguishing synthetic microplastic fragments from natural fibers, and need specialised labs to do so. Burrowing earthworms and insects also help spread microplastics through the soil, and they can be carried further underground by the roots of affected plants. As a result, scientists often have to engage in laborious soil-sampling endeavours, followed by chemical treatment and expensive techniques like spectroscopy. To fill the gap an innovative approach was necessary. Recently, scientists from Italy took a new look at this problem. The group started looking for insects that could help detect microplastics in soil rather than scientists having to do so directly. These insects, the Italy group figured, would have to be easy to sample, be distributed widely, and be well documented in the literature for further analysis. In a study published in Ecological Indicators, the scientists set pitfall traps along the Conero coast of Italy from July to October 2020. According to ScienceDirect, "Pitfall traps are plastic containers dug into the substrate until flush with the surrounding surface, often covered with plastic plates to prevent rain and debris from entering, and may contain preservatives such as ethylene glycol or saline solution." These traps captured carabid beetles from different sites with varying levels of human activity: a meadow, woodland, and a stony beach, among others. When the scientists had a sample of 50 carabid beetles, they dissected each specimen, extracted the contents of their guts, digested them with oxidising solutions, filtered the remains, and examined what was left under microscopes and using infrared spectroscopy. What they found was both encouraging and unsettling. Nearly a third of the beetles carried microplastic fragments, most of them polyester and silicone, ranging from 0.1 to 1 mm in size and often no larger than a



grain of sand. The highest rates of microplastic ingestion appeared on a stony beach popular with summer tourists, where up to 87% of beetles captured in August contained plastic. The encouragement came from the fact that the carabid beetles proved to be legitimate bioindicators of microplastics. While this study represents only the first step in this direction, according to the authors, more standardised techniques can be developed on this work. For example, carabid beetles can be integrated into bio-monitoring programs as a cost-effective way to assess the extent of microplastic contamination in a location. The idea of using bioindicators is not new. In India, farmers in particular already use bioindicators to help anticipate impending rain, to manage pests, to assess soil fertility, and to evaluate the success of certain organic farming practices. Plenty of research is also ongoing in the country to detect contaminants in rivers and agricultural lands using insects. But why insects? The new study had in fact also unearthed earthworms (which are annelids) that had ingested microplastics.

In a review published recently in Plant Archives, a team of scientists from Navsari Agricultural University (NAU) in Surat explained why insects present clear advantages. The principle purpose of a bioindicator is to be a simple and sensitive marker of an ecosystem's health. According to the Plant Archives paper, insects are effective bioindicators because they respond quickly to environmental stress, are abundant, and have short life cycles. They are also able to provide early warnings of ecological changes, are cost-effective to monitor, and sensitively reflect the consequences of pollutants on ecosystems, plants, and humans. "Their prevalence in most terrestrial habitats followed by an ability to migrate makes them the best choice," NAU entomologist Malireddi Prasanna and lead author of the paper said of the carabid beetles in this regard. Humans' response she added that even if their populations are negatively affected when scientists pick up individuals from an area for study, what they learn could help protect the insects. The review paper also enumerated important challenges when working with insects as bioindicators. They include natural fluctuations in their populations, temporary declines from calamities, predation pressure, and their absence in particular seasons. Their complex life cycles and varying activity patterns can also complicate scientists' ability to interpret the data and thus demand careful, long-term monitoring for reliable assessments. Research worldwide has established that microplastics have contaminated almost all known ecosystems and biospheres.

## Country's first Ruskin Bond International School to open in Gujarat; with a focus on nature, emotional development



GNS News Agency, March 4

After being part of school curricula for decades, stories of legendary author Ruskin Bond will now come alive in a nature-themed school in Gujarat — the first franchise of the Ruskin Bond International School (RBIS) in the country. An initiative of the writer's adopted grandson, Siddharth Bond, the school is set to open. The brand was launched in January this year in Mussoorie to mark the author's 91st birthday. The first franchise in Gujarat's Vadodara is in partnership with Advocate Kunal Sharma as well as President of Chhatra Sansad and Chartered Accountant-educationalist Utpal Shah. The school aims to impart education based on the principles of "Nature, Nurture and Nourish", intertwining Bond's stories with modern learning.

The fact that Bond spent the first six years of his childhood in Jamnagar, Gujarat — where his father ran a school for the royal family — makes it fitting that the first school to carry forward his legacy is being set up in the state. Ruskin Bond told The Indian Express, "We only left Jamnagar when World War II broke out... I was sent to a boarding school. I have fond memories of my childhood in Kathiawar... I have not lived in Vadodara but I remember passing through several times. It is a city with a history, a culture of its own and a very vibrant part of Gujarat and of India. It is an ideal place... I am so happy that the school is starting in Gujarat and in Vadodara." Several of Bond's characters and stories will become part of the curriculum that is being "painstakingly curated". A popular Bond character, Rusty from The Adventures of Rusty, based on Bond's own childhood experiences growing up in Dehradun — will be brought to life in the pre-primary classrooms when the school launches.

Bond said, "The first six years of my life were spent in Jamnagar, a small state on the Kathiawar coast, where my father ran a sort of palace school for the royal children, particularly the girls, who, in those days, were not sent out to school. I have very vivid memories of that time — of the palace area, the little porch... Rozi Bandar, Bedi Bandar

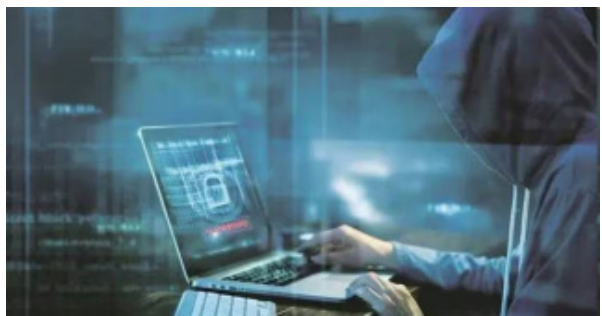
## Man held for harassing minor in Andhra Pradesh; row over TDP link

GNS News Agency, March 4

The YSRCP accused the TDP of shielding him, while the TDP called the act "shameful" and denied his association. A 58-year-old man allegedly linked to the Telugu Desam Party was arrested in Kakinada for harassing a minor girl, sparking political tensions in Andhra Pradesh. A 58-year-old man allegedly associated with the Telugu Desam Party has been arrested in Andhra Pradesh's Kakinada district for sexually harassing a schoolgirl, triggering a political row in the state.

Police identified the suspect as T Narayana Rao. While the YSR Congress Party claimed Rao is a leader of the ruling TDP's Tuni unit, the latter has not commented on the alleged affiliation. According to Kakinada Police, Rao went to the girl's government residential school posing as a distant relative and persuaded her to leave with him to "meet his family". Instead, he allegedly took her on his scooter to a mango orchard in a nearby town. There, the orchard owner and workers noticed his "suspicious behaviour" and raised an alarm while recording a video, prompting Rao to hastily drop the minor back at school, police said. Once back, the student told her teachers about the incident, after which they helped her call her parents, who alerted the police. The orchard owner's video helped trace the suspect, who was arrested on charges of kidnapping under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and relevant sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Police urged people not to "politicise" the case and warned against sharing the video on social media. Meanwhile, the student's parents held protests outside the school demanding strict

## Two more arrested for 'selling fake national park safari permits' across India



GNS News Agency, March 4

The Gujarat Cyber Centre of Excellence on Wednesday said it had arrested two persons from Delhi for allegedly black marketing and profiteering from the illegal sale of safari permits for national parks across India. The accused — Ajaykumar Ghanshyam Chaudhary and Arvind Shrikant Upadhyay, both residents of Delhi — were allegedly involved in the advance booking and resale of safari permits for Gir Jungle Safari (Sasan Gir, Gujarat) as well as other prominent wildlife reserves, including Ranthambore (Rajasthan), Tadoba (Maharashtra), Jim Corbett (Uttarakhand), Kaziranga (Assam), and Bandhavgarh (Madhya Pradesh). According to officials, the accused used electronic devices to book forest safaris in bulk using false identities on official government websites. They allegedly created fake safari permits and sold them to tourists through travel agents, collecting inflated payments and defrauding customers. Investigators of the Gujarat Cyber Centre of Excellence found that the accused had created a website mimicking the official government portal. The probe revealed that around 12,000 illegal safari permits had been allegedly issued, with over 8,650 confirmation emails and payment records allegedly recovered. Additionally, more than 10,000

and the seashore where we would go. For me, it is still a very fair-tale atmosphere. Jamnagar also was the home of Indian cricket, as it was ruled by Ranjitsinhji and his nephew Duleepsinhji. "With colourful classrooms themed on mountains, rainbows and oceans inspired by Bond's stories, the school aims to be a trendsetter for storytelling and academics.

Sharma, who is partnering with Siddharth Bond to expand the RBIS model, said, "Ruskin Bond has always been celebrated as an author and when his grandson, in a meeting in Goa, expressed his interest, we took the opportunity. Ruskin Bond's love for nature and for children gets into early education and will help us bring childhood back into education with nature walks, creative writing, storytelling sessions — not just textbooks or academic readiness but also emotional development, love for life, forests, trees, water, oceans and music." Shah added that the research team curating the curriculum is also considering incorporating elements from Japanese elementary schools that focus on cleanliness and chores, giving students hands-on experience while blending it with Bond's stories like Till the Clouds Roll By and chapters on the trees of Dehradun — with integrated lessons in math and science. With plans to expand into a K-12 school model and multiple franchises across the country, Sharma said RBIS will ensure outdoor learning. "We intend to make sure that students get out of their classrooms... We would be making them experience music, nature walks and other activities," he said. For Bond, the school represents a way to bring nature back into education. "This whole project was a vision of my grandson, Siddharth Bond. He has worked very hard on it. I hope there will be more schools... The appreciation of nature and all that it offers us will be a part of our education. Over the years, human civilisation has put nature on the back foot. It has gone out of its way to trample on it, in a way. As a result, we are the ones who have suffered — climatically and in many other ways. Nature education is an essential part of our all-round education. I will be very happy if it is a part of the teaching that will take place in this school and in others." Bond added that while he had shied away from social media at first, he now sees it as a bridge that reduces the learning gap in smaller cities. "Social media certainly helps spread literature. I remember times when you lived in a small town in India and you wanted a book, but you could not get it unless you travelled to a big city. Today, you can get it online... Technology has helped and social media helps you with what is happening. Being an old-school person, at first I backed away from it, but I embrace it now and it is a vibrant part of modern-day life and spreading education," he said.



action and questioning how the school allowed her to leave without permission. The incident has snowballed into a political row, with YSRCP spokesperson A Shyamala accusing Rao of being a predator. The party also shared purported photos of him with TDP leaders. "NDA coalition leaders can commit atrocities against women and children. Rao took the minor girl and attempted to rape her in Tuni. If we and people protest, TDP leaders threaten," she said. The TDP has not commented on Rao's affiliation with the party, saying only that the suspect "holds no position in any of TDP's wings." It, however, condemned the incident as "shameful and unforgivable." "This government will not sit idly watching such actions. It will strictly punish [the culprit], regardless of their status or the party they belong to. If a crime is committed, whether by leaders or people, the punishment will be the same. Cases have already been registered and the accused has been arrested," the TDP said in its statement.

PDF links containing fraudulent permit details were allegedly discovered. Three people were previously arrested in connection with the case, namely Alpeshkumar Mansukhlal Bhalani, who runs a tours and travels company in Thalaj, Ahmedabad; and Sultan Usman Baloch and Ajoji Nur Mohammad Shaikh, both residents of Mendarda, Junagadh. The FIR, filed on October 10 at the State Cybercrime Cell on the basis of a complaint by the Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF), Sasan Gir, on behalf of the State, booked several unknown persons under Section 112 (organised petty crime) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

## LG Electronics India launches Essential Series, home appliances designed for Indian households

Hyderabad: LG Electronics India Ltd. (LGEIL) unveiled its Essential Series, a new line of home appliances designed "Made for India" to combine performance, durability, and affordability for Indian consumers. Launched under the campaign slogan "Har Ghar Appliances, Har Ghar Happiness," the series reflects LG's commitment to making innovation accessible to millions of households across the country. Developed after engaging with over 1,200 families across India, the Essential Series incorporates two core philosophies: "Made in India" and "Made for India." Each appliance addresses everyday challenges while offering thoughtful design, superior performance, and reliability at accessible price points.

## What should and shouldn't you feed your baby? Experts bust myths



When Anjaly Thankappan, a nursing officer at JIPMER, Pondicherry, became a mother for the first time, she thought her professional training would guide her through the early weeks. Yet, the realities of postpartum life and cultural expectations played out differently. At 28 days, her husband's family wanted to conduct nookukettu, a traditional ceremony where relatives gather to bless the newborn. "I didn't have the energy to oppose it," she says. The rituals brought crowds, incense, and countless hands reaching for the baby. Soon after, her newborn developed fever and nasal congestion. While relatives dismissed the symptoms as "common," Anjaly, aware of infection risks, knew otherwise. "Even with my medical knowledge, I felt vulnerable to suggestions of giving honey, gripe water, or sugar water," she says.

Her experience highlights a broader challenge in India: the tension between traditional newborn practices and evidence-based care. According to the World Health Organization, neonatal infections remain a leading cause of newborn mortality in India, often linked to overcrowding, unhygienic handling, and unsafe feeding practices.

Arun Kumar Sundaram, senior consultant in neonatology at SIMS Hospital, Chennai, notes that misconceptions about newborn feeding persist widely. "Many people still don't believe exclusive breastfeeding is enough for the first six months," he says. This belief often leads to unsafe practices, including giving honey, sugar water, dates water, or gripe water. "Honey is particularly dangerous. Infants under one year can develop botulism because their immature gut cannot neutralise Clostridium botulinum spores," Dr. Sundaram explains. Gripe water, even when alcohol-free, can induce sleepiness, vomiting, or loose stools, while sugar water irritates the gut. Breast milk, he emphasises, provides adequate hydration and all necessary nutrients. Dr. Rajasree S., senior consultant in paediatrics and neonatology at Rela Hospital, Chennai, adds, "Traditional prelacteal feeds: honey, sugar water, dates water, or gripe water can increase the risk of infections, severe diarrhoea, sepsis, and allergic reactions. Even discarding colostrum deprives the baby of vital antibodies." She cites clinical cases where honey-induced botulism, though rare, can be fatal. "Prelacteal feeds delay exclusive breastfeeding, which is essential for immunity and growth." Meena Thiagarajan, senior consultant paediatrician and neonatologist at Apollo Children's Hospitals, Chennai, notes, "In India, festivals and family celebrations often prompt elders to give sweets or a drop of honey to a newborn. I've seen families struggle to balance cultural practices with medical advice. Honey can be neurotoxic, and gripe water,

though improved today, is not recommended for newborns."

Other harmful practices involve oil instillation in the nose, which can lead to lipid pneumonia, and applying harmful substances like kajal, which can cause infection or lead poisoning. These practices can lead to infections, illness, and increase the risk of infant mortality. Exclusive breastfeeding matters. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months is recommended by the World Health Organization and paediatric organisations globally. Dr. Sundaram explains: "Breast milk provides essential nutrients, antibodies, and growth factors that improve immunity, reduce infections, and support growth and development. Early introduction of cow's milk, herbal preparations, or complementary feeds increases the risk of allergies, infections, and feeding intolerance." Dr. Rajasree highlights additional risks, "Cow's milk before 12 months is low in iron, high in protein, and can stress immature kidneys. Herbal concoctions may carry contaminants or infections." Dr. Thiagarajan adds, "Sugar should be avoided up to age two, as infants quickly develop a preference for it. Breast milk remains the safest, most complete nutrition in the first six months, and provides significant nutrition even beyond that." One of the most frequent statements parents hear from elders is, "We followed all this and nothing happened." Dr. Sundaram says, "While maybe well-intentioned, still these practices can be harmful. Bringing grandparents to clinic visits often opens space for respectful, evidence-based discussions." Dr. Rajasree advises, "Parents can gently provide updated information from trusted sources. Emphasising modern understanding of newborn physiology and the potential hidden harms of traditional practices helps bridge gaps." Dr. Thiagarajan notes, "Cultural rituals are deeply ingrained. Professionals can support families by addressing myths without dismissing their values, gradually promoting safe practices." Recognising adequate feeding

Parents often worry whether their newborn is feeding adequately. Dr. Sundaram outlines clear indicators: at least six wet diapers per day, feeding every 2-3 hours, appropriate sleep, activity, and regaining birth weight by two weeks. Signs that require urgent attention include lethargy, poor feeding, low urine output, or inadequate weight gain. Dr. Rajasree adds that infants should feed 8-10 times in 24 hours after day four, with steady weight gain. Dr. Thiagarajan advises mothers to maintain a balanced diet, hydration, and rest to support milk production.

