

# INDIAN CHRONICLE

28 March, 2026 | Saturday | Volume No:1 | Issue No:56

Pages: 12+8

www.indianchronicle.com

Published from : Krishna (Andhra Pradesh)

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## Minority Leader Irshad Khan (Uppal Khan) Participates in Sri Rama Navami Celebrations

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): "On the occasion of the Sri Rama Navami festival, senior Congress minority leader Irshad Khan (Uppal Khan) participated in celebrations at several temples in the Beerappagadda division. At the invitation of the Sita Rama Colony Ramalayam temple committee, he attended the Sri Rama Navami festivities and had darshan of Lord Rama along with devotees. He also participated in special ceremonies and celebrations held at the Beerappagadda Ramalayam, following an invitation from the temple committee. Later, he attended an annadanam (free food distribution) program organized at Prashanthi Nagar Community Hall, where he extended festival greetings to devotees and local residents. On this occasion, he interacted with devotees and colony members, conveying his Sri Rama Navami wishes to all. He expressed hope for strengthening harmony, unity, and brotherhood in society."

## Sita Rama Kalyanam Celebrated Grandly by Mudigonda Regional Lorry Owners Association in Paleru Constituency

"Avnreddy Khammam Staff Reporter March 27, (Indian Chronicle): "On the occasion of Sri Rama Navami, the Mudigonda Regional Lorry Owners Association in Paleru constituency organized grand celebrations of the Sri Rama Kalyanam festival. The deities were adorned with silk garments, pearl decorations, and mangalsutras, and carried in a festive procession with traditional melodies and dappu (percussion) instruments. The wedding rituals of Lord Sri Rama were performed in a traditional manner by Vedic priests, showcasing a magnificent ceremony that transcended caste and religious boundaries. The event was attended by Association President Pathan Yakub Shavali (Pash), Vice President Bekkam Kanakayya, Secretary Vallabhaneni Saicharan, Joint Secretary Kanakula John Reddy, Treasurer Rudragani Madhava Rao, Convener Mohammed Siraj, along with committee members, lorry owners, drivers, cleaners, and transport business owners."

## AP Cabinet Approves Resolution to Grant Legal Sanctity to Amaravati as State Capital

Amaravati: The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet on Thursday approved a resolution to be passed in the special session of the Legislative Assembly on March 28, urging the Union Government to grant legal sanctity to Amaravati as the capital city of Andhra Pradesh.

Section-5 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 will be amended for this purpose.

The Cabinet meeting presided over by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu decided to pass the resolution in the Assembly after a debate of four hours.

It was also decided to incorporate the word 'Amaravati' in place of new State capital in the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) Act

Chief Minister Naidu had already requested the Centre to provide legal sanctity to Amaravati as the capital of Andhra Pradesh.

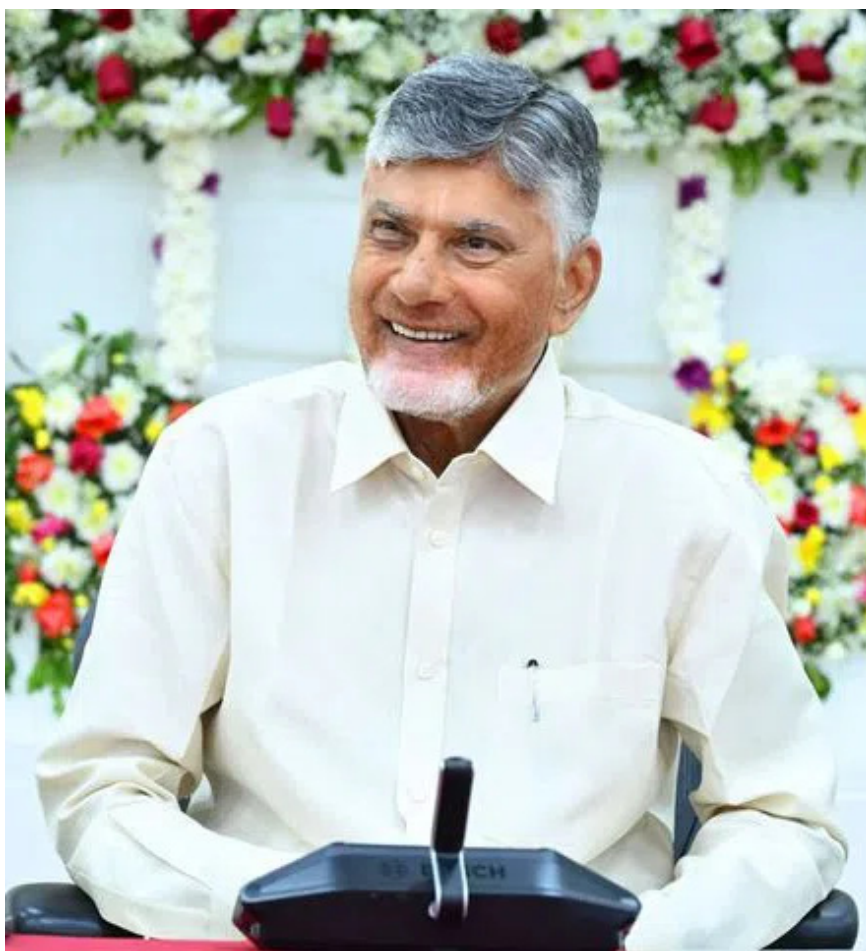
The Centre has asked the State government to send a resolution in this regard after adopting it in the State Assembly.

The Centre wants a fresh resolution on

the State capital to avoid any technical or legal complications in the future.

After receiving the resolution passed by the State Assembly, the Union Cabinet will give its nod and an announcement declaring Amaravati as the capital city of Andhra Pradesh is expected to be made during the current session of Parliament.

Farmers who provided land for the capital city, have also sought legal sanctity for Amaravati. During his meeting with Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, in New Delhi in January, Chief Minister Naidu had urged the Centre to accord statutory status to Amaravati as the permanent capital of the State. The Chief Minister urged the Centre to grant statutory status to Amaravati by introducing a Bill in Parliament, terming it vital for the state's long-term development and stability. Emphasising the need for policy certainty, the Chief Minister said formal legislative recognition of Amaravati would accelerate development and fulfil the aspirations of the people of Andhra Pradesh, while also strengthening investor confidence.



## Excise duty on petrol, diesel slashed by Rs 10, windfall tax slapped on fuel export

New Delhi, March 27

As global crude oil prices peaked on Friday, the government moved to shield domestic consumers from adverse effects of the surge by slashing excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 10 each and slapping windfall tax on the export of fuels. The prices of petrol and diesel remain unchanged in the domestic market.

Dismissing lockdown rumours, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in Parliament today, "There is a lockdown in Pakistan, not in India. Also, there is no scope of a lockdown in India."

As a cumulative impact of the twin moves by the Finance Ministry, which issued a related notification on excise duty cuts and export tax on fuels, prices of petrol and diesel remain unchanged in the domestic market and there is no price rise despite global crude oil prices soaring from \$70 a barrel to \$122 a barrel — a near 50 per cent increase in a month.

Special additional excise duty on petrol was today reduced from Rs 13 to Rs 3 a litre and on diesel from Rs 10 to nil, with Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri announcing the government decision to absorb the shock of the global crude oil cost surge.

"Instead of passing the burden to the people, the government has chosen to absorb a loss of Rs 24 per litre on petrol and Rs 30 a litre on diesel on the count of global crude cost escalation," Puri said as the West Asia conflict and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz played havoc with global oil markets.

Overall, the government will lose Rs 700 crore in revenue over a fortnight due to excise cuts on fuel. From the windfall tax on the export of fuel, the government will get Rs 1,500 crore over the same period.

FM Sitharaman said duties had been imposed on exports of diesel at ₹21.5 per litre and on aviation turbine fuel (ATF) at ₹29.5 per litre to ensure adequate availability of these products for domestic consumption.

The notification by the Department of Revenue withdrew tax rebate and duty exemption benefits on exports of petrol, high-speed diesel and ATF, amending the Central Excise Rules, 2017, with immediate effect.

Notably, the government has carved out a specific exemption for public sector oil companies exporting these three fuels to Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. State-owned oil companies supplying fuel to these four neighbouring countries will continue to operate under the earlier tax regime and will not be hit by the withdrawal of benefits.

Meanwhile, excise cuts and export tax were levied immediately without any transition window to ensure fuel prices do not rise.

Sitharaman, later, told the Rajya Sabha that Brent crude had not dropped below \$100 since March 13.

"Consequently, petrol and diesel prices for consumers have gone up all over the world — by 30 to 50 per cent in Southeast Asian nations, 30 per cent in North America, 20 per cent in Europe, 50 per cent in African countries....But we are carefully managing because the PM's one single guidance is there should be no burden on the citizen," she said.

Explaining the twin moves, the FM said the government had issued a notification cutting petrol excise duty from Rs 13 to 3 per litre and removing the duty on diesel entirely.