Any concerns should be promptly discussed with a paediatrician. For mothers whose milk output seems low, experts recommend timely evaluation by a paediatrician or lactation specialist to rule out underlying issues such as latch problems, hormonal imbalances, or postpartum complications. Strengthening newborn care requires coordinated efforts. Dr. Sundaram emphasises early counselling during the antenatal period. Mothers need support not only from healthcare professionals but also from families and the wider community. Dr. Thiagarajan suggests leveraging breastfeeding week and ongoing campaigns to reinforce correct practices. "Messages should be visible in public spaces, workplaces, hospitals, and social media," she says. Dr. Rajasree notes that engaging elders in community-based awareness efforts increases acceptance and effectiveness.

## The U.S., China and 'Circles for Peace' in an age of fracture

Hong Kong has always lived between worlds. At a meeting on November 17, 2025, in the city, of the China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), titled Circles for Peace, it became clear that this liminal geography is now a metaphor for the wider planetary condition. The U.S. and China remain locked in a tense, mistrustful relationship — yet, they are also tied together more tightly than either side likes to admit. And in that uneasy middle space, Hong Kong offered a vantage point from which to imagine a way forward. The complexities of today's rivalry

The discussions at the 6th U.S.-China Hong Kong Forum showed that trust has thinned, and both the U.S. and China now operate as if expecting sudden shocks. Participants spoke with candour, with a sense of fatigue. Old frameworks — engagement, "guardrails", managed competition — no longer feel adequate for today's complex rivalry.

A persistent theme was the shrinking room for nuance. Strategic anxieties that once belonged to specialists have entered the public sphere, shaping domestic politics and narrowing the range of acceptable positions. This has seeped into the human dimension of the relationship. American student numbers in China are far below pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. Chinese student enrolments in the U.S., once well above three lakh, have also declined. The deeper loss is familiarity: younger generations are encountering each other through narratives shaped by fear rather than through lived experience. Participants agreed that while the two Presidents, of the U.S. and China, can anchor the relationship, personality-driven diplomacy is not enough. Technology, and artificial intelligence (AI) in particular, threaded through many conversations. Several participants observed that AI now resembles an international public good — too consequential to be monopolised or monetised by any single country. A credible governance regime, they said, must rest on equity, transparency and accountability. This linked to broader concerns about the overlap between civilian innovation and defence applications, especially in parts of the private sector. One American participant suggested the eventual need for an international governance mechanism for AI, and possibly for space ("the galaxy") as well. The question was straightforward: if competition moves beyond the earth, who determines the rules?

The wider diplomatic climate also featured in the discussions. A speaker described the Busan summit, on October 30, 2025, as a "tactical retreat", not on technology but on foreign policy more broadly. The Taiwan question surfaced often. A Chinese participant argued that the discussion has become overwhelmingly militarised — and warned that American policy appeared to be drifting toward what Beijing views as a "one China, one Taiwan" posture. He called for new mechanisms and a new vocabulary before the situation hardens into confrontation by default. One question was whether the U.S. and China are prepared for another EP-3 incident (in 2001) — an accidental collision at sea or in the air that could escalate before political systems can respond. The region obviously needs a crisis-prevention mechanism insulated from political swings. Singapore's former Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen offered the broadest frame. He described this period as a "dialectic moment", when competing pressures reshape the global order but outcomes remain uncertain. The U.S., Europe and China will inevitably influence the emerging structure, he said, but the rest of the world should not allow the global commons to become collateral damage in major-power rivalry. One seasoned participant

argued that a "new approach should be crafted"; the world does not need another hegemon, it needs powers capable of co-organising the future.

Hong Kong has a role to play. Throughout the forum, Hong Kong was in focus. One speaker invoked Richard Hughes's "borrowed place, borrowed time", while another reached for Graham Greene's phrase "improvised bravado". Both images still fit — but Hong Kong today is also becoming more China-centric, even as it tries to remain globally fluent. Its future depends on preserving its cosmopolitan function: the transparency, connectivity, and cultural hybridity that allow ideas to cross borders even when politics cannot. Hong Kong reminded one that the world's middle spaces still matter, revealing pathways that pure geopolitics often misses. People-to-people ties emerged as a gentle theme of hope. Participants noted that official relations may be strained, but human contact remains the ballast that prevents larger relationships from capsizing. Hong Kong, despite the pressures of recent years, continues to make such exchanges possible.

Lessons for India. The forum conversations were a reminder that great-power relations may determine the climate of the world, but the weather is shaped by everyone else. India cannot control the forces buffeting the U.S.-China relationship, but we can decide how to navigate them, and how to ensure that our own future is not written by default. Rigid binaries are unsustainable. India's task is not to imitate U.S. rhetoric nor to accept Chinese narratives at face value. It is to build the domestic strength — technological, economic and institutional — to navigate a fractured world without losing strategic autonomy. The forum's emphasis on youth, cultural ties and the social contract around technology offered reminders that relationships are not made or unmade by summits alone. They are shaped by steady habits of engagement.

The shape of a new order

The clearest insight from the Forum was that the U.S.-China relationship will not be restored to its old shape. The economic models diverge. The technology race is structural. And the political atmospherics will remain turbulent. But the alternative to managed rivalry is not victory; it is a world of cascading risks — climate stress, pandemics, fragile supply chains, and polarised societies. One participant put it simply that this was "A story we have to write together". The phrasing carries weight. It shifts the conversation from competition to stewardship, from ideology to survival. The next order, if it emerges at all, will depend less on grand bargains and more on practical cooperation on energy, health, finance, and AI governance. As the forum ended and one stepped out into the evening.

## Eight-year-old dies amid suspected water contamination at Bengaluru apartment complex



An eight-year-old boy, a resident of the Prestige Falcon City apartment off Kanakapura Road in south Bengaluru, died on Thursday (November 27, 2025), three days after being admitted due to prolonged diarrhoea. Residents of the apartment, who have been falling ill regularly and believe water contamination is behind their deteriorating health, are alleging the same cause for the child's death. However, civic officials said they can draw a conclusion only after the medical reports are out. Mansoor Ali, a resident of the apartment complex, said that health issues such as diarrhoea and vomiting have persisted among many residents since the start of October.

"All hospitals nearby have at least one patient from our apartment complex, as everyone is falling sick regularly.

We have been complaining about water contamination, but the problem is being downplayed," he said. Avnidhar Hawaldar, another resident, was admitted to the hospital early this morning after falling unconscious. "I rushed to the hospital at 3 a.m. after I collapsed following a day-long bout of diarrhoea on Wednesday (November 26)," he told The Hindu from the hospital. Mr. Ali noted that even after the issue has claimed a life, it is still not being taken seriously. Corporation send out health team Ramesh K.N., South City Corporation Commissioner, told The Hindu that a team has been sent to the hospital and the reason behind the death will be known once the medical reports are out. "Our teams have deployed medical camps at the apartment complex at regular intervals over the past month, but there was no outbreak of any disease.

There was no evidence of illness due to contamination, but safety measures were provided to the residents," Mr. Ramesh said. Another official from the South City Corporation health team said they collected stool samples and conducted tests, but the results did not conclude that the issue stemmed from water contamination. However, the officer acknowledged that tests on the water sample from the tank showed slightly contaminated results. He added that BWSB carried out leakage tests, fixed issues wherever needed, and also conducted chlorination. "We will have a clearer understanding once the medical reports of the deceased are out. Thereafter, we will have clarity on the issue," he said.

## The INO that wasn't and the JUNO that is



China has finished building its Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO), a bittersweet development given that the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) has been in limbo for years. Both JUNO and INO were designed to study subatomic particles called neutrinos, which are very hard to catch because they rarely interact with matter. This is why both INO and JUNO are huge: the more matter there is, the more interactions there will be between neutrinos and matter, and thus more opportunities for study.

Progress on JUNO. However, this size was perhaps the original trigger of the INO's downfall, so to speak, in India. Because the INO detector was so massive (weighing 50 kilotonnes), it could not be operated from inside a lab nor could scientists situate its detector in an existing facility. Instead, the INO collaboration had planned to install the detector inside a mountain in Theni in Tamil Nadu, together with other research facilities. The mountain's rock was to serve as a natural shield for the detector, obviating the need for a separate structure, which would have been expensive. However, the scale of the construction activity in the area and the involvement of the Department of Atomic Energy, which was helping fund the project, spooked the locals and spurred local leaders to draw political mileage from that. The INO collaboration also erred (in hindsight) by not following procedure and by not estimating how controversial the project could become, which, if it had done, would have helped it respond to and manage certain public sentiments better.

In the late 2010s, these delays were painful as China moved in leaps to realise JUNO. The "pain" was because the INO collaboration was hoping to secure a limited pool of grants and investments from foreign governments to operate the detector. China expected to complete JUNO by 2020 but that turned out to be five years too soon. If it had said it would aim for 2025, would the INO have had a better chance by no longer having a tight deadline? Maybe not but it wouldn't have been implausible either.

Today, while the INO remains stalled, JUNO has released its first analyses. The JUNO team uploaded two preprint papers on November 18. One reported the "initial performance results of the JUNO detector". Its author list reveals the sort of international collaboration India was hoping for, with researchers from Armenia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile,

Taiwan, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Pakistan, Russia, Slovakia, Thailand, the U.K., and the U.S. participating. It is not clear why there are no researchers from India. Journalist Jatan Mehta has documented a similar issue in the space science sphere: researchers from India were conspicuous by their absence in the (first) list of applications to access the rocks China had brought back from the moon on its Chang'e-5 mission in 2020. India has a long history in neutrino physics and analysing lunar samples, and boasts of many excellent scholars in these fields. The second preprint paper reported the object of INO's study. Even though neutrinos are so elusive, physicists have discovered that they come in three types, or flavours, and that they can oscillate between these as they travel through space. Figuring out how the three neutrino masses are ordered is an important open question — and it is related to neutrino oscillations, which are in turn described by three figures called  $\theta_{12}$  ("theta one two"),  $\theta_{13}$ , and  $\theta_{23}$ . Previous experiments have pinned down  $\theta_{13}$ , and JUNO and INO were conceived to use this prior knowledge to determine the neutrino mass ordering. In the second paper, the JUNO collaboration reported that it had measured  $\theta_{12}$  very precisely, in a way broadly consistent with previous findings. On the back of this, Institute of High Energy Physics scientist and JUNO project manager and spokesperson Yifang Wang had said, "With this level of accuracy, JUNO will soon determine the neutrino mass ordering, test the three-flavour oscillation framework, and search for new physics beyond it." Rising bar

While we can debate the way the INO collaboration (at times), bureaucrats, political leaders, and some activists conducted themselves during the saga, one must acknowledge that in this domain, missing the bus on one occasion does not mean you can catch the next one; it means the next one has to be something more sophisticated than a bus for your efforts to mean anything. India had the wherewithal in the previous decade to help crack an important scientific mystery. But if JUNO helps surmount this challenge, India may not have the resources to take a shot at the next big mystery on this front because it will be more specialised and require more sophisticated technologies. Then again, only a fool would bet against the ingenuity and resourcefulness of young scientists to come up with a way.

What grates more is the spectre of "resource constraints" — sometimes all too real, sometimes a bogeyman that administrators invoke to not fund research or, crucially, the skills and materials required to manage its consequences for local communities. Still, there is no room for the notion that India is not ready for a Big Science project. Both the large ground-based telescopes of astronomy and the protected areas of conservation constitute Big Science, and India has many of them. Perhaps the bigger lesson is that we should not attempt such a project solely by whether our scientists alone are ready; we should also check whether the conditions beyond science and on the ground are ready as well.

## Chennai's Umpherston Street: when names metamorphose

Two weeks ago you will recall that I had walked through George Town. While doing so I had kept a sharp eye on the blue street name signboards for their spellings always provide some rich material. I did think there was something wrong with Humpherson Street but did not pay much attention owing to the general chaos. Last Sunday I was back, and this time at 6.00 am. I had ample opportunity to take a proper look, and this is what I found. This is not the first time this street name has changed. Strictly speaking it ought to have been Umpherston Street but even in British times, as is evident from the writings of HD Love in his Vestiges of Old Madras in 1913, the street name had changed to Humpherson. An H had been added where none existed, probably because someone felt it was silent, as in honour. This contrasted with the way the Y in Yeldham vanished to make it Eldam's Road — adding a Y in pronouncing is common in our region when a word begins with an E and clearly whoever was in charge of signboards in the 20th century thought that was wrong.

But let us get back to Umpherston. Rather uniquely, there were according to Love, four Umpherstons in these parts towards the end of the 18th and early years of the 19th century. Thomas was a coachbuilder in George Town, James was a trader in Ceylon, George a livery stable keeper in Chintadripet and William a sutler (supplier of provisions to an army) at Gooty in present day Andhra. Love opines that either Thomas or James gave his name to the street, though why a trader in Sri Lanka merited being commemorated in Madras is not clear. There was most interestingly, a Mr. Humpherson here at the same time and he too was a sutler, unless the British too were confused with the spelling. On August 22, 1800 (Madras Day!) Humpherson came to grief at camp near Chevittyoondy, being caught while at-



tempting to sell spirits to the sepoy of the army, contrary to orders. His cache of '24 dozen of rum shrub, 4 dozen of Jamaican rum and 7 dozen of English claret' were ordered to be auctioned by Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington no less) and the proceeds remitted to the Male Orphans Asylum. Such a Humpherson was unlikely to have merited a street name. Our Corporation must have thought that Umbarson is enough for an obscure coachbuilder or trader depending on whether it was Thomas or James. But what is forgotten is that Umpherston Street was where a great success story of 19th century Madras began. This was where P. Venkatchellum started his business of curry powders, sauces, condiments and built an empire that saw his products being sold from Europe to Australia. He was one of the few Dalit successes from Madras in business and he, like Rao Sahib MC Madurai Pillai, showed that it was sheer diligence and focus on excellence that mattered when it came to business.

## Can rural education stop youth migration? Rethinking opportunities beyond cities



Migration has always shaped India's social and economic landscape. For millions of young people, moving away from villages to towns and cities is not simply a matter of aspiration but often one of compulsion. Much like the protagonists of the recent Indian film *Homebound*, they find themselves torn between the promises of the city and the pull of home — between opportunity and belonging. While mobility is a natural feature of an evolving economy, the alarming scale and patterns of youth migration highlight deeper structural issues: the failure to generate dignified rural employment, inadequate educational linkages with jobs and uneven regional development. The Covid-19 pandemic laid bare these vulnerabilities when nearly 40 million workers were forced to return home during the first lockdown in 2020 (RBI, 2020). This mass exodus was not only a humanitarian crisis but also a reminder that rural India continues to be both a source of labour and a potential site for revitalization.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020–21, almost 29% of India's population were classified as migrants, with 89% originating from rural areas. Among youth, migration is especially significant: over 50% of migrants are aged between 15 and 25, suggesting that India's most productive workforce is leaving its villages. Gender patterns are sharply divided. For men, migration is predominantly work-related, while for women, 86.8% migrate due to marriage. This leads to a peculiar paradox: while women form the majority of migrants statistically, their mobility rarely translates into economic participation. Men, on the other hand, migrate largely in search of livelihoods but often end up in insecure, informal work. The economic profile of migrants shows that migration is strongly tied to poverty and marginalization. Households in the lowest Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) groups and those dependent on casual labour are far more likely to migrate. Studies further reveal that Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) record higher migration rates, reflecting structural inequities. Education, once seen as a guaranteed escape from poverty, no longer insulates young people from migration pressures. Many who leave villages for cities carry little formal schooling, while others hold degrees that fail to translate into secure jobs. The irony is striking: while India has expanded access to higher education, opportunities have not kept pace. Graduate unemployment has surged over the past decade, highlighting a growing mismatch between what education promises and what the labour market delivers. Urban centres absorb these migrants, but often under exploitative conditions. Data indicate that nearly 49% of youth migrants work as daily wage labourers and another 39% as industrial workers, mostly on short-term or contract arrangements. India's urban workforce remains overwhelmingly informal, leaving migrants without social security, health coverage, or stable incomes. The pandemic amplified these vulnerabilities, as millions of workers were stranded without jobs or shelter. Young women were especially disadvantaged, as they were more likely to lose employment and slower to regain it compared to men (ILO, 2021). Beyond the human cost, migration exerts enormous pressure on cities. With India projected to add 416 million urban residents between 2018 and 2050 (UN World Urbanization Prospects), the strain on housing, transport,

water, sanitation, and air quality is already acute. Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru struggle with overcrowded slums, mounting waste, traffic congestion, and worsening pollution levels. Migration, therefore, becomes both a symptom and a stressor: it reveals rural distress while deepening urban crises. Yet, the Covid-19 reverse migration also revealed another possibility. Agriculture proved unexpectedly resilient during the pandemic. The Ministry of Agriculture reported a 39% increase in sown area in 2020 compared to previous years, largely because returning workers helped boost farm labour. Stories like that of Balam Mahadev Bandagale from Raigad, Maharashtra, illustrate the potential. Once confined to a factory job in Mumbai, he returned to his village during the lockdown, used an irrigation scheme to diversify from paddy to mango orchards and today enjoys both higher income and better quality of life. Similarly, Chandrakant Pawar, who once worked odd jobs in Mumbai, returned to dairy farming in Raigad and is now the Sarpanch of his village, a symbol of reverse migration success.