## Grand Celebration of the Sri Sita Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam



CM Enumula Revanth Reddy Participates with His Spouse, Offering Silk Garments and Thalamaralu. Bhadrachalam Shrine Swarms with Devotees. CM Lays Foundation Stone for Phase-I Temple Expansion and Development Works Worth ₹351 Crores. "Kukkadapu Naresh Kumar, Bhadradi Kothagudem Staff Reporter, March 27, Indian Chronicle: The Sri Sita Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam (Divine Wedding Ceremony) in Bhadrachalam was celebrated with immense grandeur and splendor this year. State Chief Minister Enumula Revanth Reddy, accompanied by his spouse, participated in this auspicious wedding ceremony. Held at the Mithila Stadium in Bhadrachalam, the Thirukalyana Mahotsavam (Divine Wedding Festival) of Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy took place with great magnificence amidst thousands of devotees. On this occasion, representing the state government, the chief minister and his wife offered silk garments and pearl Thalamaralu (sacred rice mixed with pearls) to the divine couple. At Mithila Stadium, the wedding rituals proceeded following the performance of puja ceremonies, divine adornments, and other traditional rites for Sri Ramachandra Swamy and Goddess Sita. Conducted strictly in accordance with scriptural traditions and accompanied by the chanting of Vedic mantras, the Kalyana Mahotsavam created a deeply spiritual atmosphere. The temple priests meticulously performed all the rituals in a traditional manner. While the Bhadrachalam temple was exquisitely adorned and looked resplendent, the entire shrine complex was teeming with the movement of devotees. Thousands of devotees flocked from every corner of the Telugu states to catch a glimpse (Darshan) of Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy. In view of the massive influx of devotees, officials had made extensive arrangements to ensure a smooth and safe event. Thanks to the meticulous arrangements made for drinking water, Anna Prasadam (sacred food), medical camps, and security, devotees were able to have a hassle-free darshan (sacred viewing) of the deity. Earlier in the morning, State Chief Minister Enumula Revanth Reddy visited the Sri Seetharamachandra Swamy Temple in Bhadrachalam to offer his prayers to the deity. Subsequently, he performed the Bhoomi Puja (groundbreaking ceremony) on the temple premises for the first phase of temple development works, undertaken at a cost of ₹351 crores. Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka; Minister-in-charge for the combined Khammam district Vakiti Srihari; Ministers Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Thummala Nageswara Rao, and Konda Surekha; MP Porika Balram Naik; members of the judiciary; Principal Secretary of Endowments Sailaja Iyer; Endowments Commissioner Hanumantha Rao; District Collector Ankit; SP Rohit Raj; PO B. Rahul; Additional Collectors Vidya Chandana and Venugopal; Sub-Collector Mrunal Shreshtha; MLCs; MLAs; other public representatives; officials from relevant departments; media representatives; and hundreds of thousands of devotees attended this event in large numbers.

## Govt introduces 2nd edition of Jan Vishwas Bill in Lok Sabha

New Delhi, March 27

Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada on Friday introduced the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, a legislation for decriminalising and rationalising offences to further enhance trust-based governance for promoting ease of living and doing business, in the Lok Sabha.

Prasada said the Bill would decriminalise minor offences and implement measures such as revising fines and penalties proportionate to the offence. It proposes to amend 79 Central Acts, administered by 23 ministries.

A total of 784 provisions are being proposed to be amended, out of which 717 provisions are being decriminalised to foster ease of doing business, and 67 provisions are being proposed to facilitate ease of living. He further clarified that no major violations or serious offences were being diluted by the amendment Bill.

The new Bill builds on the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023, which had amended 42 laws with similar objectives. It proposes amendments to various laws and aims to decriminalise a range of offences across sectors such as municipal governance, motor vehicle regulation, commodity boards, apprenticeships, and export-related activities. The Bill proposes to remove imprisonment in 57 provisions and fines in 158 provisions. Also, imprisonment is proposed to be reduced in 17 provisions, and imprisonment and fine are proposed to be converted to a penalty in 113 provisions. The Bill converts several fines into penalties, and designates adjudicating officers to levy these penalties.

## Have ample fuel, things stable, CMs tell Modi at virtual meet

New Delhi, March 27

Chief Ministers and Lieutenant-Governors of non-poll-bound states and union territories today told Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the fuel situation in their areas was stable and supplies of petrol, diesel and LPG adequate.

"The CMs widely welcomed the decision to reduce excise duty on fuel, noting that it will provide significant relief to citizens amid global uncertainties," an official statement said after PM Modi held a virtual meeting with the CMs and L-Gs to review the essential goods supply status.

The statement added that all CMs reaffirmed commitment to work in close coordination with the Centre to effectively manage the situation. "The CMs also welcomed the decision to increase commercial LPG allocation to states and UTs to 70 per cent of pre-crisis levels, up from 50 per cent," the PMO said.

The meeting came hours after West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee claimed the Centre might go in for a lockdown amid the West Asia crisis — a remark top government ministers rejected as "false" and one "meant to fear monger".

The PM welcomed excise duty cuts on fuel and said working together as "Team India", the nation will successfully overcome the situation. "The PM stressed that the government's priorities are to maintain economic and trade stability, ensure energy security, safeguard the interests of citizens and strengthen industry and supply chains," the official statement said.



The PM also asked CMs to ensure smooth functioning of supply chains and take strict measures against hoarding and profiteering.

His special focus was on the agriculture sector. "The PM stressed the need for advance planning in the agriculture sector, particularly in monitoring fertiliser storage and distribution. He also called for special attention in border and coastal states to address emerging challenges related to shipping, essential supplies, and maritime operations," the communication said, cautioning against the spread of misinformation and rumours and stressing dissemination of credible information.

# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### India's laudable push in the war against cervical cancer

By launching a nationwide HPV (Human Papillomavirus) vaccination for adolescent girls, India has taken a decisive step in the war against cervical cancer, a largely preventable yet one of the most common causes of cancer deaths in India. The vaccination drive, coupled with increased screening and assured treatment access, can dramatically reduce the suffering caused by the dreaded disease within the span of a generation. Unfortunately, India bears one of the heaviest burdens of cervical cancer globally, reporting nearly 78,000 new cases and over 43,000 deaths annually. It is the second most common cancer among Indian women, after breast cancer, and is caused by the HPV infection of the genital tract. Early age of marriage, multiple pregnancies, tobacco use, and poor genital hygiene are linked to increased chances of infection. Most of these risk factors can be addressed through awareness, screening, and vaccination. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has set a clear elimination target, outlining what is called the "90-70-90" strategy: 90% of girls to be fully vaccinated with HPV vaccine by age 15; 70% of women to be screened with a high-performance test at ages 30 and above, and 90% of women identified with disease to receive appropriate treatment. India's vaccination launch is a crucial step towards achieving these targets. Over 140 countries have implemented vaccination against HPV infections, and global data has confirmed its safety and effectiveness. Total elimination of the disease requires sustained efforts and ensuring widespread coverage of HPV vaccination. India's alarming cervical cancer mortality rate is attributable to the poor screening, lack of early detection, resistance to vaccination and poor hygiene. While urban areas have shown some decline due to factors such as improved hygiene, large rural and underserved populations continue to be present with advanced cervical cancer disease. Against this backdrop, a nationwide vaccination drive could be a game-changer. It would be an effective strategy to target adolescents for vaccination before their exposure to the virus. A time-bound, mission-mode approach can help overcome the inertia that often slows the inclusion of new vaccines into routine immunisation. If implemented effectively, it could shield millions of girls from high-risk HPV strains responsible for the majority of cases. The vaccine, indigenously developed by Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII), is 97% effective in preventing the disease. While cervical cancer is preventable if detected early and managed effectively, it kills one woman every 8 minutes in the country. The vaccination campaign must prioritise rural districts and underserved communities where screening rates are low, and cancer detection often comes too late. The HPV vaccine has long been available in the private market, and a few States piloted limited public programmes over the past decade. However, cost concerns, logistical hurdles and policy hesitations delayed a universal rollout, leaving coverage fragmented and inequitable.

### Sita Rama's wedding ceremony in Bekkem village, Nela Bilk

“Village Sarpanch Bondili Kamalabhai Kamal Singh  
“Bondili presented silk garments

“Dhara Singh and his wife”Wanaparthy correspondent Indian Chronicle”Sri Rama Navami celebrations were held in the historic temple of Sri Rama in Bekkem village (Nela Bilku) under Chinnambavi mandal of Wanaparthy district. The celebrations were organized with great pomp and show under the auspices of Bekkem village Sarpanch Bondili Kamal Bhai Kamal Singh in the marriage ceremony of Sita Rama for the welfare of the world. BJP state leaders Bondili Dhara Singh and his wife participated as the chief guests for this event. Village Sarpanch Bondili Kamal Bhai Organized by Kamal Singh The village is very proud of this great event. BJP along with Sarpanch couple State leaders Dhara Singh and his wife Priests greet those who arrive at the temple Wel-



comed. Afterwards, Bondili Silk garments were given to Dhara Singh Swami, Pearl earrings were presented. Afterwards, I visited the Lord and Special prayers were performed. Vedic Chanting of mantras and auspicious instruments The middle priests performed the wedding of Sita and Rama. The ceremony was held in a scientific manner. The people of the village and Their relatives, friends and devotees were in large numbers. They gathered. With the recitation of Jai Shri Ram The temple premises were transformed. This Village Sarpanch Bondili at the event Kamala Bhai Kamal Singh couple. Shashidhar, Venkat Ramireddy, Ramu Ward Member, Bathini Krishna Reddy, Sandhu Krishna Reddy, Narayana, Bhaskar Reddy Krishna, Venkateswara Reddy, Bal Reddy, Kantaiha, Swami, Narayana, Bhaskar, Naveen Singh, Harikant, and their family members, senior leaders, local public representatives, temple committee members, village people, women, youth, and relatives participated in large numbers.