### New ways to boost rural jobs

These experiences point to the urgent need for rethinking India's development geography. If rural and peri-urban regions are to retain their youth, they must offer viable non-farm opportunities alongside modernized agriculture. Beyond traditional avenues like dairy, poultry and food processing, promising sectors include handicrafts, rural logistics, renewable energy services, agri-tourism and eco-tourism, rural BPOs and digital gig work.

The rise of e-commerce has opened markets for local products, whether artisanal crafts, processed foods or niche organic produce, allowing rural youth to become entrepreneurs rather than wage seekers. Government schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Start-up India and the expansion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) provide platforms for enterprise creation, but they need greater scale, integration and youth-focused design.

Similarly, the renewable energy push with solar panel maintenance, microgrid operations and biofuel units has potential to create thousands of decentralized rural jobs. Strengthening rural digital infrastructure is critical, not only to bridge the digital divide but also to enable access to e-commerce, online services, telemedicine and remote work. Together, these opportunities can transform migration from a compulsion into a choice, offering rural youth dignified livelihoods without abandoning their communities. Dismantling the stigma

The deeper challenge lies in dismantling the stigma that associates returning to villages with failure. Migration should not be a forced necessity but a genuine choice. Showcasing success stories of reverse migrants who built dignified livelihoods at home can reshape perceptions and inspire others. At the same time, social protection systems must be portable, ensuring health, education, and security follow migrants regardless of location. Migration in India is not inherently negative. In a globalized economy, people must have the freedom to move for opportunities. But what is troubling is that most youth migrate not out of aspiration but because their villages offer little future. The result is a dual crisis: overstretched, inequitable cities on one side, and depopulated, economically stagnant rural areas on the other. A balanced strategy that invests in rural enterprise, skills, infrastructure, and social dignity can transform migration from a story of compulsion into one of empowerment. If India fails to act, its next generation will continue to stream into cities driven by desperation, perpetuating cycles of hardship. But if it chooses to invest in rural futures, migration can be redefined, not as an escape, but as an option among many dignified livelihoods. That is the critical shift India now needs. (Vinaya Kumar HM is Assistant Professor, Keladi Shivappa Nayaka University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences, Shivamogga (Karnataka), India. Vegard Iversen, Professor of Development Economics, Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich.

## Is landlockedness the reason for Bihar's underdevelopment?

It is election season in Bihar. While the Opposition often speaks about the lack of development and industrialisation in the State, in its campaigns, the National Democratic Alliance, which is in power, argues that a change of government will bring back the 'Jungle Raj' of the earlier decade. What makes Bihar one of India's most underdeveloped States? Is landlockedness a reason for its underdevelopment, as some argue? R. Nagaraj and Manindra Nath Thakur discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Saptararno Ghosh. Edited excerpts:

It is often argued that Bihar is disadvantaged because it is a landlocked State. Punjab and Telangana are landlocked as well, and they are doing relatively well. So how is being landlocked a constraint for Bihar? R. Nagaraj: If you look at the success of Telangana, especially Hyderabad, it is mostly because of the tertiary sector; it has nothing to do with geography. If a State has an educated workforce and good infrastructure, being landlocked will not be an issue. Punjab, too, has a developed network of railways and roads, and has FCI (Food Corporation of India) godowns across the country to help with export of crops. Manindra Nath Thakur: Let us look at Bihar's prominent exports: makhana, litchi, and corn. It has been difficult for Bihar to transport these items from Patna to West Bengal or to any port. These, alongside the vegetables Bihar exports, are perishable. Moreover, significant costs are incurred due to road transport; time and distance are crucial factors in agrarian exports. One way Bihar is attempting to resolve this issue is by launching projects along the Ganga. So, it is not that concerns about being landlocked are not genuine, but they cannot be cited as a major reason for the State's economic backwardness. Prof. Nagaraj spoke of the tertiary sector; you spoke of agrarian exports. Bihar has been assessed as an agrarian economy. What should be its imperative going forward: industrialisation or agriculture?

Manindra Nath Thakur: In the last 10 years, the Chief Minister has tried to engage with industrialists. However, industrialists have often raised concerns about access to ports, citing the need to spend more on transportation. Having said that, I do think that in this modern capitalist system, no society can think of surviving with just agricultural products. While Bihar should capitalise on its potential in terms of agricultural production and processing, it must ultimately transition to industry. Without that, there is no future. R. Nagaraj: Before we think of high-technology and/or manufacturing industries, we should consider where the comparative advantage lies. Four-fifth of Bihar's labour force is in agriculture. But despite Bihar having fertile land and irrigation facilities, agricultural productivity is mostly less than

the national average. Why is agriculture not picking up? That is the big question. In the 1970s or 80s, a committee set up under the agricultural economist, S.R. Sen, was figuring out how to take the Green Revolution to the Indo-Gangetic belt. It came up with a plan for massive State investments in infrastructure and electrification to ensure that States have abundant water for the cultivation of wheat and rice. Surprisingly, the Green Revolution spread to the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh rather than the Indo-Gangetic belt. We must understand what went wrong. I think it will be both in Bihar's interest and the national interest to get basic wheat, rice, and sugarcane cultivation going. This way, western India will be burdened less; it can conserve more water and move to value-added crops.

Manindra Nath Thakur: On the agrarian front, I don't think Bihar should repeat the mistake that Punjab made during the Green Revolution, which produced a water crisis. Although Bihar has abundant water, it may face the same consequences as Punjab if water is overused. Moreover, increasing agricultural production is linked with the heavy use of fertilizers and pesticides, creating a health crisis. Therefore, I don't support the shifting of agriculture to eastern India. Agriculture is not profitable anywhere in the world unless it is heavily supported by the State. R. Nagaraj: Madhya Pradesh was also seen as a backward State. It does not have the same water resources as Bihar, yet the Green Revolution expanded there. Prosperity in the Malwa region is amazing. Therefore, I am sceptical about the idea that agriculture has no potential.

So what do you think are the factors that contributed to Bihar's underdevelopment? Manindra Nath Thakur: Apart from what I have said, there are also notions that the Centre is not interested in Bihar's growth. The State, I think, is frozen in its transition from feudalism to capitalism. One of the reasons for this is the internal colonisation of the State. Earlier, Bihar supplied raw materials, but due to policies such as freight equalisation, it suffered significantly, and industries didn't develop locally, despite having the advantage of raw material availability. Bihar ultimately lost revenues and its natural advantage. Now, with a supply of labour from Bihar, nobody is interested in developing the State. R. Nagaraj: A commodity where freight equalisation was done and which benefited eastern India was cement. Steel did not accrue the same advantage. Cement has heavy transport costs compared to steel so the freight equalisation policy for it helped eastern India. Furthermore, why Bihar is leaving Bihar has no element of capitalist conspiracy. In fact, when investments in agriculture were made in Bihar, migration to Punjab declined. It is clear that if people have

## Why pigeons are significant for public health managers



On July 3 this year, the Maharashtra government ordered the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) of Mumbai to immediately shut down all 51 kabutarshans in the city, citing health hazards arising out of pigeon droppings and feathers. The BMC subsequently banned public feeding of pigeons, leading to legal challenges in the Bombay High Court. The Court did not stay the order, but said a committee of experts could study if the old kabutarshans should continue, while stressing that "human life is of paramount importance". The Corporation's decision, however, triggered opposition from sections of the Jain and Gujarati communities who consider feeding pigeons a daily act of compassion. The disagreement has moved beyond civic hygiene to questions of health communication, faith, and evidence. Large cities create stable conditions for pigeon colonies. Continuous feeding at kabutarshans and open markets ensures an uninterrupted food supply for pigeons. Modern buildings provide nesting ledges and shaded ducts. The absence of predators and the surplus food grain availability further support survival. In densely-populated neighbourhoods, this output accumulates on rooftops, ducts, balconies, and public squares. The droppings dry into fine dust and are dispersed through the air or during cleaning. The organic matter in them supports bacterial and fungal growth.

Pigeon droppings are known reservoirs of *Histoplasma capsulatum* and *Cryptococcus neoformans*. Inhalation of these spores can lead to respiratory illness, particularly in people with weakened immunity. *Chlamydia psittaci* may cause psittacosis, and enteric bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli* have been detected on contaminated surfaces. Workers who clean terraces or monuments often face repeated contact with accumulated droppings and may inhale fine particulate matter carrying microbes, which could potentially cause illnesses.

Health effects arise primarily from allergies rather than infections. Proteins from pigeon feathers and droppings can trigger hypersensitivity pneumonitis in some people. The immune response produces inflammation in the alveoli and surrounding lung tissue. Over the years, chronic inflammation may lead to fibrosis and progressive reduction in lung capacity. This condition, sometimes called pigeon fancier's lung, does not spread from one person to another. It represents an immune reaction unique to those genetically predisposed to allergy. In sensitised individuals, even short exposure can precipitate symptoms and cause serious health hazards. Early symptoms include dry cough, breathlessness, and fatigue that worsens on re-exposure. Imaging often shows diffuse lung shadows. Pulmonary function tests reveal a restrictive pattern. Removal of pigeon droppings from the exposure environment usually improves symptoms, while continued exposure can lead to irreversible fibrosis. Corticosteroids remain the main line of management. Diagnosis requires clinical suspicion and immunological testing for bird antigens. Because it mimics other respiratory diseases, many cases remain undetected or are labelled chronic bronchitis. Systematic recording of cases under the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) would help estimate the true burden, but such surveillance is absent in routine health statistics. The prognosis of dis-

eases arising from pigeon droppings varies with the underlying condition, duration of exposure, and host susceptibility. In hypersensitivity pneumonitis, early recognition and removal from exposure usually lead to a good prognosis, but chronic or repeated exposure can result in irreversible interstitial fibrosis and long-term respiratory limitation. Fungal infections such as histoplasmosis and cryptococcosis, if diagnosed late, lead to disseminated disease in immunocompromised individuals and carry a guarded prognosis. Psittacosis caused by *Chlamydia psittaci* responds effectively to tetracycline-based treatment with minimal sequelae. Allergic bronchitis and asthma-like conditions improve with corticosteroids and avoidance of exposure. Overall, the outlook ranges from complete recovery in early, self-limiting cases, to chronic respiratory impairment or fatality in severe, untreated, or immunocompromised patients. Urban health authorities estimate that thousands of pigeons inhabit a single ward in Mumbai. Multiplying by their average annual droppings gives a load of several hundred tonnes of droppings across the city each year. The droppings contain uric acid, nitrates, and organic debris that decay and release ammonia and other gases. Rainwater mixes with droppings and washes residues into drains. When dry, they become airborne, contributing to fine particulate matter. Although their share in air pollution is minor, local exposure near dense colonies is significant. Maintenance costs for cleaning and restoration of building surfaces rise proportionally. Droppings deposited on monuments and facades react chemically with stone and metal. Over time, they erode surfaces and increase corrosion. On the ground, nutrient enrichment changes soil composition and plant diversity. Accumulated nests attract mites and fleas that can enter nearby homes. Combining aesthetic nuisance, material damage, and microbial growth makes pigeon control an environmental rather than a purely medical issue. Ecologists note that cities with high pigeon density also show lower diversity of native birds, suggesting competition for nesting sites. Communicating the risk of allergic disease is challenging because it is selective, not universal. Unlike an infectious outbreak, where transmission affects all community members, allergic reactions depend on host susceptibility. People with certain genetic markers or a background of asthma and atopy are more likely to react to pigeon antigens. The majority of residents may remain unaffected despite identical exposure. This uneven pattern of vulnerability complicates public messaging. When health authorities describe pigeon droppings as a hazard, some citizens question the warning because visible illness is rare. The difference between infection and allergy must therefore be conveyed clearly. Allergic risk demands preventive awareness rather than alarm. Explaining this selective risk requires precise language. Overstatement may generate unnecessary fear, while understatement sustains risky practices. Authorities must describe the biological mechanism and the preventive behaviour expected from citizens.

Pigeons multiply rapidly under urban conditions. A monogamous pair can produce up to six broods a year, with two eggs in each, and their offspring mature for breeding within six months. One pair can thus yield 45-50 pigeons in a single year. Abundant food, stable climate, and few predators sustain this expansion. Unlike migratory birds, pigeons remain near feeding zones, forming dense flocks of 20 or more. The absence of natural predators such as hawks or kites makes control dependent on human action. Increasing the population of pigeon predators can gradually restore ecological balance in crowded city environments. Uncontrolled proliferation of pigeons alters environmental and health dynamics. Each bird's annual contribution of 12 to 15 kilograms of droppings, multiplied by thousands, represents a significant urban waste load. The health effects are uneven but tangible among susceptible groups. Effective policy will depend on transparent communication, shared responsibility, and consistent application of scientific evidence.

## WhatsApp could soon let users chat using username instead of phone number



Hyderabad: WhatsApp is taking a significant step towards modernizing its platform by testing a "username reservation" feature in the latest Android beta build (version 2.25.28.12). This development signals the impending introduction of usernames, allowing users to connect without relying solely on phone numbers, similar to competitors like Telegram. Since its launch in 2009, WhatsApp has required phone numbers for registration and contact discovery. The new username system aims to provide greater flexibility and privacy. The current beta test, visible in the Settings menu, focuses on reserving usernames rather than full messaging access. Users can secure their preferred handles ahead of the official rollout, ensuring fairness in the allocation of popular names and helping WhatsApp manage demand and maintain platform stability. Only lowercase letters (a-z), numbers (0-9), periods (.), and underscores (.) are allowed. Additionally, WhatsApp is testing a four-digit "username key", which users must share along with their username to connect with others. This adds an extra layer of privacy, preventing anyone from messaging a user simply by knowing their username. Some beta users can already customize and reserve usernames, allowing them to secure their preferred handle before the global release. WhatsApp will use this phase to gauge demand and ensure fair access. No official global release date has been announced. Apart from usernames, WhatsApp has recently introduced AI features and enhanced call scheduling to facilitate professional meetings. WhatsApp is also preparing a major policy shift to curb spam. Meta plans to limit messages sent to contacts who do not reply, counting each message toward a monthly quota. This measure, which will roll out in several countries in the coming weeks,



more options at home, they will not move out. Literature of ten suggests that Bihar has a 'socialist hangover', and that entrepreneurship does not draw confidence. R. Nagaraj: The socialist ideology in Bihar is often equated with caste politics and caste in general — basically, distributing limited resources across various castes. If the focus shifts to productive investment, it will do a lot of good for Bihar. Policy must focus on how to augment production rather than looking at redistributing the limited resources more equitably or in a manner that helps people stay in power. Manindra Nath Thakur: Bihar has never really followed the socialist model. It also failed to understand the logic behind India's shift to capitalism. Bihar is currently at a significant disadvantage. For any structural change, there must be a solid commitment to reinvestment by the Union government. Unless that is done, the transition to capital will not take place. With respect to migration, if there are good working conditions and a decent income, no Bihar would like to migrate. The amount of investment required to help Bihar move out of this "frozen transition" phase has not been made. It could be linked to general societal politics. One argument, as Shaibal Gupta used to make, relates to the lack of a distinct Bihar identity. Or as Prashant Kishore says, of the concept of Bihar asmita. Would special status be of any help to Bihar? R. Nagaraj: I am not sure it would help. The bigger question relates to whether it will be utilised productively or not. Bihar lacks the state capacity to use it. Whereas, if you give the same money to Andhra Pradesh or Tamil Nadu, they will grab it and use it better. Being among the poorest states, Bihar gets a considerable amount of resources from the Finance Commission on considerations of its backwardness and to bring greater equality among States. When those are not utilised, the money lapses. Many of these grants are performance-based — meaning the State must raise its own share of resources to access the full amount. This often doesn't happen in Bihar.

## Australia tells AI chatbot companies to detail child protection steps



SYDNEY, Australia has ordered four artificial-intelligence chatbot companies to explain their measures to protect children from exposure to sexual or self-harm material, as its internet regulator beefs up safety measures on the AI front. The realistic conversational abilities of such services have taken the world by storm, but have also fanned concern that a lack of guardrails exposes vulnerable individuals to dangerous content. The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here.

In a statement, the eSafety Commissioner said it sought details of safeguards against child sexual exploitation, pornography and material promoting suicide or eating disorders. It sent notices to Character Technologies, owner of celebrity simulation chatbot tool character.ai, and rivals Glimpse.AI, Chai Research and Chub AI. "There can be a darker side to some of these services, with many ... chatbots capable of engaging in sexually explicit conversations with

minors," Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said in the statement. "Concerns have been raised that they may also encourage suicide, self-harm and disordered eating."