## Historian Jaishetty Ramanayya passes away

First doctorate holder from Jagtial  
KCR condoles the loss of his guru



“Jagtial Correspondent, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): Prominent historian and retired lecturer Dr. Jaishetty Ramanayya (85) passed away on Friday morning. Telangana's first Chief Minister and BRS chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao expressed his condolences and grief over his demise. “KCR recalled his association with Ramanayya, who was his teacher and a close friend. He remembered Ramanayya's tenure as a lecturer in Siddipet, where he studied Intermediate. KCR conveyed his deep sympathies to the bereaved family and prayed for Ramanayya's soul to rest in peace. “Ramanayya worked as a history lecturer in Siddipet's junior and degree colleges in 1971. He was a rare individual who took



up teaching at a young age and was the first person from Jagtial to receive a PhD. He earned his doctorate with a research work titled "South India Temples". “On hearing the news of his demise, Jagtial MLA Dr. Sanjay Kumar, MLC Ramana, former minister Tatiparthi Jeevan Reddy, and other prominent leaders, representatives, and students paid their respects. The funeral will be held on Sunday after his son returns from the US. “Kavita condoles”Telangana Jagrati President Kalvakuntla Kavita expressed her condolences on the passing of Dr. Jaishetty Ramanayya, a renowned historian and retired lecturer. She prayed for his soul to rest in peace and conveyed her sympathies to the family.

## Make the National Lok Adalat on March 28th a success.

District Principal Judge Patil Vasanth



“Kukkadapu Naresh Kumar, Bhadradi Kothagudem Staff Reporter, March 27, Indian Chronicle: In a statement issued on Tuesday, District Principal Judge Patil Vasanth and M. Rajender, secretary of the District

Legal Services Authority, announced that a National Lok Adalat will be conducted across all courts in the Bhadradi Kothagudem district on Saturday, March 28th of this month. Speaking on the occasion, they stated that the Lok Adalat presents an excellent opportunity for litigants to amicably resolve their pending cases. “Compoundable criminal cases\* Cheque bounce cases (NI Act cases)\* Bank recovery cases\* Motor Vehicle Accident Compensation cases (MVOP)\* Matrimonial cases\* Property partition disputes, rental disputes, and other civil cases\* “Drink and Drive” and E-challan cases\* Cybercrime cases\* Petty theft cases\* Telephone-related cases\* Maintenance cases\* Cases involving minor altercations They informed the public that cases such as these can be resolved during the event. The District Principal Judge urged litigants and respondents within the district to contact the respective courts—either through their lawyers or directly—to have their cases included in the Lok Adalat list; he encouraged them to make the most of this opportunity to save themselves the effort and expense of repeatedly visiting the courts.

## "Ramaniya... Ramanyam... Sita Rama Kalyanam

Sri Ram Navami celebrations held grandly in Jagtial district



“Retired ASI team's costumes impress devotees”Jagtial Correspondent, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): Devotees thronged temples to witness the grand celebration of Sri Sita Rama Kalyanam, saying 'Come and witness the divine wedding of Sita and Rama'. The Sri Ram Navami festivities were celebrated with great pomp across Jagtial district. Veda Brahmins conducted the wedding ceremony of Sri Sita Rama with grandeur and as per scriptures. “In Jagtial, the celebrations were held at the Ramalayam in Dharur camp, Vidyannagar Sita Ramachandra Swami Temple, and Chinnagattu

Anjaneya Swami Temple, attracting a large number of devotees. The wedding ceremony was conducted with traditional rituals and grandeur. “At Kondagattu Anjaneya Swami Temple, devotees thronged to witness the celebrations, and the wedding ceremony was conducted with grandeur. The Sri Ram Navami celebrations were also held at Markandeya Swami Temple and other temples across the district. “The celebrations were also held at Dharmapuri, Bathikepalli, Chandayyapalli, Chinnapoor, Raikal, Gollapalli, Nerella, Dontapoor, Medipalli, Kodimial, Poodur, Velgatoor, Pegadapalli, Laxmipur, Beerpoor, and Pembatla Dubbarajanna Temple. “MLA Sanjay Kumar, MLC L. Ramana, former minister Tatiparthi Jeevan Reddy, Municipal Chairpersons Samindla Vani, Nagalakshmi, Ravinder, Limbadri, and other dignitaries participated in the celebrations. Former Zilla Parishad Chairperson Dava Vasanta Suresh, former Municipal Chairpersons Tatiparthi Vijayalakshmi, Devender Reddy, Giri Nagabhushan, Desai, and other councillors also participated. “Prominent personalities like Chitla Anjana, Ashok Rao, Sankoji Venkataramana, TV Satyam, former Jagtial District Sarpanch Association President Ennam Kishan Reddy, Chitla Shankar, Anshul Reddy, Vemula Rajireddy, Haricharan Rao, Pitta Lingar Reddy, Pitta Rajanna, Ayansh Reddy, Gangadhar, Raman, Limbadri, Adi Srinivas, Siddham Rajasekhar, Jangili Chandramouli, Aksha, Adhvi, Balakrishna Reddy, and others participated in the celebrations.”

## Uppal Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy Participates in Sri Sita Rama Kalyanam Celebrations on Sri Rama Navami



Rama, who sacrificed his kingdom to honor his word and went into exile, stands as a great example of commitment and righteousness. Despite facing numerous hardships, he never abandoned dharma, making him an inspiration to all. He prayed that the divine blessings of Lord Rama be upon everyone. Several colony presidents and Congress party leaders also participated in the program.

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 25 (Indian Chronicle): “On the occasion of Sri Rama Navami, Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Parameshwar Reddy participated as the chief guest in the Sri Sita Rama Kalyanam (celestial wedding ceremony of Lord Rama and Sita) held at various temples across Ramantapur, Venkat Reddy Nagar, Beerappa Gadda, Habsiguda, and Uppal divisions. During the event, temple priests extended a special welcome to Parameshwar Reddy. He later performed special ??? (ritual prayers) to the deities and received theertha prasadam. Speaking on the occasion, Parameshwar Reddy expressed his wishes that with the blessings of Lord Rama, who guides people on the path of devotion, every household should be filled with happiness. He stated that the life of Lord Rama is an ideal for everyone, symbolizing truth, justice, and righteous living. He emphasized that Lord Rama's life serves as a guiding force in Indian culture. “He further added that Lord

Property taxes must be paid by the end of the month.

“Collector reviews Jagtial, Rayakal municipal property tax collections

“Jagtial Correspondent, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): “Jagtial District Collector B. Satyaprasad has instructed officials to collect property taxes in Jagtial, Rayakal, Dharmapuri, Korutla, and Metpalli municipalities by the end of this month. “On Friday, the District Collector reviewed the collection of old pending bills and property taxes in Jagtial and Rayakal municipalities. He directed officials to issue notices to owners with old tax dues and collect them by March 31. He also stated that if



taxes are not paid, the black connection should be disconnected. “As part of the 99-day action plan of the Jana Pola Pragathi program, he emphasized focusing on sanitation management, infrastructure, and tax collections in all municipal areas of the district. He noted that municipal property taxes play a key role in urban development and infrastructure expansion. “The event was attended by Jagtial Municipal Commissioner Spandana, Rayakal Municipal Commissioner Nagaraju, Jagtial Tahsildar Rammohan, revenue staff, municipal staff, and related officials.

## Vadavadala Sri Rama Navami celebrations

INDIAN CHRONICLE KHAMMAM K SANJAY “Gundala Krishna performed special pujas”On the occasion of Sri Rama Navami, celebrations were held grandly in Khammam Friday. On this occasion, the devotees set up separate mandapams and performed the kalyanam of Lord Swami. As part of this, senior lead-



ers of BRS visited the mandapam set up at Gundala Krishna Guntu Mallanna Swami temple and visited many mandapams in the city and visited Lord Swami and performed special pujas. Krishna said that Swami wanted to radiate his cool look on all the people. BRS leaders Chirumamilla Ravikumar and others participated in this program.

## Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Participates in Sri Sita Rama Kalyanam Mahotsavam at Several Temples in Uppal

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): “On the occasion of Sri Rama Navami, Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy visited several temples within the Uppal constituency and participated in the Sri Sita Rama Kalyanam Mahotsavam celebrations. “Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said that the harmony between Sita and Rama, the brotherhood of Rama and Lakshmana, the friendship between Rama and Sugriva, and the bond between Lord Rama and Hanuman are values taught to us since childhood



by our elders. He emphasized that these values are our everlasting wealth. He further stated that festivals like Sri Rama Navami remind us of these traditions, and hence the day of Lord Rama's incarnation is a true festival for all. He urged everyone to celebrate the festival in a traditional manner. “The event was attended by several senior BRS leaders from Uppal, including Mekala Madhusudan Reddy, Mushyam Srinivas, Anya Balakrishna, Akula Mahender, Pili Nagaraju, Chintala Narasimha Reddy, Panga Mahender Reddy, Panga Rajesh Reddy, Ailesh Kuruma, Jetta Kishore, Niranjan Chari, Sukka Kiran, Suredy Srinivas Reddy, John, Sai Reddy, Hari, Alwal Nagaraj, Naveen Chari, Prabhakar, Gnaneshwar, Raghavendra, Roshan, Mallesh, Balaraj, Shiva, and a large number of devotees.

# Mass Protest by Telangana Outsourcing Employees on 29th: Support from Water Board Workers

### Poster released in support of the protest; call for unity among employees

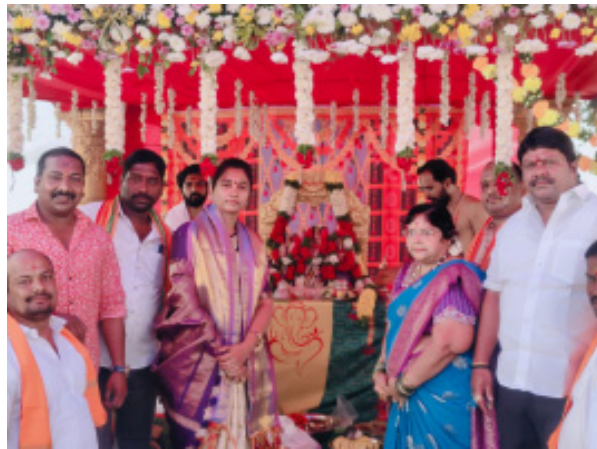


KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): "The Joint Action Committee (JAC) of Telangana State Outsourcing Employees has called for a mass protest (Maha Dharna) to be held on the 29th of this month. Outsourcing employees of the Water Board have extended their full support to this protest. On this occasion, a poster supporting the dharna was released at the Uppal Water Board office. Leaders urged all employees to unite and participate actively in the protest. Speaking at the event, JAC leaders demanded the implementation of "equal pay for equal work" in accordance with the Supreme Court's directives. They also called for the abolition of the agency system, urging the government to eliminate middlemen agencies and en-

sure direct payment of salaries to outsourcing employees. Furthermore, they requested that the long-pending issues of outsourcing workers be discussed in the State Assembly and resolved at the earliest. Telangana State Outsourcing JAC Working President Mandala Balakrishna Reddy appealed to all outsourcing employees working in the Water Board to participate in large numbers in the Maha Dharna on the 29th and make it a success in the fight for their rights. Several leaders and members, including Vice President Suresh, Srinivas Reddy, Siddiramulu, Balaraju, Anji Reddy, Shiva, Upendar, Tirupati Reddy, Ravi, Krishna, Srikanth Reddy, Vinod, Venkatesh, Ajay, Madhu, Naveen Reddy, and Bhaskar, participated in the program and expressed their protest.

# Former Uppal Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy Participates in Sri Sita Rama Kalyanotsavam

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): "On the occasion of Sri Rama Navami, former Uppal Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy participated in the Sri Sita Rama Kalyanotsavam (celebrated) at various temples in the Uppal division. She attended the celebrations held in several localities including Kuruma Nagar, Satya Nagar, New Shanti Nagar, Vijayapuri Colony, Shesh Sai Nagar, Venkateshwara Colony, Ganesh Nagar, South Swaroop Nagar, Lakshminarayana Colony, Uppal Bhagayat Orange Arcade Apartments, and Uppal Bharat Nagar (Buruza). "Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy took part as the chief guest in these ceremonial events. On this occasion, temple priests extended a special welcome to her. She later offered special prayers to the deities and received theertham and prasadam. "Several colony association presidents and Congress party leaders also participated in the program.



# Aakarapu Arun Sharanya Patel Couple Participate in Sita Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam in Venkat Reddy Nagar Division

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): "On Friday, the Sri Sita Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam was celebrated with great devotion and grandeur across several colonies in Venkat Reddy Nagar Division. The festivities took place in areas including Ram Reddy Nagar, Vasavi Nagar, Srinivasapuram, Kamakshi Puram, Satya Nagar, and Srinagar Colony. "On this occasion, Uppal Constituency Youth Congress President Aakarapu Sharanya Arun Patel and her husband Aakarapu Arun Patel participated in the celebrations. The couple performed special prayers and rituals to Lord Sita Rama. Expressing their happiness on being part of the auspicious event conducted for the welfare of society, they prayed that the blessings of Lord Sita Rama be bestowed upon all residents of the colony. They also took part in the



Annadanam (food distribution) program. Colony presidents, residents, and Congress party leaders actively participated in the event.

# Sita Rama's wedding ceremony at Sri Anjaneya Swamy Temple in Koppunur village

### Former ZPTC K.C. Reddy Venkatravamma Chinna Reddy Leaders of the Bharatiya Rashtra Samiti of Koppunur village"

"Wanaparthi correspondent Indian Chronicle" "In Koppunur village under Chinnambavi mandal, the marriage of Sita Rama was celebrated with great pomp and devotion in the presence of all the villagers at the Sri Anjaneya Swamy Temple in Koppunur village. Devotees came in large numbers to witness this marriage of Sita Rama. They prayed to Lord Rama to bless the villagers and to ensure good harvests for the farmers and to provide them with wealth. Hundreds of Bharatiya Rashtra Samiti leaders and activists who prayed with all their hearts. Among those who watched the wedding of Sitaram were former ZPTC of Chinnambavi Mandal Kesi Reddy Venkatramamma, leaders and organizers of Sitaram wedding Ulapala Maheshwar Reddy, former Upasarpanch Thagaram Kurmaiya, former second ward member Thagaram Narasimha, Yella Reddy, Polamoni Kurumurthy, Giri Prasad, Hitler Narasimha, former chairman of the primary school Thagaram Nagaraju, Tholla Nagendram, Sandepogu Kurmaiya, TRS party youth leader Kesi Reddy Dinesh Reddy, village people, relatives and others.



# Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy participates in Sita Rama Kalyanam at Beerappa Gadda Ramalayam

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): "On Friday, the Sri Sita Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam was celebrated with great grandeur at Beerappa Gadda Ramalayam. Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy attended the following an invitation from BRS State former secretary Nertham Bhaskar Goud. "The event was organized under the leadership of Chilukanagar Congress Party in-charge Aakiti Agam Reddy, and was conducted in a grand manner. The MLA performed special prayers and received teertha prasadam. Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said that Lord Sri Rama is an ideal figure for everyone and wished that his blessings be upon all. Former Municipal Chairman Mekala Shiva Reddy, Kola Ravikumar Goud, Papi Reddy, Mallesh, Srikanth Reddy, Aakiti Madhukar Reddy, Jagadeesh Mudiraj, Santosh, and others participated in the program.



# Blessings of Sita, Rama, and Lakshmana should be upon the people of Chilkanagar and Beerappa Gadda Division:

### Former Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): "On the occasion of the Sri Rama Navami festival, former corporator of Chilkanagar Division, Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj, along with BRS party division leaders, participated in the Sri Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam (celebrations) held at various temples in the division. These included Beerappa Gadda Ramalayam, Thene Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple, NGRI Abhaya Anjaneya Swamy Temple, Raghavendra Nagar Colony, Dharmapuri Colony, Bank Colony, East Kalyanpuri, New Ramnagar Colony, Kummurikunta Chilkanagar, Markandeya Swamy Temple on Chilkanagar Hill, and the Ramalayam temple located opposite the Nagadevatha temple on Chilkanagar Hill. "Speaking on the occasion, former corporator Geetha Praveen said that the Sita Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam were celebrated with great grandeur in almost all temples across the division. She expressed that the blessings of Lord Sita, Rama, and Lakshmana should be upon all the people of the division. "The program was attended by BRS party state leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, senior leaders Eddula Kondal Reddy, Kokkonda Jagan, Muddam Srinivas Yadav, Balakrishna Goud, Banti Goud, Beerappa Gadda Balu, and others.



# Annadanam under the auspices of Adhyatmika Arya Vaishya Family Dr. Srinivas and Nagarathna's generosity



Jagitial Correspondent, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): "The Adhyatmika Arya Vaishya Family, Jagityal, distributed annaprasad (food offering) on Friday under the patronage of Dr. Rachakonda Srinivas and Dr. Nagarathna. The event was inaugurated by Jagityal town CI Karunakar, who was the chief guest. On the occasion of Vasavi Mata's birth star and Sri Rama Navami falling on the same day, the family distributed food to 300 people with the help of donors. The organizers of the Adhyatmika family, Sura Srinivas, said that they conducted the annadanam with the cooperation of donors. The event was attended by Basetti Prabhakar, Yamsani Srinivas, Elimilli Sagar, Jilla Prakash, Rayanchu Harish, Gudise Bhadrappa, Moturu Sampat, Manchala Lachanna, Katkuri Chandramouli, Ashok, Sattanna, Sampat, Ramesh, Krishna, Srinivas, Mahesh, Suryaprakash, and members.

# Sri Sita Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam celebrated grandly at Chiluka Nagar Gutta Sri Abhayanjaneya Swamy Temple

### Under the leadership of Temple Trustee Gudi Swarna Madhusudhan Reddy

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle): "On the auspicious occasion of Sri Rama Navami, the Sri Sita Rama Kalyana Mahotsavam was celebrated in a grand and devotional manner on Friday at the Sri Abhayanjaneya Swamy Temple located on Chiluka Nagar hill, under the leadership of temple trustee Gudi Swarna Madhusudhan Reddy. Malakajiri contested MP candidate Ragidi Lakshma Reddy attended the event as the chief guest. Leaders from various political parties and a large number of devotees participated in the celebration and had darshan of the deity. "After the Kalyanam, teertha prasadam was distributed to all devotees, followed by a large-scale annadanam (free food distribution). A huge number of devotees from Chiluka Nagar gathered and received the blessings of the Lord. "The organizers expressed their gratitude to all friends, well-wishers, permanent members of the Abhayanjaneya Swamy Temple, devotees, and the people of Chiluka Nagar for their support in making the event a success.



# Chalivendram Launched at Kapra MRO Office to Aid Public



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajiri Staff Reporter, March 27, (Indian Chronicle): "KAPRA: In view of the rising summer temperatures, a cooling water camp (Chalivendram) has been set up in front of the Kapra MRO office to help quench the thirst of the public. Speaking on the occasion, Prashanth Karthi, Chairman of Prashanth Karthi People's Foundation, said that such service activities are highly beneficial

to society, especially during the scorching summer. He inaugurated the camp as the chief guest. He emphasized that providing drinking water to people in extreme heat is a meaningful initiative and urged the public to make use of the facility. Foundation members Durga Prasad, Naresh Reddy, Madhu Goud, Chandu Reddy, Avinash Reddy, Kiran, Anil, and others were present at the event.