Australia's online regulatory system gives the commissioner the power to compel internet firms to report internal safety processes or face daily fines of up to A\$825,000 (\$536,000). The most popular of the services queried, Character.ai, is being sued in the United States after the mother of a 14-year-old said her son died by suicide following prolonged interaction with an AI companion on the site. Character.ai has sought to dismiss the lawsuit and says it introduced safety features, such as pop-ups directing users to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline if they express thoughts of self-harm. Schools in Australia have reported children as young as 13 spending up to five hours a day talking with chatbots, sometimes sexually, the regulator said, adding that minors risked forming sexual or emotionally dependent ties with them, or being spurred to self-harm. However, the regulator did not query OpenAI, owner of the world's most popular AI search tool, ChatGPT, as its crackdown focused on companion-based tools and ChatGPT is not covered by an industry code until March 2026, an eSafety spokesperson said. Australia has one of the world's strictest internet regulation regimes. From December, social media companies will be forced to deactivate or refuse accounts for users younger than 16 or face a fine of up to A\$49.5 million, in a bid to safeguard young people's mental and physical health. Byron Kaye is the Reuters chief companies correspondent for Australia, based in Sydney. Over 10 years at Reuters he has covered banks, retail, healthcare, media, technology and politics, among other topics. He can be reached at +612 9171 7541 or on Signal via username byronkaye.01

## Paris' Louvre reopens after heist, as backlash grows over security flaws

PARIS, - 7 The Louvre in Paris reopened on Wednesday, three days after thieves made off with historic jewellery worth an estimated 88 million euros (\$102 million) in a spectacular heist that has raised urgent questions over security lapses at the museum. Visitors queued to enter through the Louvre's glass pyramid for the first time since Sunday's brazen robbery, in which hooded assailants broke through a second-floor window using a stolen movers' lift before making off with jewels from the royal collection. The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here. Later on Wednesday the museum's director will appear before the French Senate to answer lawmakers' questions. The Galerie d'Apollon, the ornate gilded hall that was robbed, remains closed.

Amid rising frustration in France that no senior official has taken responsibility, French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said there had clearly been security failures and Culture Minister Rachida Dati had launched an administrative inquiry. "There was a burglary at the Louvre, some of the most precious jewels in France were stolen. So obviously it's a failure, there is nothing else I can say," Nunez told Europe 1 radio. But he added that "the alarm system worked perfectly, as soon as the window was attacked, it was activated. Police were notified, and within three minutes they were on the scene. The whole system worked, it didn't fail, but what happened has happened." He declined to comment on the police manhunt, but said he was confident the perpetrators would be found. Item 1 of 6 Visitors take pictures of the painting "La Liberté guidant le peuple" (Liberty Leading the People, 1830) by French artist Eugene Delacroix (1798 -1863) displayed in the salle Mollien of Denon wing at the Louvre Museum on the day it reopened to the public for the first time since last Sunday's heist, while the Galerie d'Apollon where eight pieces of Napoleon and the Empress's jewelry collection displayed in the gallery were stolen by thieves, remains closed, in Paris, France, October 22, 2025. REUTERS/Gonzalo Fuentes.[1/6] Visitors take pictures of the painting "La Liberté guidant le peuple"



(Liberty Leading the People, 1830) by French artist Eugene Delacroix (1798 -1863) displayed in the salle Mollien of Denon wing at the Louvre Museum on the day it reopened to the public for the first time since last Sunday's... Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tab Read more Dati came under fire after saying in parliament on Tuesday there had not been any security lapses. Louvre director Laurence des Cars will be questioned by senators later on Wednesday. Des Cars warned in January that the centuries-old building was in a dire state. President Emmanuel Macron has announced a six-year renovation of the Louvre, which will include money for security upgrades. Asked on RTL radio whether state budget cuts had led to security lapses in French museums, the head of France's national audit office Pierre Moscovici said that was not the case for the Louvre. "It is richly endowed, there are sponsorships, really, the Louvre is not without resources." Built in the late 12th century, the Louvre Palace used to be the official residence of the kings of France, until Louis XIV abandoned it for Versailles. It was turned into a museum for the royal art collection in 1793, four years after the French Revolution. It hosts the Mona Lisa, the world's most famous painting, and the Venus de Milo statue, as well as countless old masters.

## World Court to give opinion on Israel's obligations to allow aid to Palestinians



THE HAGUE, The United Nations' top legal body, the International Court of Justice, will issue an advisory opinion on Wednesday on what Israel's obligations are to U.N. and other aid organisations trying to work in Gaza and the West Bank. The opinion, which was requested by the U.N. General Assembly in December, will be closely watched as it could have effects beyond the Gaza conflict. It is expected to address the protections states must provide for U.N. staff worldwide. The Reuters Gulf Currents newsletter brings you the latest on geopolitics, energy and finance in the region. Sign up here.

Advisory opinions of the ICJ, also known as the World Court, carry legal and political weight, but they are not binding and the court has no enforcement power. In April this year lawyers for the United Nations and Palestinian representatives at the ICJ accused Israel of breaking international law by refusing to let aid into Gaza between March and May. Since then some humanitarian aid has been allowed in but U.N. officials say the relief is nowhere near what is needed to ease a humanitarian disaster.

The 20-point ceasefire plan mediated by the U.S. earlier this month allows for 600 trucks of aid a day into Gaza. Israel has previously accused Hamas of stealing food delivered into the enclave, which it denies, and has said the aid restriction was to put pressure on the militant group. Israel did not appear before the ICJ in hearings but did submit its legal position in writing. In April, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar dismissed the hearings as a "circus" and said the court was being politicized.

The request for an ICJ opinion was prompted by a 2023 Israeli law that banned U.N. Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA from operating in the country, as it said the organisation had employed members of Hamas who took part in the attacks on Israel. The U.N. said in August last year that nine UNRWA staff may have been involved in the Hamas assault and had been fired. Another Hamas commander, confirmed by UNRWA as one of its employees, was killed in Gaza in October 2024, according to Israel. In an earlier 2024 advisory opinion, the ICJ found that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories is illegal and should end immediately. The court also said that Israel had human rights obligations to the Palestinians because of its position as an occupying power.

## Journalists imprisoned in Belarus and Georgia win EU's top human rights award

Two journalists, one imprisoned in Belarus and the other in Georgia, have won the European Union's top human rights honour, the Sakharov Prize, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola announced.

Andrzej Poczobut is a correspondent for the influential Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza. He was convicted of "harming Belarus' national security" and sentenced to eight years, which he is serving in the Novopolotsk penal colony. Mzia Amaglobeli, a prominent journalist who founded two of Georgia's independent media outlets, was convicted in August of slapping a police chief during an anti-government protest. She was sentenced to two years in prison in a case that was condemned by rights groups as an attempt to curb media freedom. "Both are journalists currently in prison on trumped up charges simply for doing their work and for speaking out against injustice. Their courage has made them symbols of the struggle for freedom and democracy," Ms. Metsola said at the parliament in Strasbourg, France. The annual EU award, named after Soviet dissident Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov, was created in 1988 to honour individuals or groups who defend human rights and basic freedoms.

## Saudi Arabia abolishes Kafala system – What it means for migrant workers



GNS News Agency, March 4

Hyderabad: In a landmark reform, Saudi Arabia has officially abolished the decades-old Kafala (sponsorship) system, marking a major shift in the treatment and rights of migrant workers in the Kingdom. The move, effective since March 2021 and part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 initiative, is expected to benefit 'around 13 million migrant workers,' making it one of the most significant labour reforms in the Gulf region.

What is the Kafala system?

The Kafala system—Arabic for "sponsorship"—is a legal framework that binds migrant workers to a specific employer or sponsor (kafeel) for the duration of their stay in a host country. It has been widely implemented in countries across the Middle East, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and also in Lebanon, Jordan, and formerly Israel.

Under this system Employers controlled workers' legal status, work permits, and even their ability to leave the country. Migrant workers were often unable to change jobs or return home without the employer's permission. Employers sometimes confiscated passports, restricted movement, or withheld wages. Human rights organizations have long criticized the system for facilitating exploitation and abuse with little legal recourse for workers.

Why was Kafala controversial?

According to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the kafala system gave employers unchecked power over foreign workers, especially in domestic, construction, and low-skilled sectors. In 2008, HRW said it was "incompatible with Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." In 2014, the International Trade Union Confederation estimated that 2.4 million domestic workers in the Arab Gulf and Levant were effectively enslaved, most from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and West Africa.

Where has Kafala been abolished?

Bahrain (2009): First GCC country to scrap kafala. Its labour minister publicly likened the system to slavery.

Israel (2006): The "binding system" was struck down by the Supreme Court in a landmark ruling citing human rights violations. Saudi Arabia (2025): Though reforms began in 2021, a complete abolition was announced in June 2025, ahead of global events like the 2034 FIFA World Cup, in a bid to improve Saudi Arabia's international image and attract investment. Drawbacks of the Kafala system: Restricted Movement: Workers couldn't leave or re-enter the country without sponsor permission. Passport Confiscation: Common and often unpunished. Forced Labour: Some employers exploited legal control to force migrants to continue working against their will. Limited Legal Protection: Workers had minimal access to justice in cases of abuse.

What has changed in Saudi Arabia?

The reforms, which started as early as November 2020, introduced several key changes:

1. Freedom to Change Jobs: Workers can now switch employers without sponsor approval, provided certain contract conditions are met.

2. Exit and Re-entry Without Sponsor Approval: Migrant workers no longer need permission to leave or re-enter Saudi Arabia.

3. Access to Labour Courts: Workers now have improved legal access to report abuse or contract violations.

4. Digital Labour Contracts: All employment contracts must be digitally documented, increasing transparency and legal accountability.

5. Implementation via Absher and Qiwa Platforms: Saudi Arabia's e-government systems now process visa and employment-related services.

Why Now?

Saudi Arabia is undergoing a broad transformation under Vision 2030, a plan to reduce dependence on oil and open its economy to the world. The reform: Aligns with international labour standards. Aims to attract foreign investment and skilled labour. Addresses long-standing criticism from rights groups and foreign governments. Prepares the Kingdom for hosting the 2034 FIFA World Cup, amid global scrutiny. The abolition of the kafala system is a historic step for labour rights in the Gulf. While implementation and enforcement remain critical, the reforms provide migrant workers with unprecedented freedom in Saudi Arabia. Activists and labour groups say continued pressure is necessary to ensure these changes lead to real, on-the-ground improvements for millions of workers.

## IRA in the making: Ghazwa-e-Hind rhetoric, 8,850 trainees at seven camps in Bangladesh



GNS News Agency, March 4

New Delhi: The disclosure by a senior adviser to the Muhammad Yunus government in Bangladesh clearly suggests that the first phase to set up the Islamic Revolutionary Army (IRA) is underway. On October 20, Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain, an adviser to the interim government, said on social media that recruitment and training were being imparted to 8,850 individuals across several centres. He said that these individuals would undergo training in martial arts, firearms instruction, taekwondo and judo.

This revelation confirms what the Indian agencies have been saying for a couple of months. The Yunus government, labelled as a puppet of the Jamaat-e-Islami and ISI, has been planning the IRA for several months now. The idea is to replace the existing army with the IRA. The IRA, according to Indian officials, would be on the lines with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The IRA would be a highly radicalised institution, which would help the establishment convert Bangladesh into an Islamic state. It would be used for moral policing, like one gets to see in Iran, officials add. However, the bigger target would be India, and this would mean that once the IRA is set up, the tensions along the border would be very high.

Recently, Dr Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, a Jamaat leader, said in New York that five million Jamaat youth were ready to fight against India. He said that if India enters Bangladesh, the bad name that was given in 1971 will be wiped out. We will prove ourselves as true freedom fighters, and one part of the Jamaat's five million people will engage in guerrilla warfare, while the rest will spread

## Man crashes car into White House security gate, taken into custody

Washington: A man was taken into custody after crashing his vehicle into a security gate outside the White House in Washington, according to local media reports. The incident occurred around 10:37 p.m. on Tuesday (local time) at the intersection of 17th Street and E Street NW, near the southwest perimeter of the presidential complex. According to the US Secret Service, the driver rammed his car into the secured gate, prompting an immediate response from security personnel. Agents quickly arrested the suspect on the scene, deploying a heavy security presence in the area, reports Fox News. Armed officers were seen securing the perimeter, while forensic teams examined the damaged vehicle. Authorities have not yet released details about the suspect's identity, possible motive, or the circumstances leading to the crash.

Visuals circulating on social media show Secret Service officers surrounding the vehicle, conducting measurements, and photographing the scene. Following the collision, access to the area was temporarily restricted while officials assessed the situation. The White House itself was not placed under lockdown, but the road leading to the gate was closed until the vehicle was towed away. No injuries have been reported. The Secret Service said it is reviewing

surveillance footage and other evidence to determine the driver's intent. Some media reports also suggested that US President Donald Trump was inside the White House at the time of the crash. The site of the incident lies southwest of the main residential complex, close to the headquarters of the American Red Cross. This is not the first time a vehicle has breached security near the White House. In January 2024, a driver crashed into an outer gate and was detained by law enforcement. A few months later, in May 2024, another vehicle struck a security barrier near the complex, resulting in the driver's death. In both cases, the Secret Service ruled out any broader threat to public safety. The latest incident comes amid ongoing construction work for a new East Wing ballroom, which has already increased security measures around the White House.

It also follows a separate security concern just days earlier, when a suspicious hunting stand was found overlooking the area where President Trump was scheduled to exit Air Force One at Palm Beach International Airport in Florida. Authorities have not yet confirmed whether there is any connection between the two incidents, but investigations are underway.

## 'Is settling scores': Mann slams ban on Sikh jathas to Pak, says 'BJP has deep-rooted enmity with Punjab'



Mann's reaction came a day after the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India advised states including Punjab not to allow Sikh pilgrims to Pakistan. Mann's reaction came a day after the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India advised states including Punjab not to allow Sikh pilgrims to Pakistan. Mann's reaction came a day after the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India advised states including Punjab not to allow Sikh pilgrims to Pakistan. Mann's reaction came a day after the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India advised states including Punjab not to allow Sikh pilgrims to Pakistan.

Mann's reaction came a day after the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India advised states including Punjab not to allow Sikh pilgrims to Pakistan. Addressing media, he said, "I have said it so many times that BJP is taking revenge from Punjab...sometimes they withhold our funds...I have even stated that if they had their way then they would delete Punjab from the National Anthem...They have so much of enmity with Punjab that they can do that...I would like to ask state BJP chief Sunil Jakhar to ask Prime Minister Narendra Modi as to what they have done. Cricket matches can wait...even the films can wait...but faith cannot wait," he said. He questioned the policy of the BJP, "What is BJP's policy? It is against Pakistan or against people? If a Pakistani artiste is taken in a film in which the shooting of the film is done before then they will be called traitors and do not want to have any relation with Pakistan. They said they will not allow any such movie released. They called out names like traitor. Entire troll army got at work. When they stop a fit then who suffers? The producer. But in case of the cricket match that took place on Monday, in which the producer is the son of 'bade sahib' and this loss cannot be allowed. Now the main stream media is saying hands were not shaken. Did we not played the match? What is this? Were the catches not taken? Did they not bowl? Can we say we will not touch the ball because it has touched Pakistanis but? Why play? This loss cannot be allowed because he is the son of 'bade sahib'." "The Chief Minister said that, "It is sad that our own government has been putting restrictions of us...had the British done this...or Pakistanis banned us it would have been different. We lost 10 lakh in partition. How we came from the other side hiding our daughters...trains carrying bodies crossed borders. The independence came very expensive for us. I want to tell Modi not to play with the emotions of Punjabis. We seek 'Sarbat da Bhal' (well being of the entire universe)." Punjab is a land of progress. Even if you would not give us anything, Punjab will still stand up. But we will remember these excesses. We will see when you come to us...you will come

seeking votes...you will seek rice...when you will seek rice, we will provide..." In a strongly worded allegation Mann said, "Why stop Sikh pilgrims? A cricket match took place yesterday but Sikh pilgrims cannot pay obeisance at a Gurdwara? It is about our faith. This is not about politics or business. It is in our ardas that we seek to serve at those gurdwaras which went to the other side after partition. But we cannot go there because those are in Pakistan."

Taking on the BJP, he said, "We are not like them. We will tell our views in a straightforward way. We have a common culture. We have one brother on this side and second on the other. We go to meet each other. Guru Nanak Dev ji was born in Nankana and he spent his last days at Kartarpur. These two places are of immense faith for us. These are our pilgrims. These two places mean so much for us. You can send help to Afghanistan. But for Punjab, you do not get time. They want the winds should flow according to them...the rivers and oceans should also flow as they want...Punjabis follow their own will. Had they not followed their will then you would not have been the Prime Minister of an Independent India. Because Bhagat Singh followed his will that Independence struggle will only get intense after sacrifice of life. We follow the path shown by our Gurus. I had stated that earlier also that either boycott everything or allow cultural change also alongwith the sports. We are all social people. Dont you think they are putting too many restrictions on us? Now, they will ask rice from us. Why don't they get rice also from the other side. Wheat, sarson, maize and sugarcane...When it comes to satiating hungers then Punjab is the food bowl of India. When Punjab faces a disaster then they say you face it on your own. Now, Assam has got a package of Rs 12,734 crore...Did they give Rs 1 lakh crore from Bihar? Why the BJP leaders in Punjab, who are seeking details of SDRF from me, ask the Centre about all this?"