# Grand Sri Rama Navami Celebrations Held in Kushaiguda

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 27, (Indian chronicle):“Kushaiguda: Sri Rama Navami was celebrated with great fervor at the Kanyakaparneswari Temple in Vasavi Shivanagar, Kushaiguda, on Friday. The celebrations were organized under the leadership of temple chairman and founder Dacha Ashok Gupta. As part of the event, former corporator and senior BRS leader Kotha Rama Rao was felicitated by Telangana activist and BRS AS Rao Nagar Division President Kasam Mahipal Reddy. Addressing the gathering, Kotha Rama Rao said that the life of Lord Rama serves as an inspiration to humanity. He stated that Lord Rama's rule is an ideal example of good governance and reflects the kind of leadership people aspire to. He added that Lord Rama's life teaches how individuals should live and conduct themselves. Kasam Mahipal Reddy said that Lord Hanuman stood as a devoted follower of Lord Rama and that the Ramayana remains relevant even today. He noted that many values can be learned from the epic and added that chanting the name of "Rama" brings spiritual merit and removes sins. The temple premises echoed with chants of "Rama" throughout the celebrations. A large number of devotees participated with devotion and enthusiasm. A free food distribution program organized during the event provided meals to nearly 2,000 devotees.



# Educational institutions Triveni Krishnaveni Educational Institutions have been rendering dedicated service to devotees during the annual Sri Rama Navami celebrations at Bhadrachalam for over a decade.



“Avnreddy Khammam Staff Reporter March 27, (Indian Chronicle):“Marking the occasion, the institutions set up distribution centers to provide buttermilk and drinking water to thousands of pilgrims devotees, helping them stay hydrated during the festivities. The initiative was formally inaugurated at the Bhadrachalam bus stand by Depot RMO Sariram and SI Navita. “Speaking on the occasion, Director Gollapudi Veerendra Chowdary said that serving devotees of Lord Rama is equivalent to serving Lord Rama himself. He emphasized that the institu-

tion considers it a privilege to contribute to such a noble cause every year. Another distribution center was also set up near the Sri Rama temple, ensuring wider reach to pilgrims. This year, around 50,000 buttermilk packets and 50,000 drinking water packets were distributed. “School Principal Rajendra Prasad stated that participating in such service activities every year is a humble opportunity bestowed upon them by Lord Rama. “CRO Katragadda Muralikrishna, along with teaching and non-teaching staff, actively took part in the service activities, dedicating their efforts to the service of Lord Rama and his devotees.

# Rama Navami Celebrations Enthrall Khammam; BJP Leaders Participate in Sita Rama Kalyanam



“Steps must be taken with the goal of protecting Dharma,”— BJP District President Nelluri Koteswara Rao urged. “Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 27, (Indian Chronicle):“Devotional fervor gripped Khammam district as Sri Rama Navami celebrations were held with great enthusiasm and spiritual devotion on Friday. Marking the birth anniversary of Lord Sri Rama and the sacred Sita Rama Kalyanam, the festivities were conducted grandly across the district. On this auspicious occasion, BJP Khammam District President Nelluri Koteswara Rao toured various parts of the district and offered prayers at several temples. As part of the celebrations, he first performed special Prayer at Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple in Khanapuram Haveli. Later, he visited the Indira Nagar Ramalayam, where he participated in ongoing rituals along with devotees and reviewed the arrangements. A major highlight was the Sita Rama Kalyanam held at Anantharam village, which took place in a grand manner amid chants of devotion by large gatherings of devotees. Nelluri Koteswara Rao took part in the Ceremony and received the sacred harathi with reverence. “He appreciated the efforts of Sri Rama Navami committee members and Hindu devotees across the district for organizing the celebrations on such a large scale. Emphasizing the importance of protecting dharma, he called upon people to work towards the establishment of “Rama Rajya.” “He also lauded the continuous efforts of committees, particularly those based in Hyderabad, for promoting Indian culture and traditions. Extending his greetings to the people of the district, he wished that every household prospers with happiness and blessings of Lord Sri Rama. “District BJP leaders Allika Anjaiah, Achanti Koteswara Rao, Vakadani Ramakrishna, party workers, and thousands of devotees participated in the celebrations, filling the district with chants of “Rama Nama.”

# Inorbit Mall Grand Openen at Visakhapatnam



“Visakhapatnam: Inorbit Mall Vizag is now open, bringing a vibrant new destination to the heart of the city. The grand inauguration was marked by a special ribbon-cutting ceremony led by Rajneesh Mahajan and Rohit Gopalani, in the inspiring presence of celebrated para-athletes. Among them were Shaikh Kausar Sahil, a decorated champion with 12 national medals including 11 gold; Yalla Sattibabu, an international para badminton player with 17 national medals and a World Championship appearance; Galidevara Siva Ganga Durga, a powerhouse in shot put and javelin with multiple national and international golds; and Addaguduru Pranay, a rising star with 6 medals across state and national levels. Their presence added a powerful note of resilience and achievement to the occasion, making the launch not just grand, but truly meaningful.

# Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy and Gaddam Ravikumar Participate in Sri Rama Navami Celebrations



“KISHORE VADEPALLI, Uppal, March 27 (Indian Chronicle):“Sri Rama Navami celebrations were held grandly at Sri Lalitha Parameshwari Temple in Sri Ramapuram of Ramanthapur Division. “Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy and senior Congress leader Gaddam Ravikumar participated in the Kalyana Mahotsavam. On this occasion, they performed special ??? (rituals) and later took part in the annadanam (community meal service). “Speaking at the event, they advised people to follow the ideals of Lord Sri Rama and wished that the blessings of Lord Sita Rama be upon everyone. “Temple Chairman R.N. Chari, former corporator Leta Akula Raghupathi Reddy, Sarva Babu Yadav, Ramulu, Trimurthulu, Ramakrishna, Akula Mahender, Naresh, G.B. Sai, Minna Rao Naidu, Prasad, Srikanth Reddy, and others also participated in the program.

# Khammam MP Raghuram Reddy Participates in Sri Rama Navami Celebrations Across District

“Avnreddy Khammam Staff Reporter March 27, (Indian Chronicle):“On the occasion of Sri Rama Navami, Khammam Member of Parliament Ramasahayam Raghuram Reddy took part in celebrations held at various places across the district on Friday, joining devotees in performing prayers and rituals. “In Khammam city, he attended festivities in Srinagar Colony (Divisions 7 and 18) and Sai Ganesh Nagar along with Tumburu Dayakar Reddy, in-charge of Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy's camp office, and participated in special Ritual worship. Later, at the renowned Bhakta Ramadasu Dhyana Mandiram in Nelakondapalli, the MP attended the grand Sita Rama Kalyanam ceremony. He offered special prayers and presented Mangala Harathi to the deities amid Vedic chants by temple priests, participating with deep devotion. “He subsequently inaugurated the annaprasadam (free food distribution) program organized in the temple premises and personally served food to devotees. Interacting warmly with children, women, and the elderly, he extended festive greetings to all. He also participated in Sri Rama Navami celebrations and launched annadanam (food donation) programs in Kotha Kothuru, Nachepalli, and Mangapuram villages of Nelakondapalli mandal. “Speaking on the occasion, the MP emphasized that protecting Indian culture and traditions is everyone's responsibility. He noted that such festivals strengthen unity and devotion in society. “MP Visits Two Families: “Raghuram Reddy visited the residence of former Nelakondapalli sarpanch Vangaveeti Nageswara Rao, who recently underwent knee surgery, and wished him a speedy recovery. He also consoled the family of senior Congress leader Vaka Srinath following the demise of his father Vaka Rangaiah. “The program was attended by Edulapuram Municipal Chairperson Pokabattina Anita, Corporator Neeraja, Councillor Venkata Reddy, Market Chairman Vennapusal Sitaramulu, former chairman Shakamuri Ramesh, and several leaders, public representatives, and party workers.



# Buttermilk Packets Distributed by Vasavi Club on Sri Rama Navami in Khammam

“Avnreddy Khammam Staff Reporter March 27, (Indian Chronicle):“On the occasion of Sri Rama Navami, the Vasavi Club Rotary Nagar organized a large-scale distribution of buttermilk packets to devotees at Indiranagar Pamasala in Khammam. The event was attended by Vasavi Club International Senior Vice President Kadavendi Srinivas as the chief guest. The local Khammam Urban Station House Officer also took part in the Program. “Vasavi Club Rotary Nagar has been consistently organizing this buttermilk distribution drive every year on Sri Rama Navami for the past ten

years. “Among those present were International Program Coordinators Mashetty Varaprasad and Kodamuri Jagannatham, Region Chairman Dasa Srinivasa Rao, Club President Kaja Venkateswara Rao, Secretary Kalvakuntla Venkata Rao, Treasurer Vamsi, former presidents Soma Seshagiri Rao and Palvai Venkateswara Rao, and members Noone Gopala Rao, Kalvakuntla Hanumantha Rao, Rayala Basaveswara Rao, Palvai Nageswara Rao, Rajarao, and others.

# Cooling Water Stalls Launched by Solis Eye Hospital on Sri Rama Navami



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, March 27, (Indian chronicle):“KAPRA: On the occasion of Sri Rama Navami, cooling water stalls were set up by Solis Eye Hospital under the leadership of Tulasamma Charitable Trust Chairman Nandanapati Ramu to provide relief to the public during the summer heat. The stalls, offering buttermilk, were established at Radhika X Roads and ECIL areas. Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy inaugurated the stalls. Former corporator Kotha Rama Rao, Dr. A.S. Rao Nagar Division President Kasam Mahipal Reddy, and General Secretary Peddapuram Kumaraswamy were present at the event. Kushaiguda Police Station Cl L. Bhaskar Reddy, Traffic Cl Rudraveer Kumar, and Sis Sailu and Satish also attended. Solis Hospital staff including Mahesh, Bhaskar, Vijayalakshmi, Gajender Reddy, Mohan, Mukesh, Anjaneyulu, Srikanth, Sanal, Vijender Reddy, Ramu, and Balaraju participated in the program. Organizers stated that setting up these stalls would help provide much-needed relief to people from the intense summer heat.

# Noted intellectual Dr. Guggilla Divyamurthy was felicitated in a grand ceremony at LB Nagar.

The honor was presented by Telangana Film JAC Chairman and film actor Rosham Balu. “Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau March 27, (Indian Chronicle):“Dr. Divyamurthy, a native of Kottakothuru village in Nelakondapalli mandal of Khammam district, was recognized for his exceptional talent and contributions. Speaking at the event, Rosham Balu praised Divyamurthy's abilities and stated that individuals like him are essential for society. He also expressed his Happiness in honoring such a distinguished personality. “Dr. Divyamurthy expressed happiness over the recognition and mentioned that he has been felicitated on 127 platforms so far. The event was attended by Veeramohan, Raghu, Raghuram, Rushi, and several others.

## Meri Yogyta Meri Pehchan campaign: Ludhiana admn installs name plates with qualifications of 11 women outside their houses



GNS News Agency, March 27

The Ludhiana district administration on Wednesday expanded the "Meri Yogyta Meri Pehchan" campaign to the entire district, under which names and higher qualifications of 11 women were installed outside their homes in Manakwal village. Deputy Commissioner Himanshu Jain said, "For years, girls and women have faced discrimination. In most families, girls have to struggle harder than their brothers to pursue higher education. Despite these challenges, when they achieve higher degrees, it becomes our duty to give them due respect and recognition." "Any daughter or sister

who wishes to have a name plate outside her house mentioning her name and qualifications can approach the district administration. We will get a beautiful nameplate made and installed at her residence free of cost. This will motivate her to pursue further studies and inspire other girls in the area," the DC said. The DC said, "These name plates will encourage more girls to aim for higher qualifications."

He appealed to Ludhiana residents to extend full support so that this target could be achieved successfully. "This initiative will help our daughters achieve greater success in life," he emphasised. Jain said the Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann-led government has taken concrete steps to empower women by giving them prominent positions in administration and governance. "Several women officers have been appointed as Deputy Commissioners and SSPs, while many others are serving as ADCs, SDMs and on other senior posts. The women officers are performing their duties with great dedication, sensitivity and efficiency, which is benefiting society immensely," the DC added. He urged the women to pursue higher education and higher positions so that they could contribute meaningfully to society. Sarpanch Manpreet Singh Manu expressed gratitude to Jain and the district administration for honouring the educated daughters of his village by installing name plates outside their homes.

## Reviving cotton viability amid shrinkage in area: Experts, policymakers call for urgent action in interstate meet

GNS News Agency, March 27

Alarmed by the steady shrinkage of cotton area across northern states, experts and policymakers called for urgent, coordinated action to revive the crop's viability, while calling upon all stakeholders to work in close coordination to tackle pest pressures and restore cotton's profitability. The concern was voiced at a meeting of the Interstate Consultative and Monitoring Committee on cotton held at Kheti Bhawan, Bathinda, under the chairmanship of Dr Satbir Singh Gosal, Vice-Chancellor, Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana. The meeting that continued till late on Tuesday was attended by representatives from three cotton-growing states: Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

The meeting brought together senior officers and scientists, including the Director of Agriculture, Punjab; PAU's Director of Research; Director of Extension Education; Additional Director of Extension Education; Chief Agriculture Officers from the cotton belt; and experts from the Central Institute for Cotton Research, Sirsa.

PAU V-C Gosal expressed serious concern over the persistent decline in cotton acreage. He linked the trend to mounting biotic and abiotic stresses, notably infestations of pink bollworm, whitefly, and cotton leaf curl virus, coupled with erratic weather patterns. He outlined a clear roadmap for the Kharif 2026 season, stressing timely availability of high-quality, recommended seeds and subsidies on Bt cotton to encourage adoption among farmers. He underlined the importance of assured canal water supply for pre-sowing irrigation, calling it critical for establishing a healthy crop stand. Balanced fertilization, he added, must be promoted to enhance productivity. Dr Gosal urged all stakeholders to work in close coordination to tackle pest pressures and restore cotton's profitability. Dr Gurjeet Singh Brar, Director of Agriculture, Punjab, attributed the decline in acreage to a shift towards paddy, driven by reliable irrigation and recurring pest attacks in cotton. He emphasized timely sowing, deep ploughing, and effective crop residue management as key interventions to improve yields. He also informed that a large-scale awareness campaign is underway across Punjab's cotton-growing districts.



Chief Agriculture Officers from Bathinda, Mansa, Shri Muksar Sahib, Fazilka, Sangrur, Barnala, Faridkot, and Moga shared updates on extension efforts, particularly focusing on off-season management of pink bollworm and whitefly. Dr A S Dhatt, PAU's Director of Research, highlighted recent advancements, including the release of the desi cotton variety PBD 88. He outlined updated plant protection strategies and stressed the need to develop cotton plant types suitable for mechanization. He also advocated proper fumigation practices in ginning factories and wider promotion of desi varieties developed by the university.

Dr Makhan Singh Bhullar, PAU's Director of Extension Education, pointed out that the shift of cotton cultivation to lighter soils is affecting both productivity and profitability when compared to paddy. Despite these challenges, he described cotton as integral to the socio-economic fabric of the Malwa region. He suggested intensified field outreach, with immediate focus on cotton stick and weed management. Presenting the current pest scenario, Dr Vijay Kumar, Principal Entomologist, PAU, noted the presence of hibernating larvae and pupae of pink bollworm in cotton stick heaps and ginning factory stocks. He warned that unchecked residues could fuel fresh infestations in the coming season. Dr Rishi Kumar, Head of Central Institute for Cotton Research, offered insights into shifting pest dynamics and charted targeted measures for effective management. He underlined the need for adaptive strategies to address emerging threats.

## Bengaluru's Kempe Gowda International Airport wins award for best regional airport third year running



GNS News Agency, March 27

BIAL also stated that the airport had been named the 'Best Global Airport in Arrivals' for four years running. BIAL also stated that the airport had been named the 'Best Global Airport in Arrivals' for four years running. For the third year in a row, Bengaluru's Kempe Gowda International Airport has been named the 'Best Regional Airport in India and South Asia' at the Skytrax World Airport Awards on Wednesday. The airport also rose in the rankings of the

world's top airports from 48 to 41.

According to a statement from Bangalore International Airport Limited, the awards take several factors into account, including check-in, arrivals, transfers, retail, security, immigration, and departures. The statement also noted that Kempe Gowda Airport had received accreditations for carbon management and accessibility. Previously, Terminal 2 of the airport had also been the first in India to receive Skytrax's 5-star rating. BIAL also stated that as of 2025, they had served 43.8 million passengers and moved over 500,000 tonnes of cargo. BIAL MD and CEO Hari Marar said in a statement, "It is a testament to the collective effort of our teams and partners who continue to push the boundaries of what a modern airport experience can be..... we remain committed to continuously raising the bar on service and experience."

BIAL also stated that the airport had been named the 'Best Global Airport in Arrivals' for four years running. Skytrax had also said in a statement that Terminal 2 has strengthened the airport's reputation, and Bengaluru is now positioned among "the region's most recognisable airports".

## A week after Maldives boat accident, family plans prayer meet for missing 'Gypsy King' Hari Singh in Chandigarh on March 30

Hari Singh, a five-time Indian National Rally Champion, has been untraceable following a boat accident in the Maldives on March 19. Hari Singh, a five-time Indian National Rally Champion, has been untraceable following a boat accident in the Maldives on March 19. The family of 59-year-old rally driver Hari Singh has decided to hold a prayer meeting on March 30 at a gurdwara in Chandigarh, after the 'Gypsy King' remained untraceable since March 19 following a boat accident in the Maldives. SPS Garcha, president of the Chandigarh Motorsport Association, said, "The family has decided to hold a prayer meeting for Hari on Monday, March 30, at Gurdwara, Sector 8, Chandigarh,

from 12 noon to 1 pm." Hari Singh, a five-time Indian National Rally Champion, was on a speedboat with others, including industrialist and Raymond Group chairman Gautam Singhanian, when the accident occurred near the Felidhoo area of the Maldives around 1.15 am on March 19. After the boat capsized, Singhanian was rescued with injuries and later brought back to Mumbai, but Hari and at least one other person remain missing, according to reports. Garcha, who has known Hari Singh for years, said the rallyist shared a long association with the motorsport community in the region. Hari Singh began his rallying career in 1990 with the Himalayan Car Rally.

## Tricity residents move Punjab and Haryana HC against Zirakpur bypass tree felling



GNS News Agency, March 27

Raising concerns over the felling of many trees for the proposed construction of a six-lane Zirakpur Bypass, 21 residents from the Tricity have sought the intervention of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The 19-km project will commence from NH-7 (Chandigarh-Rajpura-Patiala) and terminate at NH-5 (Zirakpur-Parwanoo Road), forming part of the proposed Tri-City Ring Road.

The residents, represented by senior advocate Anand Chhibar, stated in their public interest litigation that "the Rs 1878 crore project will result in the felling of more than 5,000 mature trees including over 2,000 trees from notified forest land in Punjab, more than 2,200 trees from the Panchkula Golf Course, and approximately 1,000 trees from Sector-1A, Panchkula and other green belts". They added: "These trees are predominantly 20-30 years old and constitute established ecological assets performing vital ecosystem services."

According to the petitioners, the Panchkula Golf Course, developed by Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran over approximately 124 acres since 1988, houses nearly

14,000 mature trees and functions as one of the principal urban green lungs of Panchkula. They argued that compensatory afforestation proposed in Firozpur, Punjab, situated over 240 kilometres away, cannot restore the ecological functionality of mature, region-specific forest and riverine ecosystems in the Tricity urban belt. Mature trees, they said, cannot be substituted by saplings which take decades to attain ecological equivalence and often suffer high mortality.