Mocking at BJP MP Anurag Thakur, the CM said the nation has to play a multi-national tournaments. I do not know when was Thakur Sahib born? There are so many instances where we have boycotted the match, even a World Cup in which Sri Lanka won. Film will not be released because of Pakistani artistes. But cricket match will take place. What was the pressing reason for the match? The Pakistani cricket board will also the money. Where will they use this money? There is no body which is independent. Everything is under the army there. They will take this money saying chitta and arms are to be sent across the border. "Chief Minister Mann said that he would also write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ask him about relief fund for Punjab floods being collected in Prime Minister Relief Fund by International Advertising Agency (IAA). He said, "Who are these people? Why are they collecting funds in the name of floods in Punjab? They are seeking funds in PM Relief Fund? Why shouldn't this be collected in CM Relief Fund? Who are they to collect fund in Punjab's name? Have they sought funds for other states in PM National Relief Fund? Then they say they have a lot of money? The Prime Minister should make it clear why the name of his relief fund is being used? They seek account of SDRF from us? Who will give the account of this fund being collected? Then they say this fund does not come under the scope of RTI. I will also write to the PM and I am asking him through you also to lend some clarity on this."

## What is 'involution' that is plaguing the Chinese EV sector? | Explained

For some years now, the Chinese economy has faced what has locally come to be called *něijūàn*, or an involution. It is a process in which rivals in certain sectors indulge in price wars, attempting to capture market share and clear out oversupply of goods. However, these price wars are counterproductive, as they reach thresholds where the retail price of the product is so low that even the production costs cannot be realised, pushing firms into losses. This has been most apparent lately in China's electric vehicle sector, so much so that China's President Xi Jinping has prescribed corrective measures in a recent article in *Qiushi*. This phenomenon is not new in China; a similar trend has been witnessed in the solar industry as well.

Where does the phrase "involution" originate from?

Involution is derived from the Latin phrase *involutionem*, meaning "to turn inwards." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest known use of the noun "involution" dates back to 1611, in the writings of lexicographer Randle Cotgrave. But the dictionary lists nine meanings for the noun, ranging from its usage in literature to mathematics and pathology. The term appears to have been popularised by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz in the 1960s. Geertz used "involution" in his 1969 book *Agricultural Involvement: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* to describe a dynamic in Java's wet-rice (sawah) economy, where ever more labour and intricacy were packed into the same agro-ecological system, raising output per acre somewhat but not per person — so incomes stagnated even as effort and social complexity increased, according to a blurb of his book in the University of California Press website.

Have EU and U.S. tariffs exacerbated involution in the Chinese EV sector?

Yes, they have. The U.S. Section 301 tariffs on Chinese EVs, set at 100% (from 2024), along with higher duties on EV batteries and parts, effectively mean a trade embargo on Chinese EVs by the United States. Since October 30, 2024, the EU has imposed "countervailing duties" on Chinese EVs (e.g., BYD 17.0%, Geely 18.8%, SAIC ~35%), on top of the standard 10% import duty. This is to ostensibly counter the "subsidies" provided by China to its EV sector. But, Europe's auto sector is at an inflection point with plummeting sales in its iconic brands as Europeans begin to buy the technologically superior Chinese EVs at highly competitive prices. The countervailing duties are a desperate attempt to save Europe's once export-heavy auto industry. The commission has also entertained talks on minimum price undertakings in 2025. Türkiye added a 40% extra tariff on Chinese vehicles in 2024, and Mexico has moved toward a 50% tariff to head off U.S.-bound transshipment. As a result, Chinese Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) intensified competition at home, fuelling price wars.

Industry leaders themselves have called this an "involution." Beijing has begun an anti-price-war push as top executives warn of severe consolidation among the 120-130 EV makers in the country.

OEMs are localising abroad (e.g., BYD in Hungary/Turkiye) and diversifying exports to emerging markets, but timelines and capacity ramps are uneven. Meanwhile, according to the International Energy Agency, Chinese imports accounted for 75% of the increase in EV sales across



emerging economies outside China in 2024. What is the Chinese government doing to rein in the process in the EV sector? On May 31, the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) assured to rein in involution in the EV sector. This was followed by June 30 news coverage in the Chinese media, which framed a Politburo communication as Mr. Xi's "war on price wars". On July 24, Beijing released a draft overhaul of the pricing law to curb below-cost selling and algorithmic pricing abuses. On Monday, Mr. Xi's article in *Qiushi*, the Chinese Communist Party's theoretical magazine, called for curbing "disorderly price competition" and an "orderly exit" of outdated capacity, the clearest sign yet that the Central government plans a phased slowdown of price wars.

## Why internal assessments continue to be important in classrooms

Recently, the Telangana government withdrew its decision to remove the 20% internal assessment marks for the Secondary School Certificate (SSC exams) and award the entire 100% to external assessment. The 80:20 ratio has been a form of assessment for many years not just at the school level but also in higher education. In boards like the CBSE and ICSE, the system usually has 20% assessed internally at the institution level and the remaining 80% coming from the board exams, which are assessed by external examiners. The rationale in allotting 20% for internal assessment is that teachers are expected to know their students' capabilities in comprehending, retaining, and recalling the lessons taught and in observing the interest to learn and urge to improve. Thus, the teacher is the best judge of the students' performance. In an ideal situation, the teacher would be the examiner to award the entire 100% for the subject taught at the end of the course. However, the role of bias and misuse of the system cannot be ruled out. The role of internal assessment in the board exam has been a subject of repeated debates among educationists and administrators. Let us look at the benefits first. It provides a holistic evaluation of students' knowledge, skills and attitudes beyond written exams. Not only does it reduce the pressure and fear of exams but also helps students develop soft skills such as teamwork, communication and time management and increases self confidence.

## Unlocking innovation with India's procurement reforms



Procurement policies, often designed with transparency and cost-efficiency in mind, have long had unintended consequences for research and development. While preventing fraud, these frameworks frequently kill innovation, one process at a time, by prioritising procedural compliance over scientific needs. India's recent reforms to its General Financial Rules (GFR) — particularly exemptions from the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal and enhanced financial thresholds for research and development (R&D) procurement — are a welcome change.

Procurement as innovation catalyst The tug-of-war between procurement policies and innovation is not new. Studies have shown that public procurement, when done properly, can give a push to private-sector R&D by creating stable demand for advanced technologies. Moreover, it has been found that targeted procurement spending is associated with increased patent filings and private R&D investment, forming a virtuous cycle of innovation. However, as the Brazilian case study in *EconStor's* 2023 report notes, generic procurement rules rarely achieve this unless explicitly designed to spur innovation. India's pre-reform framework fell into this trap: mandating GeM purchases for all sub-₹200 crore equipment, regardless of specialisation, which forced scientists into a time-consuming exemption process for globally benchmarked tools. Vendors on GeM often supplied materials of poor quality, compromising research.

The Government of India's policy changes in June 2025 directly address these issues. By allowing institutional heads to bypass GeM for specialised equipment and raising direct purchase limits from ₹1 lakh to ₹2 lakh, the reforms acknowledge that cookie-cutter procurement is incompatible with R&D's bespoke needs. Delegating approval for global tenders up to ₹200 crore to vice-chancellors and directors eliminates bureaucratic lag — a chronic grievance highlighted by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. These adjustments align with theories of "catalytic procurement", where flexibility enables public institutions to act as early adopters of advanced technologies, stimulating private-sector innovation. Yet, the reforms stop short of a full paradigm shift. While empowering institutional leaders, they retain safeguards such as departmental purchase committees for higher-value acquisitions. This could be argued as a necessary balance. However, even the revised ₹2 lakh direct purchase limit could remain inadequate for high-cost fields such as quantum computing or biotechnology. Additionally, the focus on global tenders, while ensuring quality, could marginalise domestic suppliers unless local R&D systems are empowered and left free to collaborate globally, and compete at that level. The policy's success will depend to a large extent on implementation. Trusting institutional heads with procurement discretion assumes high ethical standards, which is something that will have to be built up, slowly, in a system that has been historically plagued by inefficiency. As the policy rolls out, monitoring mechanisms will be vital to prevent misuse while preserving agility. How has procurement evolved globally? Globally, nations leading in R&D outcomes have already reimagined procurement as something that acts as a catalyst for innovation — not just a cost-control mechanism. India can learn from their experiences. Procurement processes have evolved from ancient record-keeping to Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven strategies. India would do well to learn from these.

Germany's approach is a good example of balancing procurement checks and R&D ambitions. Through its High-Tech Strategy, the federal government mandates that public procurement be used to promote innovative solutions, supported by KOINNO, which is a dedicated agency advising procurers, curating supplier databases, and hosting cross-sector innovation forums. This institutionalises what economist Mariana Mazzucato terms "mission-oriented procurement", where state-purchasing power deliberately shapes technological markets. Similarly, the 'Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program' of the United States reserves 3% of federal R&D funds for startups, us-

ing phased procurement contracts to derisk early-stage technologies while maintaining competitive tension among vendors. These models recognise that procuring innovation is not about buying predefined products but in fostering ecosystems where suppliers compete on breakthroughs. India's GeM reforms partially embrace this philosophy by exempting specialised research equipment from mandatory portal use — a nod to the fact that Indian labs often face delays extending to a few months when dealing with niche instruments. However, the policy lacks Germany's proactive market-shaping elements or the SBIR's staged funding structure. For instance, India's ₹200 crore global tender limit for institutional heads still prioritises cost benchmarks over technical ambition, unlike South Korea's "pre-commercial procurement" system that pays premium prices for prototypes meeting moonshot criteria.

Procurement's 5,000-year journey, from Egyptian scribes tracking pyramid materials to AI predicting supply chain details, reflects an evolution from control to creativity. The Industrial Revolution looked at procurement as a cost-centric function, but the two World Wars exposed its strategic role in securing scarce resources. Post-1945, this duality deepened: corporations adopted Just-In-Time inventory systems while governments used procurement to spur sectors such as semiconductors. Today's frontier is "cognitive procurement", where tools such as generative AI analyse supplier ecosystems, simulate scarcity scenarios, and automate compliance — freeing researchers to focus on creative sourcing. Consider Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine effort, where AI-optimised procurement identified multiple critical suppliers within a few hours, compressing a months-long process into weeks. The discussion over procurement policies often leads to calls for privatisation of national labs, as that would probably open up the procurement process. However, it would be wise to consider that the debate over privatising India's national labs hinges on a false binary. As the U.S. experience shows, privatisation is not about abandoning public oversight but redefining it. When the Department of Energy handed over the management and operation of Sandia National Laboratories in 1993 to a private company, it retained mission control through performance-based contracts while unlocking private capital for laser and materials research. The result? A huge increase in patent filings and partnerships with a number of small and medium enterprises within a decade. India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) could adopt this hybrid model. Laboratories working in strategic fields such as space tech or quantum computing might benefit from corporate-style agility in procurement and hiring, provided the government maintains some control to safeguard national interests. However, success requires robust accountability frameworks and some alignment with innovation road maps. Procurement as a research variable India's procurement reforms are necessary but insufficient. Four systemic shifts could anchor deeper change. The first would be outcome-weighted tenders. Following Finland's example, there must be an evaluation of bids not just on cost but also on an index that weighs various qualitative factors such as supplier R&D investment and scalability potential. The second would be providing sandbox exemptions. Allow institutions such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research or the Indian Institutes of Technology to bypass GFR entirely for some percentage of their purchases, provided they meet annual innovation targets audited by third parties.

The third intervention should be AI-augmented sourcing. Deploy the INDIAai ecosystem to create a procurement assistant that scans global catalogues, predicts customs delays, and suggests alternative materials — reducing decision cycles from months to hours. And finally, go in for co-procurement alliances. Replicate the European Union's Joint Procurement Agreement, enabling multiple Indian labs to aggregate demand for high-cost items such as cryogenic coolers, achieving economies of scale. Privatisation is not a silver bullet but a tool among many. As this study on U.S. labs warns, merely transferring ownership sans performance-linked funding or competitive pressure risks creating ineffective labs. The goal must be creating a procurement continuum where public and private entities coexist — each accessing shared innovation marketplaces but governed by distinct risk-reward matrices. India's GeM reforms are a tentative step toward procurement systems that value time-to-lab as much as cost savings. By marrying these changes with global best practices in market-shaping, cognitive tools, and hybrid governance, the nation could transform procurement from a research impediment to its accelerator. The lesson from history is clear: civilisations that procured for monuments left ruins; those that procured for inquiry built futures.

## Plea at Madras High Court seeks making Election Commission of India website, polling stations universally accessible to the disabled

The Madras High Court, on Tuesday (September 16, 2025), sought the response of Election Commission of India (ECI) to a public interest litigation (PIL) petition which complained that the ECI's website and many polling stations were not universally accessible thereby depriving the disabled persons their valuable right to vote. First Division Bench of Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and Justice G. Arul Murugan directed ECI standing counsel Niranjan Rajagopalan to take notice and file a reply within four weeks. The judges asked the ECI not to consider it as an adversarial litigation since it had been filed for a genuine cause. Litigant Vaishnavi is the best person to espouse the cause. Pointing out that the litigant Vaishnavi Jayakumar, a cross disability rights activist, was the best person to espouse the cause of the disabled, the judges took a look at some photographs produced by her counsel S. Tanvi and asked how the disabled could be expected to climb steps to cast their votes. "We will take this matter seriously. You (ECI) have already taken many steps for making polling stations universally accessible but you must also ensure that these kind of physical accessibility barriers are removed completely wherever they exist," the Chief Justice told Mr. Rajagopalan.

In her affidavit, Ms. Jayakumar stated that Section 11 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 requires all polling stations to be accessible to persons with disabilities and all materials related to the electoral process to be made easily understandable and accessible to them. Despite such a statutory mandate in place for over seven years since the enforcement of the legislation and repeated requests made to the ECI, neither all the polling booths had been made universally accessible nor the information on the ECI website had been made accessible, free from all barriers, to the disabled, she said. "The present writ petition



is filed aggrieved inter alia by the fact that polling stations and websites of ECI, to even verify a voter's status and the candidates lists, are not universally accessible, thereby depriving persons with disability and other mobility impaired persons their valuable right to vote," her affidavit read.

ECI website must have multi-modal CAPTCHAs: Petitioner The petitioner said websites such as [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in), <https://electoralsearch.eci.gov.in>, <https://voters.eci.gov.in> and <https://officials.eci.gov.in> have only a single image based CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart) instead of multi-modal CAPTCHAs that must also include audio, text, logic and OTP options. "The respondent (ECI) is the authority to conduct elections in the country and by taking simple measures like making candidate information available in an accessible form online, ensuring accessible ramps at polling booths etc., the entire process can be made barrier-free and legally compliant," the petitioner said.

## Public sector insurers increase market share in first half of FY26



Public sector non-life insurance companies — which had witnessed a decline in market share in previous years — have managed to regain some ground in the half-year ended September 2025, despite facing intense competition, according to the latest data.

On a year-to-date (YTD) basis, private insurers' share declined to 63.8 per cent as of September 2025 from 66.3 per cent a year earlier, while public sector insurers' share improved to 31.7 per cent from 30.8 per cent in September 2024, indicating a gradual strengthening of their market position, said a CareEdge Ratings report. Government-owned New India Assurance increased its market share to 13.25 per cent at Rs 21,884 crore in the half-year ended September 2025 from 12.60 per cent in the same period a year ago. Oriental Insurance pushed up its share to 6.83 per cent from 6.53 per cent and United India Insurance to 6.62 per cent from 6.54 per cent, data from General Insurance Council showed. On the other hand, private sector ICICI Lombard's market share came down to 8.68 per cent in the half-year ended September 2025 as against 9.36 per cent a year ago. Star Health Insurance witnessed a decline in market share at 4.88 per cent as against 5.08 per cent a year ago. HDFC Ergo share came down to 4.47 per cent from 5.77 per cent in the previous six-month period. The overall growth in non-life sector in the six-month period ended September 2025 was 7.31 per cent at Rs 1,65,156 crore as against a growth of 7.03 per cent a year ago, according to GI Council data.

Meanwhile, the non-life insurance sector experienced a rebound, with a 13.2 per cent year-on-year growth in the month of September 2025 compared to a 6.5 per cent decline in September 2024 and 1.6 per cent growth in August 2025. While premium collections reached Rs 31,117.6 crore, the overall growth was supported by stronger renewals in core segments like motor, crop, fire, and engineering, coupled with rising demand in specialised lines and personal accident insurance, according to latest figures.

"The recent GST reductions are likely to enhance affordability, boost policy sales, improve compliance, and increase penetration. Overall, the sector's trajectory will be shaped by a combination of competition, regulatory devel-

opments and global economic uncertainties," said Priyesh Ruparelia, director, CareEdge Ratings. Health insurance remained the largest segment within the non-life insurance industry, posting a 6.9 per cent growth in September 2025, largely supported by stronger performance in the other category and the effect of the GST rate cut in individual health policies. However, overall growth momentum has moderated due to the impact of the 1/n rule and affordability pressures from rising premiums.