The petitioners highlighted that as per the India State of Forest Report 2023, Punjab possesses only 3.67% forest and tree cover and Haryana merely 3.65%, both drastically below the national average of 21.71% and far below the 33% benchmark envisaged under the National Forest Policy, 1988. In such a scenario, diversion of additional forest land constitutes ecological regression of alarming magnitude. They pointed out that the tendering process has already advanced and financial bids are imminent. "The tender has already been issued by the NHA and the closing date of the said tender was 20.03.2026. If tree felling commences, the ecological damage will be permanent and irreversible. No subsequent judicial relief or monetary compensation can restore decades-old forest ecosystems," said the petitioners. Seeking intervention, the petitioners urged the High Court to quash or reconsider forest clearances, restrain further tendering and construction activity, direct reconsideration of alternative alignments, and ensure that developmental objectives are pursued strictly in conformity with constitutional mandates, statutory safeguards, and binding environmental jurisprudence. Counsel Anand Chhibar confirmed that the High Court on Wednesday issued notices to the Haryana government, the central government, the union Ministry of Environment and Forest, and HSPV, seeking their response. The matter will now be taken up on April 1.

## Mumbai Metro mishap: A month on, two victims still hospitalised after parapet collapse

GNS News Agency, March 27

Over a month after the metro parapet collapse in Mulund, two of the three injured remain hospitalised, with one still in intensive care and facing long-term disability, even as an MMRDA probe has squarely blamed the contractor for the incident, citing serious lapses in execution and supervision. Rajkumar Indrajeet Yadav, 45, the rickshaw driver, continues to be in the ICU at Upasani Hospital, while Mahendra Pratap Yadav, 52, has been shifted to a general ward and may be discharged soon, family members said. Both were travelling with a relative, Ramdhan Yadav, who died in the incident. Rajkumar has undergone seven to eight surgeries since the accident, including procedures on his head, abdomen and limbs. "A few days ago, Rajkumar underwent another head surgery as water would continuously leak out of his nose when he sat upright," said Sarvesh Yadav, a relative. "Rajkumar will never be able to live a normal existence again; he will remain 40 to 50% paralysed and dependent on others for the rest of his life."

Family members said the injuries were extensive. "The damage to Rajkumar's left hand and both legs has been such that even after surgery, he cannot move them. Of his entire left hand, he can only move his little finger," Sarvesh added. Mahendra, who suffered injuries to his spine, head and lungs, is recovering but still requires continued care. "Rajkumar has only just started eating. Almost every part of his body was affected," said Shubham Yadav, Mahendra's son. "Mahendra is much better, but we are not sure about his discharge as he still needs proper medical care, which may not be possible at home. At least here,



doctors are available at all times." The accident has also displaced both families, who are now living in a rented room near the hospital. "We have been moving between the hospital and the room every day," Shubham said. Rajkumar's daughter has also dropped out of school, relatives said. The MMRDA, in its submission to the Bombay High Court, said subcontractor Milan Road Buildtech has paid ₹27.59 lakh towards the treatment of the injured. However, a detailed probe report has held the Reliance Infrastructure-Astaldi joint venture responsible, citing unsafe practices and lapses at multiple levels, including the welder, supervisor and site engineer. The report found that a parapet segment became unstable after temporary supports were removed prematurely, pointing to procedural violations rather than any flaw in design or material. Earlier, the MMRDA had also flagged negligence by the contractor and lack of adequate supervision as key factors behind the collapse.

## Try accused for culpable homicide not amounting to murder: District court on BMW hit-and-run case

GNS News Agency, March 27

Nearly 10 months after a speeding BMW car allegedly hit a Chandigarh Police constable in Sector 9, a district court has ordered that the accused, Ishaan Shankar, be tried under Section 105 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which pertains to culpable homicide not amounting to murder. The order was passed on Wednesday by Additional District and Sessions Judge Ashwani Kumar, who framed charges against the accused and disposed of his discharge application. "It is not a simple case of rash and negligent driving punishable under Section 106 of BNS, rather it is a case of culpable homicide not amounting to murder," held the court. The trial in the case is scheduled to commence on July 6.

The incident dates back to May 11, 2025, when two BMW cars were allegedly racing on a road in Sector 9. During the race, one of the vehicles, driven by the accused, struck a cyclist — later identified as Constable Anand of Chandigarh Police — causing him fatal injuries. The victim succumbed before reaching the hospital. During the proceedings of accused's discharge application, the defence argued that the case did not warrant charges under Section 105 (culpable homicide), and instead fell under Section 106 of the BNS, which deals with death caused by negligence in road accidents. The defence counsels argued that in this case during the investigation, the police have not collected such evidence which could show that all the ingredients constituting the offence punishable under Section 105 of BNS are fulfilled. He pointed out that as per application, dated May 13, 2025, filed by the investigating officer, offence under Section 105 of BNS has been added on the basis of site inspection report, mechanical examination report and analysis of CCTV footage. However, mechanical examination report of offending vehicle was prepared on May 15, 2025 whereas CCTV footage was taken in police possession on May 14, 2025. The public prosecutor, however, contended that the applicant-accused had committed accident while racing with another vehicle. He had knowledge that his act would result in an accident and after accident, the applicant fled away. During the investigation, the applicant was found involved in the commission of offence under Section 105 of BNS.

On hearing the arguments, the court held that mechanical report can be prepared after one-two days. CCTV footages may be taken in police possession next day but investigating officer is talking about analysis of CCTV footage before it was taken in police possession. The court noted that on May 11, 2025 about 6.45 pm, two cars of BMW were being driven in a rash and negligent manner and hit one cyclist which dragged the cyclist to a large distance. After leaving the injured at the spot, the driver of the offending vehicle fled away. The injured was got admitted to hospital. The offending vehicle was racing with another



BMW car. "From this fact, it cannot be said that the applicant has no knowledge about the consequence of his act as it was his duty to drive vehicle cautiously. He did not stop the vehicle after the accident and did not help the injured to get his medical treatment, rather he kept dragging the injured for a large distance. It is not a simple case of rash and negligent driving punishable under Section 106 of BNS, rather it is a case of culpable homicide not amounting to murder," noted the court in the order while adding that prima facie evidence on record is sufficient to show that the applicant/accused has committed an offence punishable under Section 105 of BNS, so the applicant be charged under Section 105 of BNS.

## Unknown persons booked for killing street dogs in Nizamabad

Nizamabad: Amid allegations of killing around 1,000 stray dogs over the past few months, some unknown persons were booked for allegedly poisoning stray dogs to death in the town on Wednesday.

Nizamabad fourth town police said that a case was registered against unidentified persons under Section 325 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) (Mischievous by killing or maiming animal, criminalizing intentional harm, poisoning, or killing of any animal), based on a complaint from Goutham Adulapuram, from Stray Animal Foundation of India based in Karimnagar town.

A foundation statement said around 1,000 stray dogs were killed in Nizamabad municipal corporation over the last 7 months.

"A few individuals, allegedly hired by the corporation along with involvement of local elected representatives, were responsible for these killings. Earlier, some stray dogs were eliminated in August in the town," the statement said.

## In a 5-hour response, Siddaramaiah defends Rs 1.32 lakh crore debt, blames Centre for revenue deficit



GNS News Agency, March 27

In a 5-hour response, Siddaramaiah defends Rs 1.32 lakh crore debt, blames Centre for revenue deficit. This came days after his marathon three-hour forty-minute Budget speech, and Siddaramaiah surpassed that by spending around five hours responding to Budget discussions in the Assembly. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah Wednesday defended Karnataka's economic performance, citing a 7.8 per cent growth in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), and argued that the proposed debt of Rs 1.32 lakh crore is within the Fiscal Responsibility and Budgetary Management limits, which are essential for state development.

This came days after his marathon three-hour forty-minute Budget speech, and Siddaramaiah surpassed that by spending around five hours responding to Budget discussions in the Assembly. He responded by countering Opposition legislators' claims that the state's growth had stagnated while its debt burden had increased. Quoting from a report, he said, "Karnataka leads southern states in fuel-

ling India's GDP." Karnataka had the highest GSDP rate in the country at 7.8 per cent, followed by Telangana at 7.1 per cent, Andhra Pradesh at 6.9 per cent and Tamil Nadu at 6.8 per cent. All states incur debt in their budget, Siddaramaiah said, noting that the national debt has ballooned by Rs 165 lakh crore under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "But the money should be used for welfare and asset creation," he said. Siddaramaiah said the proposed borrowing of Rs 1.32 lakh crore in the 2025-26 budget was within the limits prescribed by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budgetary Management Act, noting that state debt doubled every five years. Central government policies also came under fire in his speech, which was interjected by occasional banter between him and the Opposition benches over his power tussle with Deputy CM D K Shivakumar.

The Karnataka Government, he said, was hopeful of presenting a surplus budget for the upcoming fiscal. The Central Government's rationalisation of GST rates in the middle of the fiscal year, in September last year, affected the state's budget estimates prepared in March 2025. While the rationalisation cost the state Rs 10,000 crore in reduced revenue in the 2025-26 fiscal, the Centre has refused to compensate. This, along with pending Jal Jeevan Mission dues of Rs 13,000 crore, impacted the finances, he said. In response, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said the state had reached a situation where it had to borrow even to finance earlier loans. He said the Opposition was unhappy with the queries it raised regarding the reduction in grants to several development corporations. "To maintain fiscal discipline, the government has employed such tactics. This budget is not pro-people. So, we oppose this budget," he said.

## 'No cause for concern' As petrol and diesel shortage rumour sparks panic, Karnataka Government issues clarification



GNS News Agency, March 27

The Karnataka Government Wednesday dismissed rumours of an impending fuel shortage after reports of citizens queuing at petrol pumps with bottles, cans, and other containers in some parts of the state. In a release, the under secretary of the Food and Civil Supplies Department

said that such behaviour by consumers was triggered by speculations circulating on social media and certain localities.