The 1/n rule in insurance refers to an accounting approach for long-term non-life insurance contracts, where premium income is recognised evenly over the policy's duration rather than as a lump sum upfront. The retail health segment grew the fastest in September 2025, driven by GST rate cuts, policy renewals and improved penetration amid rising medical inflation. However, growth moderated to 7.3 per cent, down from 18.2 per cent in the same period last year. Group health insurance growth moderated to 7.9 per cent in YTD FY26, down from the 11.5 per cent pace seen in YTD FY25. "The deceleration is partly linked to the 1/n rule and further exacerbated by rising medical inflation, which has pushed premiums higher and weighed on affordability," CareEdge said in a report.

Standalone health insurers (SAHIs) remain concentrated in the retail segment, whereas general insurers continue to dominate the group business. With new SAHIs set to enter the market, competitive intensity is expected to rise over the medium term, CareEdge said in the report. The recent reduction in GST on health insurance has lowered the overall cost for policyholders, making products more affordable and supporting stronger demand. Insurers are likely experiencing higher new business premiums and improved penetration, particularly in retail segments. The reduced tax burden also helps enhance customer retention, as renewal premiums have become relatively more economical, contributing to sustained growth in the health insurance segment. Specialised insurers witnessed a significant rebound in September 2025, with premiums surging 261.5 per cent year-on-year, a strong reversal from the steep 61.8 per cent contraction recorded in September 2024. This increase was primarily driven by a low base effect, coupled with higher renewals and increased uptake in credit guarantee insurance, it said.

On a YTD basis, the segment has returned to positive growth, rising by 66.4 per cent compared to a 27.9 per cent decline in the corresponding period of FY25, reflecting renewed momentum and business recovery across specialised lines. SAHIs saw a marked slowdown in growth, with premiums rising just 3.1 per cent y-o-y in September 2025, significantly lower than the 25.9 per cent growth recorded in the same month last year. This moderation is likely attributable to higher premiums, impacting affordability and new business inflows.

## Inside Rs 173 crore SEBI crackdown: How traders exploited CERC data to profit from IEX stock

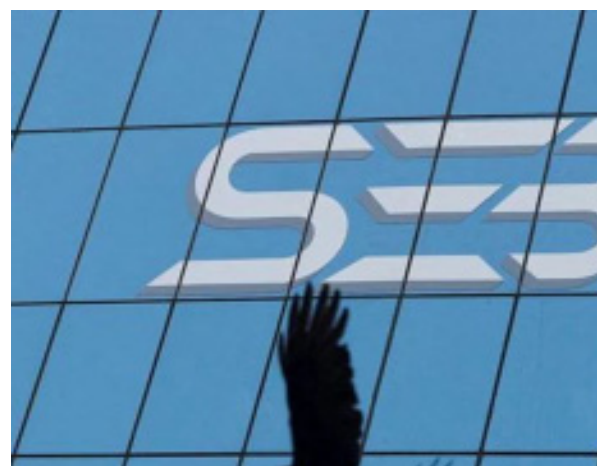
In an unusual crackdown on a major insider trading in the shares of a power exchange — Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) — using unpublished price sensitive information (UPSI) from another regulator, Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has ordered impounding of Rs 173.14 crore from eight individuals and barred them from dealing in the markets until further orders.

The eight individuals — or Noticees 1 to 8 — listed by the Sebi include Bhoovan Singh, Amar Jit Singh Soran, Anita Soran, Anita, Narender Kumar, Virender Singh, Bindu Sharma and Sanjeev Kumar. The Sebi order, issued on October 15, says that there are evidences of confidential documents and communication relating to CERC recovered from the mobile phone of Bhoovan Singh. It also has evidence of Sanjeev Kumar watching live-streaming of the CERC meeting on July 15, 2025 from the adjoining room. Besides, there were frequent communications and meetings between officials of CERC and Bhoovan Singh and Sanjeev Kumar. Inside info from CERC

On July 23, 2025, CERC issued an order for implementing market coupling. Market coupling involves the centralised matching of bids from various power exchanges to arrive at a uniform market clearing price. This move was aimed at achieving price convergence across different electricity markets and streamlining the process of price discovery. Currently each power exchange determines its price based on demand and supply.

With the new framework of market coupling, it was prima facie observed that IEX was expected to lose control over price discovery in the DAM (Day Ahead Market) segment due to market coupling and smaller exchanges like Power Exchange of India (PXIL) and Hindustan Power Exchange (HPX) getting access to some volume of trades. Accordingly, it was prima facie observed that the implementation of market coupling mechanism was expected to negatively affect trading volume on IEX in the DAM segment. Preliminary examination further revealed that there was a significant movement in the price and volume traded in the scrip of IEX on the next day after the CERC order i.e. on July 24, 2025, the Sebi order says. The CERC order led to fall in prices in the scrip of IEX, and an increase in the volume of derivatives of PEs (put European options) was observed. Once the CERC order was made public on July 23, 2025, price of the scrip opened at Rs 169.10 and closed at Rs 132.32 on July 24, Sebi said. Sebi conducted a suo-motu preliminary examination after taking cognizance of the significant fall in price of shares in the scrip of Indian Energy Exchange following the announcement made by CERC on July 23, 2025 after-market hours. While the examination was being carried out, SEBI also received a complaint alleging insider trading in the scrip.

Humongous alleged ill-gotten gains have been made by noticees by executing trades with great precision and timing and at the cost of innocent investors who had no prior access about the impending fall in the price owing to the CERC order, the order said. "Immediate action is also required against Noticees to prevent the alleged ill-gotten gains from going beyond the regulatory reach. Part of the alleged ill-gotten gains has already been transferred to certain connected entities by Noticees. There is apprehension that the Noticees may further transfer the alleged ill-gotten gains," Sebi Whole-time Member Kamlesh C Varshney said in his order dated October 15. SEBI noted that the noticees had carried out very few trades before and after the period under review. However, their trading activity rose sharply during the time they had access to unpublished price-sensitive information (UPSI). This, SEBI said, clearly shows how their trading pattern was designed to take advantage of the expected fall in the share price of IEX. By doing so, they were able to multiply their profits significantly through put



option trades, revealing a well-planned scheme to benefit from insider information.

The modus operandi involved sharing of crucial information relating to regulatory actions that emanated from a regulator (CERC) and which was bound to have severe impact on the listed securities of IEX. "Such actions create an information imbalance amongst investors, leaving them at a disadvantage due to their lack of access to the confidential information held by individuals who can have access to such information owing to their influential contacts," it said.

## Amazon Web Services outage impacts ChatGPT, Alexa and more; brings half the internet down

New Delhi: Amazon Web Services is facing a major outage on Monday that has affected online services globally, including AI platforms, e-commerce platforms, popular websites and online games. Access to Amazon's virtual assistant technology Alexa, the social media app Snapchat, online game Fortnite, the AI platform ChatGPT, Epic Games Store, and Epic Online Services was disrupted. Amazon Web Services, Inc. is a subsidiary of Amazon that provides on-demand cloud computing platforms and APIs to individuals, companies, and governments, on a metered, pay-as-you-go basis. Amazon reported that it is "investigating increased error rates and latencies for multiple AWS services in the US-EAST-1 Region" and that multiple services are "impacted" by operational issues. Users on social media platform Reddit reported that the Alexa smart assistant is down and unable to respond to queries or complete requests. AWS' cloud-hosted platforms such as Perplexity, Airtable, Canva, and the McDonald's app were also affected, according to user reports. The cause of the outage hasn't been confirmed, and it's unclear when regular service will be restored. Perplexity CEO Aravind Srinivas informed on social media platform X, "Perplexity is down right now. The root cause is an AWS issue. We're working on resolving it." AWS outage knocks Amazon, ChatGPT, Alexa and dozens of apps offline. The AWS dashboard first reported issues affecting the US-EAST-1 Region at 3:11 AM Eastern Time (ET). "We are actively engaged and working to both mitigate the issue and understand root cause. We will provide an update in 45 minutes, or sooner if we have additional information to share," Amazon said. Later at 5:27 a.m. ET, Amazon reported "significant signs of recovery," adding that "most requests should now be succeeding."

## Is kidney damage linked to mercury in skin-lightening creams bought online? Study finds eight brands with levels a thousand times higher than legal limit



Beware of skin lightening creams that you have been buying from online marketplaces because they contain mercury levels a thousand times higher than the legal limit set by governments, triggering serious health issues like kidney failure, according to a latest report. Ahead of a meeting of the Minamata Convention, which is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury, the Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG) has released a new report documenting the availability of dangerous and often illegal mercury-added skin lightening products on marketplace platforms worldwide. Of the 31 creams tested, 25 were found to contain mercury thousands of times higher than the 1 ppm usual legal limit. Toxics Link from India tested eight skin lightening creams of different brands manufactured in India, Pakistan and Thailand and found the mercury concentration in seven samples to be in the range of 7331 ppm to 27,431 ppm. In contrast, only a few mercury-added products were found on platforms in the US and the European Union (EU), indicating how unsuspecting and unaware customers were exposed to risks in unregulated online marketplaces.

"While Indian brands in the organised sector comply with norms, the continued availability of highly toxic, non-compliant skin lightening creams by foreign and unorganised sector manufacturers on online marketplaces is a serious violation of national regulations. Since 2023, we have been

highlighting cases of kidney diseases, even failure, from excess mercury in creams. Three women of a family in Akola, Maharashtra, had suffered kidney damage after applying heavy mercury-laden creams," says Satish Sinha, associate director, Toxics Link, who has been working with doctors across the country to track usage and side effects of skin lightening products marketed online.

What do mercury-laden creams do to the skin?

Many unregulated fairness and skin-lightening creams contain mercury, a heavy metal that is highly toxic to the nervous system, liver and the kidneys. "Mercury is used in skin-lightening products because it suppresses melanin, the pigment that acts as a natural sunscreen by blocking harmful UV rays, leading to a lighter complexion. It pauses the enzyme necessary for melanin creation, and is also used as a preservative in some cosmetics," says Dr D M Mahajan, senior dermatologist, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, Delhi. According to him, many users don't know that such creams can build dependent behaviour. "Because the skin lightening effect is immediate, users develop a dependence. But such creams damage the skin's protective barrier. So when you stop using it, the skin can go worse, with irritation, redness, patches, tingling sensations and even temporary loss of hair or skin. This is known as a reverse phenomenon," says Dr Mahajan.

What are side effects?

Apart from the skin, there are other effects. Chronic exposure to mercury through these creams is a known cause of nephrotic syndrome, a condition where the kidneys leak excessive protein into the urine. "Over time this can lead to renal failure and we have recorded cases. It can cause sores in the mouth, affect the nervous system, triggering tremors and itching," says Dr Mahajan.

How does mercury get into the body by topical application of creams?

Inhalation is the commonest route, by which the mercury vapour gets to the lung and damages it over time. "It can get in accidentally through lips, where the cream or lotion may spill on to and the user may lick it unconsciously. This way it gets absorbed in the gut. Then there is mucosal absorption through the eyes," says Dr Mahajan. But the reason it goes straight to the kidneys in big amounts is because of its absorption through the skin. "The average skin surface area is 1.73 sq metres, so if you are using a lightening lotion, then the absorption is quite a bit," he explains.

How to prevent usage of mercury-laden products?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a product contains mercury if you see the label containing Calomel, Cinnabaris, Hydrargyri oxydum rubrum or Quicksilver. If you see the word "mercury" or "mercuric" on the list of ingredients, that also means the product contains mercury. Check for a warning that tells you to keep the product away from silver, gold, rubber, aluminium, and jewellery because mercury can damage these. "Always consult a dermatologist for skin lightening treatments. If it is a foreign cream, see if it is US FDA (Food and Drug Administration-approved)," advises Dr Mahajan. "Only tested and certified products must be retailed on country online platforms," argues Sinha.

## Two hours of exercise a week can reduce back and joint pain, says UK study: Here are easy, full-body routines

I came across an interesting piece of research that has now found that people with sore joints who exercise for two hours every week have less pain, visit their doctor less and take less sick leave. The findings were from an analysis of how 40,000 people across the UK with hip, back or knee pain fared when they did two one-hour exercise classes every week for 12 weeks. The results were enough for the NHS to make physical activity a standard part of treatment for those with musculoskeletal conditions. So what can be the options for those who can exercise just twice a week, or be a weekend warrior? I would recommend doing some drills in the water, in the shallow end of the pool.

The buoyancy of the water provides support, making movements easier to perform and allowing for a greater range of motions than on land. Leg extensions in water, where you are seated on a chair and lift weights, are good because they are low-impact, reducing stress on joints, while the water's resistance builds strength and endurance. This makes the exercise beneficial for people with joint pain, arthritis, or those recovering from injury, while also providing a cardiovascular workout. Kicking your legs in water, freestyle crawl kicking — where you float holding on to the pool wall and kick backwards — doing breaststroke and backstroke movements, walking sideways, backwards or just simply just standing in water strengthen your hips. Other than movements in water, one can do exercises specifically targeting specific muscles and joints prone to pain. I recommended hip mobility exercises since our hips support our entire torso and connect our legs with our back. Hips ought to be strong as they help in performance, be it in sports, workouts, injury prevention and daily functions. They help in proper force generation, shock absorption, balanced movement patterns and give you a lot of vanity when you wear clothes. Along with weak hips, knee and ankle pain can also manifest, so the alignment and strengthening of the hips is most important. Do the following for hip mobility. 1) Hip swing: Circle your hips as wide as you can, moving clockwise and anti-clockwise alternately to ease out stress. 2) Squats: When you squat or do any kind of lower body workouts, you engage the hips and make sure that we stretch them well.

3) Clamshell routine: Basically you mimic the opening and closing of a clamshell. Lie on your side, place your feet together and bend your knees. Raise your top knee toward the ceiling. Hold, then slowly let go. Clamshells can be a useful exercise for building up hip muscles like the gluteus medius, which can improve hip stability and alleviate some types of hip discomfort. 4) Lunges: These strengthen and stretch the hip flexors and surrounding muscles. The forward lunge, reverse lunge and lateral lunge are important variations that emphasize various ranges of motion to increase strength and mobility. The knee plan

Knees are not just joints, they are the foundation that allows us to walk, climb, sit, rise, travel and move through life with dignity. Your knee joint's supporting muscles can be strengthened with low-impact exercises and gentle



stretching. 1) Work your way up to half squats, calf lifts, and other leg lift variations after stretching your hamstrings, quadriceps.

2) Try heel and calf stretch: Facing a wall, lean back one foot as far as is comfortable while keeping your hands on the wall. Both feet should have their toes pointed forward, their heels level and their knees slightly bent. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds while leaning into it. Your back leg ought to feel stretched. Repeat with a different leg.

3) For knee joint mobility, flexibility and range of motion, do knee circles. Stand straight with your feet together and your knees bent. Place your hands on the knees and slowly rotate them making small circles. Complete a set in one direction and then switch to the opposite direction.

Back exercises are for everybody, so that our overall body movements are well coordinated. 1) Lie flat on your back, bend the hips and perform a cycling action with your legs. Great for endurance and mobilising your hip joints. 2) Raise your hips off the mat while lying on your back with your knees bent and your feet hip-width apart. This pose strengthens the back muscles.

## WhatsApp tests message limits to curb spam, unwanted messages

New Delhi: WhatsApp is planning a big change to stop spam and unwanted messages. The messaging app is testing a new rule that limits how many messages users and businesses can send to people who are not in their contact list and do not reply. This move is aimed at giving users a quieter and more organised inbox. Over the years, WhatsApp has grown from a simple chat app into a large platform that includes communities, business accounts, and customer service channels. But with this growth, the number of unwanted messages and promotions has also increased, frustrating many users. According to a report by 'TechCrunch', WhatsApp is now testing a monthly limit on messages sent to people who don't respond.

## India hosting 2030 CWG a moment of immense pride: Andhra CM Chandrababu Naidu



GNS News Agency, March 4

Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has said that India securing the bid to host the Centenary Commonwealth Games 2030 is a moment of immense pride for every citizen.

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Naidu, while replying to the prime minister in a post on X, said, "It is a moment of immense pride for every citizen as India secures the bid to host the Centenary Commonwealth Games 2030! Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji." "This achievement stands as a special milestone, further elevating India's standing on the global stage and reflecting our nation's strong commitment to sporting excellence," Naidu added. Earlier, PM Modi said he was delighted by India winning the bid and congratulated people and the sporting fraternity for their contribution to the nation's ascent in global sports. "Delighted that India has won the bid to host the Centenary Commonwealth Games 2030! Congratulations to the people of India and the sporting ecosystem," Modi said in his post on X. He further said, "With the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, we are eager to be celebrating these historic games with great enthusiasm".

## WPL auction 2026: UP Warriorz acquires Deepti Sharma for Rs 3.2 crore, Laura Wolvaardt sold to Delhi Capitals in marquee set



GNS News Agency, March 4

Deepti Sharma headlined the marquee set, returning to her original franchise after the UP Warriorz used the Right-to-Match card, following Delhi Capitals winning the solitary bid for Rs 50 lakh. DC quoted Rs 3.2 crores and the Warriorz accepted the bid. She will be joined by Meg Lanning and Sophie Ecclestone in the setup, the latter for whom the Warriorz used their second RTM card. Here's the full set of marquee players and the teams they were sold for: Deepti Sharma

All-rounder Deepti Sharma, who entered the auction at a base price of Rs 50 lakh, was sold to UP Warriorz for Rs 3.2 crore at the Women's Premier League (WPL) 2026 auction in New Delhi on Thursday. The all-rounder was initially bought by Delhi Capitals (DC) for Rs 50 lakh, but the UP Warriorz opted to use the Right-to-Match (RTM) card. DC valued her at Rs 3.2 crore, and the Warriorz accepted the bid to regain the player in their squad. The 28-year-old played three seasons for the UP Warriorz, during which she scored 507 runs in 25 matches at a strike rate of 117.63, with her highest score of 88 not out, which came in the second season against Gujarat Giants. She also took 27 wickets at an economy rate of 8.29. Sharma captained the Warriorz in Alyssa Healy's absence, who was ruled out due to a stress injury, in WPL 2025. She will enter the fourth season of the league on a high, having won the Player of the tournament in the ODI World Cup, where she took 22 wickets in nine matches. She also scored 215 runs with the bat, including three half-centuries, one of which came in the final, where her run-a-ball 58 helped India reach a match-winning score. Indian medium pacer Renuka Singh Thakur, who entered the auction at a base price of Rs 40 lakh, was bought by the Gujarat Giants for Rs 60 lakh. The Giants and UP Warriorz tried to acquire her, but the former pipped the latter to sign her up ahead of the fourth season. The pacer played three seasons for Royal Challengers Bengaluru and was part of the side which lifted the title in 2024. She played 10 matches in the title-winning campaign, claiming two wickets at an economy rate of 8.07. Overall, Renuka played 23 matches in the first three seasons for RCB, claiming 13 wickets at an economy rate of 8.34. Her best season was in the third edition, where she took 10 wickets in seven matches.

Renuka played six matches in the Women's ODI World Cup, including the semi-final and the final, and claimed three wickets in the tournament. Her best performance came against New Zealand, where she took 2/25 in six overs, ensuring the White Ferns did not get off to a flying start in their mammoth run chase in the second innings. Former New Zealand captain and veteran all-rounder Sophie Devine was bought for Rs 2 crore by Gujarat Giants. Her base price was 50 lakh. Devine saw a bidding war between the Giants and the Royal Challengers Bengaluru, with Delhi Capitals entering the race to sign her at Rs 1.1 crore. Eventually, it was the Giants who acquired her for Rs 2 crore. The 36-year-old played the first two seasons for Royal Challengers Bengaluru and was part of the title-winning side in the second edition in 2024. She made 136 runs in 10 matches and also took six wickets to help the Smriti Mandhana-led side go all the way in the tournament. Overall, Devine made 402 runs in 18 matches for RCB at a strike rate of 153.43 with a highest score of 99, which came against the Gujarat Giants in the inaugural edition. Devine led New Zealand to victory at the 2024 T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates. She made 114 runs in six matches in the tournament and relinquished the leadership role after the tournament. The all-rounder retired from ODIs at the end of the recently-concluded World Cup, where New Zealand finished in sixth place on the points table. England left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone, who entered the auction at a base price of Rs 50 lakh, was bought by the UP Warriorz for Rs 85 lakh. RCB and DC were involved in a bidding war for the player, with the latter eventually winning the bid at Rs 85 lakh. The UP Warriorz, however, used the Right-to-Match (RTM) card and regained the player for the same amount. Ecclestone played three seasons for the Warriorz, claiming 36 wickets in 25 matches at an economy rate of 6.68. Her best showing came in the inaugural edition, where she took 16 wickets in nine matches with best figures of 4/13. She has also made handy contributions with the bat down the order, amassing 187 runs in 25 matches at a strike rate of 121.42 with a highest score of 33. Ecclestone played a key role in England's run to the semi-finals of the ODI World Cup, claiming 16 wickets in seven matches with two four-wicket hauls to her name. The 26-year-old will lend enormous experience to the Warriorz in the upcoming edition and will aim to win her maiden WPL title with her old franchise.

Amelia Kerr New Zealand all-rounder Amelia Kerr, who entered the auction at a base price of Rs 50 lakh, was bought by the Mumbai Indians for Rs 3 crore. The two-time cham-

ions were involved in a bidding war for the player with the UP Warriorz, but the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side won the tussle and brought her back into their setup. The 25-year-old won the league twice with the Mumbai Indians in 2023 and 2025 and scored 437 runs in 29 matches at a strike rate of 119.39 during her three seasons with the franchise. She also took 40 wickets in 29 matches at an economy rate of 7.64, with a best bowling performance of 5/38. The all-rounder will bring a wealth of T20 experience for MI, having played in the WBBL and represented the White Ferns 88 times in the shortest format of the game and was the Player of the tournament in New Zealand's T20 World Cup win in 2024 in the United Arab Emirates.

Kerr had an underwhelming time during the ODI World Cup, where she made a mere 137 runs in seven matches at an average of 27.40. She also took seven wickets with her leg spin as New Zealand could not progress past the league stage of the tournament. Meg Lanning Former Australian captain Meg Lanning, who entered the auction at a base price of Rs 50 lakh, was bought by UP Warriorz for Rs 1.9 crore. The 33-year-old led the Delhi Capitals to three consecutive runner-up finishes and amassed 952 runs in 27 matches at a strike rate of 127.10. Her best season with the bat came in the inaugural edition, where she scored 345 runs in nine matches at a strike rate of 139.11 and formed a successful opening partnership with Shafali Verma at the top of the order. Lanning was released by DC when the retentions were announced earlier this month. She has been in excellent form in the ongoing Women's Big Bash League for Melbourne Stars, with 327 runs in six matches and a best score of 135 against Sydney Sixers. She retired from all forms of international cricket in November 2023 at the age of 31. As one of the game's greatest ever captains, she led Australia to four T20 World Cup titles, an ODI World Cup title and a Commonwealth Games title, the last two coming in 2022.

Alyssa Healy Australian captain Alyssa Healy, who entered the auction at a base price of Rs 50 lakh and was the first player to come out in the marquee set, went unsold at a base price of Rs 50 lakh. She could be called back later in the accelerated phase. The 35-year-old played two seasons for the UP Warriorz, scoring 428 runs in 17 matches at a strike rate of 130.48 and a highest score of 96 not out. She missed the third season of the tournament earlier this year due to a stress injury, with Deepti Sharma leading the side in her absence. Healy had an outstanding World Cup with the bat, where she made 299 runs in five matches at an average of 74.75 with two centuries to her name. She led Australia to a semi-final finish in the tournament, bowling out after a loss to the hosts India, in a thrilling contest at the D.Y. Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai. South Africa captain Laura Wolvaardt, who entered the auction at a base price of Rs 30 lakh, was bought by the Delhi Capitals for Rs 1.1 crore. The 26-year-old played three seasons in the league for the Gujarat Giants, scoring 342 runs in 13 matches at a strike rate of 125.73 and a best score of 76. She has led South Africa to runner-up finishes in two ICC tournaments in the last 12 months. Wolvaardt was the captain when South Africa lost to New Zealand in the 2024 T20 World Cup final in the United Arab Emirates. She was also the tournament's highest run-getter with 223 runs in six matches. She also had an exemplary 2025 ODI World Cup in India, where she was the leading run-getter with 571 runs in nine matches at an average of 71.38 and a strike rate of 98.79. Wolvaardt's contributions went a long way in helping South Africa reach the final of the tournament, where they lost to India.

## BCCI signs new commercial partners for WPL

Hyderabad: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the onboarding of new commercial partners for the upcoming editions of the TATA Women's Premier League (WPL).

The new agreements, collectively valued at Rs 48 crore, will cover the 2026 and 2027 seasons and further strengthen the commercial ecosystem of the world's biggest women's cricket league.

For the next two seasons, ChatGPT and Kingfisher Packaged Drinking Water join the WPL as Premier Partners, marking one of the most significant commercial expansions and reflecting a powerful endorsement of the league's remarkable surge in popularity and strong appeal among leading global and Indian brands.

Strengthening a trusted partnership since the inaugural season, CEAT continues its association as the Strategic Time-Out Partner, while Bisleri joins the league as the Beverage Partner.

With these additions, the TATA WPL's commercial lineup is as follows: Mithun Manhas, president, BCCI, said: "The WPL has emerged as one of the most impactful sporting properties globally, and the confidence shown by leading international and Indian brands is a strong endorsement of its remarkable growth. The retention and onboarding of our new partners reinforces the league's modern, progressive vision and its expanding commercial appeal. We look forward to working closely with all our partners to elevate the WPL to even greater heights in the coming seasons."

## Deepti Sharma sold to UP Warriorz for Rs 3.2 crore, Sophie Devine goes to Gujarat Giants



GNS News Agency, March 4

The all-rounder was initially bought by Delhi Capitals (DC) for her base price of Rs 50 lakh, but the UP Warriorz opted to use the Right-to-Match (RTM) card. DC valued her at Rs 3.2 crore, and the Warriorz accepted the bid to get the player back in their squad. The 28-year-old played three seasons for the UP Warriorz, during which she scored 507 runs in 25 matches at a strike rate of 117.63, with her highest score of 88 not out, which came in the second season against Gujarat Giants. She also took 27 wickets at an economy rate of 8.29.

Sharma captained the Warriorz in Alyssa Healy's absence, who was ruled out due to a stress injury, in WPL 2025

Former New Zealand captain and veteran all-rounder Sophie Devine was bought for Rs 2 crore by the Gujarat Giants. Devine saw a bidding war between the Giants and the RCB, with Delhi Capitals entering the race to sign her at

Rs 1.1 crore. Eventually, it was the Giants who acquired her for Rs 2 crore. The 36-year-old played the first two seasons for Royal Challengers Bengaluru and was part of the title-winning side in the second edition in 2024. She made 136 runs in 10 matches and also took six wickets to help the Smriti Mandhana-led side go all the way in the tournament. Overall, Devine made 402 runs in 18 matches for RCB at a strike rate of 153.43 with a highest score of 99, which came against the Gujarat Giants in the inaugural edition. Healy, who was the first player to come out in the marquee set, went unsold at a base price of Rs 50 lakh. She could be called back later in the accelerated phase.

What is Right-to-Match?

Right-To-Match, as the name suggests, is for franchises to bring back one of the players that they had released before the retention deadlines. Ahead of the last IPL mega auction, the league announced that the franchises can retain a total of 6 players from their existing squad. This could be either via retention at fixed-price slabs or by using the RTM option at the auction. Teams tend to use RTM if they believe they can get a player cheaper than their existing contracts. The RTM was previously used at the mega auctions before IPL 2014 and IPL 2018, but scrapped before the 2022 edition. It made a comeback with a modified clause. In the past, if the franchise used RTM after another team's successful bid for one of their released players, it was enough to sign them back. But this time around, after a franchise used RTM, the highest bidder was allowed to name an improved one-time price, with the older franchise has to then match or say no.

## After Smriti Mandhana's wedding postponed, Jemimah Rodrigues to stay in India to support teammate and miss rest of WBBL season



GNS News Agency, March 4 India's World Cup winning star Jemimah Rodrigues will miss the remainder of the Women's Big Bash League season in Australia as her franchise Brisbane Heat announced that she will stay back in India to support her teammate Smriti Mandhana. Rodrigues, who was the only Indian player part of WBBL's 11th season, reached Australia within a week after winning the World Cup in Navi Mumbai to turn up for Brisbane Heat in three matches. She then returned to India to be part of the wedding festivities of her close friend and teammate Smriti Mandhana with music composer Palash Muchhal.

"Brisbane Heat have agreed to a request to release Jemimah Rodrigues from the remainder of the Weber Women's Big Bash League. Rodrigues returned home to India after the Heat's match against the Hobart Hurricanes 10 days ago as part of a pre-arranged commitment where she was to be involved in Indian teammate Smriti

Mandhana's wedding last weekend," the franchise said in a statement. "However, the celebrations were subsequently postponed due to a health issue with Mandhana's father. Rodrigues will stay in India to support her teammate, and the Heat has agreed to her not returning for the final four games of the WBBL season." Mandhana's wedding was scheduled to take place on November 23, but was postponed on the day after her father Shrinivas' health deteriorated suddenly while having breakfast and he had to be hospitalised according to Smriti's manager Tuhin Mishra.

Heat CEO Terry Svenson said the franchise had no qualms in agreeing to Rodrigues' request. "It has obviously been a challenging time for Jemi, so while it is unfortunate that she will take no further part in the WBBL, we were more than willing to agree to her request to remain in India," he said. "The Heat club obviously wish her and Smriti Mandhana's family all the best for the future. Jemi told us she was disappointed not to be coming back and has passed on her appreciation to the club and the Heat fans for being so understanding of the circumstances. She has been in touch with the players and wished them all the best for the rest of their games." Rodrigues was Heat's number one pick at the International Player draft earlier this year. She landed in Brisbane just hours before Heat's first match of the season and played three matches for the franchise, scoring 6, 11 and 20. The last year's finalists have had a torrid season, losing six out of six matches so far. Mandhana, who has been part of WBBL in the past before with Strikers and Thunder, didn't feature in this edition.

## Gautam Gambhir's contradictions: In press conference post South Africa series defeat in Guwahati, India head coach's puzzling comments

GNS News Agency, March 4

He perhaps doesn't have another tone to his voice when he speaks to the media, whether in victory or defeat, but it was the good old combative version of Gautam Gambhir that turned up to the press conference on Wednesday in Guwahati. What followed over the next 14 minutes was a case study in contradictions as he tried to make sense of – as Anil Kumble put it to the broadcasters – India's meek surrender against South Africa to lose the series 0-2.

"It lies with everyone in that dressing room and starts with me to everyone in that dressing room. I've said it before as well that we went together, we lose together. So I'm not going to be someone who's going to say that it lies with x, y or z. Cliched as it might be, that's what most coaches would say when fronting up after a damaging defeat. But after starting the press conference with these lines, at various points he'd go on to make pointed remarks about the batting collapse in the first innings, when his side went from 95/1 to 122/7, terming it acceptable. When asked how one quantifies accountability, he went on to say this: "It comes from care. How much you care about the dressing room and the team? Accountability and the game situation can never be taught. You can talk about skills, you can work on skills, you can keep talking about the mental aspect of the game, but ultimately when you go in, if you keep putting the team ahead of your own self, not thinking, 'this is how I play, and this is how I will get the results, I don't have plan B,' so sometimes you will get these kind of collapses as well. More than the accountability, it's the care. How much you care about Indian cricket and how much you care about the team and people sitting in the dressing room is important as well." If any one of those six batters who were dismissed in that period were to read this, the message is that the buck stopped with them, and they didn't care enough for their wicket or for the dressing room.

"I know that I hate using this word... transition. This is exactly what transition is. When you've got a batting lineup which has literally played less than 15-20 Test matches, they need time to absorb pressure, they need time to keep getting better against quality attacks and against quality sides." He refused to call in transition in England too during the summer, but after saying he hated that word, Gambhir went on to explain how the batting lineup in the series against South Africa was inexperienced. But the lack of continuity in personnel and instability in the batting order during Gambhir's tenure lie in direct contradiction. While it is indeed big shoes to fill for the recently retired stalwarts, the Indian side still



Cliched as it might be, that's what most coaches would say when fronting up after a damaging defeat. But after starting the press conference with these lines, at various points he'd go on to make pointed remarks about the batting collapse in the first innings, when his side went from 95/1 to 122/7, terming it acceptable.

had plenty of experience in their ranks. "Start prioritising Test cricket. If we really care about Test cricket and want it to flourish in India, I think we've got to have a collective effort to make that happen. If you get runs in white-ball formats, suddenly you forget about what you have done in red-ball cricket. That should never happen." Over the English summer and during the home season as well, some of India's selection calls don't necessarily scream 'red-ball success', instead Gambhir has opted for all-rounders over specialists. Those who prioritised domestic red-ball cricket, like Sarfaraz Khan and Karun Nair, have gotten shorter ropes. Even if there are valid reasons for those specific calls, it doesn't sync with his larger vision. "It is up to BCCI to decide. I've said it during my first press conference. Indian cricket is important; I'm not. And I sit here and say exactly the same thing. And yes, people can keep forgetting about it. I'm the same guy who got results in England as well, with a young team. I'm sure you guys will forget very soon because a lot of people keep talking about New Zealand. And I'm the same guy under whom we won Champions Trophy and Asia Cup as well." For someone who has been on record saying a tournament can't be won by won shot in the end by one individual. But after saying that his future as a head coach is up to BCCI, Gambhir threw a strong first-person retort, emphasising a couple of times "I am the same guy..." for a couple of good results in recent times across formats. The narrative quickly shifted from him not being important for Indian cricket to offering reminders of the wins.

## ‘Dharmendra was everything to me’: Hema Malini shares first post after actor’s death, says, ‘my personal loss indescribable’



Three days after Dharmendra’s death, his wife, actor-politician Hema Malini took to X to share a note in his memory. Hema penned an emotional note and shared many pictures of Dharmendra and their daughters, Esha and Ahana. She shared that he was her “go to person” and was always with her, “through good times and bad.” Her note read, “Dharam ji?? He was many things to me. Loving Husband, adoring Father of our two girls, Esha & Ahana, Friend, Philosopher, Guide, Poet, my ‘go to’ person in all times of need – in fact, he was everything to me! And always has been

through good times and bad. He endeared himself to all my family members with his easy, friendly ways, always showing affection and interest in all of them.” She shared that he was humble despite his immense popularity and wrote, “As a public personality, his talent, his humility in spite of his popularity, and his universal appeal set him apart as a unique icon unequalled among all the legends. His enduring fame and achievements in the film industry will last forever.” Hema concluded her note as she wrote about her “personal loss.” “My personal loss is indescribable and the vacuum created is something that will last through the rest of my life.?? After years of togetherness, I am left with myriad memories to relive the many special moments...” she wrote. She also shared a collection of pictures from the family album in his memory.

Dharmendra and Hema got married in 1980 and welcomed their first daughter, Esha, in 1981, and later, Ahana in 1985. When Dharmendra married Hema, he was already married to Prakash Laur and had four children with her – Sunny, Ajeeta, Vijayta and Bobby.

Dharmendra and Hema continued to stay married, even though they never lived in the same house. They worked together in the 1970 films Sharafat and Tum Haseen Main Jawan. They were later seen together in films like Naya Zamana, Seeta Aur Geeta, Raja Jani, Jugnu, Patthar Aur Payal, Pratigya, Sholay among many others. Dharmendra passed away at his residence on November 24 at 89. A prayer meet is expected to be held in his memory in Mumbai on Thursday.

## Deepika Padukone’s 82°E declares loss of Rs 12.3 cr in 2025; Katrina Kaif’s brand expected to hit Rs 100 cr in revenue

Deepika Padukone’s mid-premium skin care brand 82°E has declared net losses of Rs 12.3 crore in the financial year 2025, as per MCA (Ministry of Corporate Affairs) filings. The brand’s revenue has dropped from Rs 21.2 crore in 2024 to Rs 14.7 crore in 2025, with the company’s net losses amounting to Rs 12.3 crore. On the other hand, another Bollywood A-lister, Katrina Kaif’s make-up brand has been profitable. Deepika’s brand continues to struggle despite cutting costs. In the filing, the actor’s company stated that they are cutting costs and increasing sales efforts to achieve profitability. Deepika’s brand hasn’t been profitable since its launch in November 2022 and has continued to post losses. This year, the company’s losses are lower compared to 2024, when it posted a net loss of Rs 23.4 crore in FY24, according to Tracxn data. According to a report in Moneycontrol, the company is aggressively cutting costs. It spent Rs 25.9 crore in 2025 – significantly lower than the Rs 47.1 crore it spent in 2024. The company has also reduced its marketing expenses from Rs 20 crore in 2024 to just Rs 4.4 crore in 2025.

Why is Deepika’s brand struggling?

82°E is positioned as a mid-premium brand with products priced between Rs 2,500 and Rs 4,000. The actor has used her social media influence and star power to promote the brand—running campaigns on her Instagram account, which boasts 80.5 million followers, and even roping in big celebrities like Shah Rukh Khan. During the release of their film Jawan, she and Shah Rukh released a promotional video featuring the superstar applying 82°E products while Deepika guided him. Despite high-quality campaigns, Deepika’s brand hasn’t taken off due to stiff competition from fast-growing brands like Foxtale, mCaffeine, Plum, and Dot & Key, which offer quality skin care products at much more affordable prices. At the other end of the market, the luxury skincare space remains dominated by international giants such as



Estée Lauder and L’Occitane. Katrina Kaif’s Kay Beauty vs Deepika’s 82°E. Although Deepika and Katrina’s brands do not compete in the same category—Katrina’s Kay Beauty is a makeup brand—Kay Beauty has been far more successful. It made its first profit in 2022, three years after its launch in 2019. According to reports, the brand’s revenue reached

Rs 88.23 crore in financial year 2024, with profits amounting to Rs 11.3 crore. It is also noteworthy that Katrina launched the brand in collaboration with Nykaa, with the retail giant owning 51 per cent of the company, while Katrina holds 42 per cent and the remaining 7.5 per cent is held by Matrix. As per reports, experts estimate that Kay Beauty is poised to grow to Rs 100–105 crore in revenue this year.

## Suniel Shetty explains why he doesn’t take up South films: ‘They cast Bollywood actors in negative roles’



Suniel Shetty, who is proud to be a Mangalorean, was recently asked if he gets any offers from the South film industry and the actor shared without any hesitation that the South films often cast Hindi film heroes as villains, and present them as antagonists, and he does not appreciate that. Suniel shared that while he has appeared in Rajinikanth’s Darbar in a negative role, he only did so because it was his lifelong dream to work with the star.

In a chat with The Lallantop, Suniel said, “I do get offers (from the South) but unfortunately, what happens is, you will notice this trend that we get offers for negative roles. They want to cast the Hindi heroes as powerful... from an antagonistic point of view, (they say) that’s good for the screen and for the audience. And that is one thing that I don’t like.” He added that he did a film with Rajinikanth only because it was a bucket list moment for him. “I did a film with Rajinikanth only because I wanted to tick that box of having worked with him,” he said. Suniel shared that he recently did a Tulu film because he wanted to support local films from Karnataka. “Recently, I did a small Tulu film just to encourage the film which is doing really well, it’s called Jai,” he said. Jai saw him in a cameo appearance. It was reported that Jai was the widely screened Tulu film in recent years. In the first five days of its release, the film made over Rs 3

crore. Suniel continued that there is no language barrier in this day and age when it comes to films and content. “Today, there is no language barrier. If there is a barrier, then it’s perhaps because of the content. If your content is good, it will cross all barriers,” he said. In 2025, Suniel was seen in Kesari Veer and Nadaanian. The actor will next be seen in franchise films Welcome to the Jungle and Hera Pheri 3.

## Vijay Deverakonda’s life update: Juggling two films, training and playing with handsome boy Storm

Mumbai: Actor Vijay Deverakonda has shared a slice of his life, saying he has been consumed by the grind of shooting two demanding films at the same time, which he tags as a first in his career. Vijay took to Instagram, where he shared that work may have taken over his days, but he has still managed to enjoy a few personal joys, including indulging in new gadgets and adding a vintage Rolex to his collection.

He went on to introduce his “spiritual, handsome boy,” Storm, and said no matter how hectic the schedule gets, he never skips a pooja or training. Vijay wrote: “It’s been a while... Shooting 2 films parallelly for the 1st time in my life.. both extremely demanding, they have taken up my life... But here are bits from my life recently, got myself some new tech that I am enjoying, my current favourite watch – a beautiful vintage Rolex, my spiritual handsome boy Storm... will not skip any pooja, train to always be prepared for war, my passion for making cool clothes – dropping these uniforms soon...(sic).”

## Andhra King Taluka movie review: Ram Pothineni, Upendra star in a complex story made too easy, but also endearing



A packed single-screen theatre in a small town in the Rajahmundry district, circa early 2000s. Superstar Surya Kumar (Upendra) makes a surprise entry into the hall with his backlit, larger-than-life silhouette projected on the barren white 70-mm screen. The crowd turns its heads in anticipation, and the first real glimpse of the actor quickly turns into gasps and murmurs that cause them to be motionless for a few seconds. Surya, though, isn’t there to soak up this moment of adulation, but rather to meet a person in that very crowd. He is there seeking Sagar (Ram Pothineni), a fan that he hadn’t even heard of until 24 hours ago, but has now come to be the biggest hero of his life. For Sagar himself, as he rises from the audience with his mouth agape, getting to meet the man he has devoted his entire life to, and in a manner he eventually does, is a moment that even his fanciest daydream couldn’t have conjured.

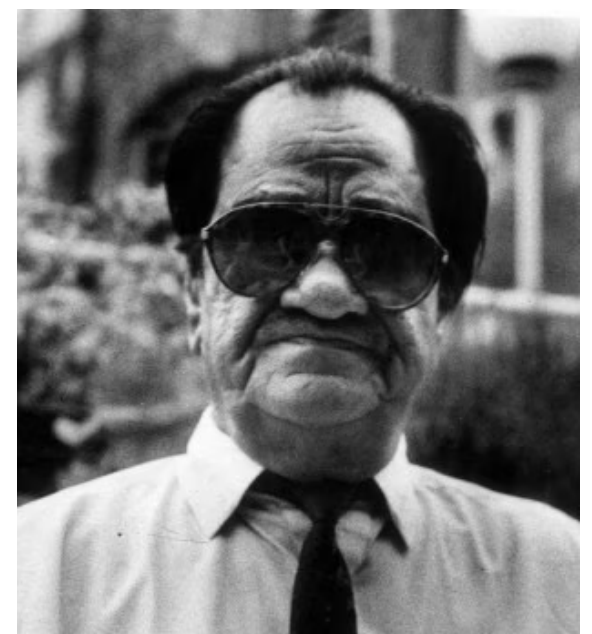
Reality, indeed, is stranger than fiction, and what makes that encounter special is the exemplary set of events leading to it. It culminates a journey that – both literal and figurative – Surya and Sagar individually endure, while it simultaneously triggers a new beginning in their lives. It’s a potent reminder to the two of them of the symbiotic relationship they have shared all along, as well as the fact that stardom isn’t just a gift but also a responsibility: and if Surya is a star in the customary sense to the world, then in his small universe, Sagar is a star in his own right as the most sincere admirer of the ‘Andhra King’. Fittingly, Mahesh Babu P finds the fan’s story to be more fascinating than the hero’s, and his reasons are plenty. Sagar is someone who is willing to climb to precarious heights to proudly parade Surya’s name on a piece of cloth. Sagar, quite literally, crosses deep waters time and again to catch a new Surya release and unabashedly celebrate it. He pledges all his measly savings on Surya, gets into frequent brawls with rival fans, takes on tall missions and even forsakes a future for a man that he believes is responsible for breathing life into his, many years ago. Surya might have earned a name through his 99 outings as a matinee idol, and is currently mulling over a slow decline in stature, but one still doubts his real-life escapades are close to being as exciting as Sagar’s. Andhra King Taluka belongs to an era when India wasn’t in the grips of the digital medium, meaning that even performative stunts had to be done in person. It takes place at a time when cassette tapes were shared and preserved, when reel cans took forever to reach the country’s interior pockets, and when single-screen cinema halls were sanctuaries available in only two sizes: 35mm and 70mm. It also refers to a period when romances couldn’t be cast through phone screens, and one such comes to the fore in the film to add another dimension to its story. Sagar falling in love with the upper caste Mahalakshmi (Bhagyashri Borse), who also happens to be the owner of the famed eponymous cinema hall, changes his life to an extent that he not only comes of age, but also unwittingly becomes a trailblazer that he has seen Surya play countless times on the big screen.

Once all the ‘intents’ of the film are established, Mahesh Babu P finds himself entrusted with a juggling act that, although ambitious, grows a little overbearing with time. Sagar’s arc as a fan is one of finding self-worth, and the film subtly highlights the caste/class angle that is inherently attached to it. The word ‘taluka’ has larger connotations in this context, and we get a few scenes in which the protagonist’s background is questioned and ridiculed, particularly by Mahalakshmi’s father (Murali Sharma) and brother. It’s a rather valid discussion that is grossly overlooked in the cinematic discourse, and Andhra King Taluka does its bit to underline it.

Through that, it also affords itself an opportunity to branch out to another arc that involves Sagar combating the discrimination and rising to the occasion in such a way that his search for an identity gradually envelops the people of his village. A classic hero’s journey, after all, Andhra King Taluka wishes Sagar to win over his love, be the most faithful of fans, fight social battles and be a leader, all in a single breath. So, it is of little surprise that film tires itself out after a point, settling for broad strokes instead of digging deep into a single idea of its choosing.

The fatigue shows in how the writing never finds the time and patience to dwell on its protagonist’s apparent vulnerabilities. A scene reveals that when pushed into a corner, a hidden side of Sagar surfaces — one that strips away his usual confidence and leaves him stuttering, shaken, and desperate for safety. It’s a strong and bold punctuation to a narrative that is risking predictability, suggesting that we are here to witness a multifaceted study of a young man who doubles as a movie star’s devotee. Yet, the promise is short-lived, and it doesn’t take more than a few minutes for Sagar to regain his voice and speak in platitudes that heroes normally do. A few scenes later, he realises that the challenge he has posed to Mahalakshmi’s father is unmeetable in every sense of the word, but the film once again offers instant solutions that are over the top and incredibly convenient (accentuated by Vivek–Mervin’s score). Even the setting of the island town Godipalli Lanka, where there is no electricity throughout the year and whose people have never received any formal education, feels slightly contrived because it doesn’t contribute with problems that feel real-world and relatable. Sure, a film such as this shouldn’t necessarily be about its realism, but it has enough complexity within its core to not restrict itself to grand gestures. Here’s a trailer for Andhra King Taluka Ram Pothineni, though, comfortably rises above all these missteps, and the film solely functions on his control as a performer. The Ready (2008) actor has been around for a long time, and there is no doubt that many desire to see him in films that can do justice to his effervescence. He gets a solid platform here to be that guy, and he also throws in surprises that elevate the material. His Sagar is charismatic and big-screen-like in several ways, yet isn’t over-embellished so that the innocence of the character is diluted. His Sagar also has a palpable ease and energy, and it is to the writing’s credit that it anchors everything in him to navigate a material that is, at times, too dense for its own good. Ram Pothineni strikes an engaging dynamic with Bhagyashri Borse, who makes an impression despite an underwritten role. Their love story required better handling, and it is certainly reflective of the unwillingness in the writing to break away from a conventional approach. But the Sagar-Mahalakshmi romance still has enough girth to it that it cannot be dismissed. It does its job, as it were, and even manages to prop up the other ‘love story’ of the film, which is between the superstar and his fan. It would seem intentional on Mahesh Babu P’s part that he keeps Surya Kumar on the sidelines, and that decision pays off because it keeps the fan in a singular focus. It would seem intentional on Mahesh Babu P’s part that he keeps Surya Kumar on the sidelines, and that decision pays off because it keeps the fan in a singular focus. There could be a grey side to the superstar’s being that the fan knows very little of, but this isn’t a film about that; it simply looks for a hero in the person who has worshipped heroes all his life, and while the results of that search are at times a bit too convenient, they remain endearing nevertheless.

## Helen was abused by ex-husband, thrown out of her own home; don Karim Lala helped her on Dilip Kumar’s request



Long before she became one of Bollywood’s most iconic dancers, actor Helen faced a personal crisis when her ex-husband, filmmaker P N Arora, threw her out of her own home, eventually forcing her to seek help from an unlikely quarter — ‘the Mumbai underworld’, reveals a new book, ‘When It All Began: The Untold Stories of the Underworld’. Written by former Mumbai police commissioner Rakesh Maria, the book, which offers a detailed account of the rise and fall of Mumbai’s underworld — including the rise of the first generation of dons such as Karim Lala, Haji Mastan and Dilip Aziz — documents the little-known incident in which Lala intervened to help Helen reclaim the house she had been evicted from by Arora. The book recalls that Helen, who turned 87 this month, was born in Rangoon in 1938 and arrived in Bombay after escaping wartime Burma. Financial struggles pushed her into films, and she soon

emerged as one of the most prolific performers of the 1950s and beyond, with over 700 roles. But, as the book explains, behind the glamorous screen persona, Helen was a vulnerable young woman who had entered into a relationship with a much older Arora and even handed over control of her finances and properties to him.

“Not wanting in talent, Helen got her first break in 1958 when she was just nineteen. Gradually, she began bagging good roles, and the number of films to her credit is a whopping 700 or more. However, the control of her properties was in the hands of Arora, who was not progressing well in his career. He started ill-treating her, but she bore the suffering patiently,” reads the book. Eventually, the relationship soured to the point that Arora refused to give Helen the property that was rightfully hers and one day threw her out of her own house. Desperate, Helen sought help from veteran actor Dilip Kumar and writer-actor Salim Khan, both close friends within the industry, the book notes. Dilip Kumar first attempted to contact Lala himself. When he was unable to reach the don, he wrote a note addressed to him and asked Helen to rush to Lala with it. Lala, born Abdul Karim Sher Khan in Afghanistan, rose from a worker in 1920s Bombay to one of the city’s most feared crime bosses. As head of the notorious ‘Pathan Gang’, he controlled liquor, gambling and extortion rackets through the 1960s and early 1980s and was known both for his clout and his strict personal code, particularly his respect for women. “When Karim Lala came to his darbar, he sensed an unusual excitement in the air. The gathering had recognised the distinguished woman waiting for him for the celebrity she was. Karim Lala was not much of a film buff... When he learnt who she was and saw the note, he asked his aide to take her to his wife, Fatima, and joined the ladies after a while.” Helen explained to him her plight. He could see that she was not lying. “He promised her she would get her house back and asked her to reach it after a couple of hours,” reads the book. What followed took her by surprise. When she reached the house, Arora had left the house, leaving all her goods behind and the keys with the guard. “