"The Central Government has clarified that there is ample stock of fuel available at retail outlets across the country. Furthermore, the public is strongly advised against transporting or storing fuel in loose or unsuitable containers, as this poses serious safety risks and fire hazards," the release said. The department also issued directions to petrol pumps that only direct refuelling should be done at retail outlets. "Petrol pumps are strictly prohibited from supplying fuel in bottles, cans, or any other external containers," it said. It noted that existing laws prohibit the storage of fuel in bulk or in unauthorised containers. "The Government assures the public that the fuel supply chain remains robust and that there is no cause for concern," the release said. The panic comes amid restrictions on the sale of LPG cylinders imposed due to the West Asia conflict. The shortage has caused a crisis, especially for hoteliers in Bengaluru and other parts.

## Bengaluru's Bannerghatta zoo to get 25-metre solar-powered tower: See city skyline and wild elephants from one spot

GNS News Agency, March 27

The Bannerghatta Biological Park in Bengaluru on Tuesday signed a Rs 5-crore Memorandum of Understanding with Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies to construct a new public observation tower on the zoo premises. The 25-metre-tall proposed tower, which will accommodate 50-70 visitors at a time, will also be equipped with solar energy and rainwater harvesting capability. The skyline of the city will be visible from this vantage point during zoo hours, while also functioning as a safe wildlife observation spot. The design for the tower has been finalised, and construction is set to start in April, with completion by the end of the year. Deputy Conservator Surya Sen, who is also the executive director of the Biological Park, said that an old watchtower already exists on the spot, which was the highest point in the zoo. "You will be able to see the National Park on one side, parts of the Biological Park on the other, nearby villages, as well as the city." He also said safety measures were being put in place to ensure that wild elephants in the area do not damage the tower, along with a professional safety audit.

Explaining the conservation angle, Sen said, "We are designing the tower off-grid and completely solar powered while not affecting local flora and fauna. Earlier, we used to go to big cities to see skylines with fascination. Now people will come from the skylines to the forest to see the vastness of the forests...silence and darkness are now luxu-



ries. We want to show the public and especially the younger generations how a forest exists, and how you coexist." Writer and philanthropist Rohini Nilekani noted that she has been supporting conservation and biodiversity efforts for the past 30 years. "As a citizen of Bengaluru, Bannerghatta is very important to me. We asked Mr Surya what we could help him with further. Of his list of projects, this one appealed to me the most because it is very public-facing. I want children to come and feel a sense of wonder about the greenery we are so privileged to have around us, and hopefully become trustees of India's biodiversity," she added. Nilekani also expressed the hope that projects like the observation deck would help inculcate curiosity in visitors and a desire to protect nature.

## No one involved in drug trade will be spared, even if from AAP: Sisodia

Senior AAP leader and party Punjab in-charge Manish Sisodia Wednesday said "none involved in drug trade will be spared, even if that person is from AAP" and 'Yudh Nasheyen Viruddh' was the "final nail in the coffin" to end drug menace. Sisodia was addressing in Ludhiana's Malwa Zone on 'Yudh Nasheyen Viruddh' drive. The meeting was held at Ludhiana's Guru Nanak Dev Bhawan. The AAP leader said the "crackdown will be absolute and impartial, with strict action against every individual involved in the drug trade, even if they are linked to AAP". Addressing the party workers, he said, "If we want to free Punjab from drugs, we must fight like warriors. Clear instructions have been issued that no one involved in the drug trade should be spared regardless of political affiliation, even if the accused belongs to AAP." The senior leader said, "We belong to the land of Gurus and martyrs, and 'Yudh Nasheyen Viruddh' will prove to be the final nail in the coffin of the drug menace."

"Fight against drugs is a long and decisive battle, and the Bhagwant Singh Mann-led government is fully committed to eradicating the drug menace from Punjab," said Sisodia. "Just as the AAP is not merely a political party but a movement to root out corruption and corrupt elements from the system, similarly, we must root out drugs and drug

traffickers from Punjab." The Punjab Prabhari said the AAP has never lacked courage despite the struggles. "Even when our leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal, Satyendar Jain and myself were targeted in the so-called liquor scam, the court found there was no case at all... the government delivered landmark reforms in education, healthcare, electricity, and water supply," he said. Sisodia said ministers, MLAs and Halqa in-charges must work together with block heads and Village Defence Committees against drugs. He said, "I want to tell my AAP's MLAs, ministers and Halqa in-charges that they must not shift responsibility onto others... If any MLA, minister or Halqa in-charge feels they are not in politics to take on drug traffickers, they should not embarrass Arvind Kejriwal and must leave the party. Arvind Kejriwal, Bhagwant Singh Mann and I entered politics to fearlessly take on the drug mafia and finish their network completely... There is no point in being in the Aam Aadmi Party if you are unwilling to fight this battle." The programme was also attended by Ludhiana Deputy Commissioner Himanshu Jain, Ludhiana Police Commissioner Swapan Sharma and Khanna SSP Darpan Ahluwalia. Sharma said, "Around 2,500 drug peddlers were arrested, including 352 notorious offenders. Properties worth Rs 12 crore were seized and over 4,000 people were admitted for de-addiction treatment."

## Expert from Jamia Millia Islamia requested to interpret 'radical' literature in Arabic, NIA tells court



GNS News Agency, March 27

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) told a Delhi court that it has requested an expert from Jamia Millia Islamia to interpret "radical" material in Arabic extracted from digital devices of the accused persons in the terror module case related to the blast near Red Fort on November 10 last year. It has also asked the court for 45 more days to conclude the probe. "Judicial custody of the... accused persons is also required to confront /interpret radical material so extracted from their digital devices. In this regard, an expert from Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, has been requested to provide an interpretation report after thorough analysis of the radical material as procured, to ascertain the content of the fundamentalist/extremist nature of these literatures & articles, which are in Arabic language, seeking to promote/propagate violent jihad and preparation of bombs through household everyday articles and chemicals," the NIA submitted before the court on March 23.

The central probe agency made multiple arrests in connection with the blast, which left 13 dead and several injured after a Hyundai i20 car exploded near the Lal Qila Metro station. The NIA told the court that its investigation has yielded "multiple new leads" which are required to be proved to unearth the "larger conspiracy" behind the

incident. "During investigation, the NIA has also identified certain WhatsApp groups wherein the arrested accused persons were members... Based on the above technical analysis, legal interception of certain mobile phone numbers, including WhatsApp Legal Interception (VoIP), has been done with the aim of identifying other members ascribing to the radical/jihadi ideology of the terror module and to identify the potential associates and handlers of the arrested accused," the agency submitted before the court. It also said that nine residential premises in Jammu and Kashmir were searched on Monday during which multiple digital devices have been seized, whose technical analysis is pending.

"Approximately 5TB data has been extracted from the digital devices and sent to CERT-in and CFSL, DFSS for scrutiny and the same is still under progress. During scrutiny of the extracted data, incriminating information and facts emerged in the form of videos, voice samples, radical literature, handwritten books etc," the agency said. As per the NIA, the disclosure statements of the accused persons revealed that they were in "contact with certain foreign entities through online platforms and pseudonymous social media accounts". It also told the court that the accused could attempt to influence key witnesses who are being examined if the extension of investigation is not granted. As per the agency, which has arrested over 10 people in the case, all the accused are connected to Umar Nabi, the man who was allegedly in the i20 car which had caused the blast. Officials had confirmed he was driving it after collecting DNA samples of his mother. The NIA, which was handed over the investigation by the Union Home Ministry, is working closely with various state police forces to track and arrest others behind the blast. It is also closely tracking everyone Umar contacted over the last few months. Umar is suspected to be the leader of the "white-collar group" of doctors, part of a terror module that was busted days before the Red Fort explosion.

## After SC stay, HCS officers' IAS cadre promotions face setback



GNS News Agency, March 27

In a setback to eight Haryana Civil Services (HCS) officers awaiting promotion to the IAS cadre, the Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed an order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court that had quashed a vigilance chargesheet against them. The chargesheet was filed by the State Vigilance Bureau in June 2023 against the officers and others in connection with alleged irregularities in

the selection of the 2001-batch of the state civil services. The HC ruling had cleared the way for their promotions to the Indian Administrative Services.

Former Haryana minister Karan Singh Dalal, through his son and SC lawyer Deepkaran Dalal, moved a petition to the apex court challenging the February order of the High Court. Alleging collusion between the officers concerned and the Haryana government, Dalal had asserted that the collusion was evident from a legal opinion which had recommended issuance of integrity certificates to the officers — despite the filing of a final report under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Hearing the petition, a bench of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta said on Wednesday: "...issue notice, returnable within four weeks. In the meantime, the effect and operation of the impugned order (s) passed by the High Court shall remain stayed." Dalal had earlier challenged the selections before the HC in 2002, alleging "favouritism, malpractices and illegalities involved in the entire HCS Executive and Allied Services Examination".

## 13 dead, 20 injured as private bus collides with truck in Andhra Pradesh's Markapuram

GNS News Agency, March 27

At least 10 people were killed and 20 injured in a bus accident in Markapuram, Andhra Pradesh. At least 10 people were killed and 20 injured in a bus accident in Markapuram, Andhra Pradesh.

At least 13 people were killed and 20 others were injured after a private bus caught fire in the Markapuram district of Andhra Pradesh in the early hours of Thursday. At least 40 people were on board the Harikrishna Travels bus when the accident occurred near the Rayavaram stone

quarry. The bus travelling from Jagtial in Telangana to Vinjamuru in Nellore district collided with a truck that was joining the highway. State Minister for Medical and Health Satya Kumar Yadav expressed deep shock over the accident and said 10 people were confirmed dead. The injured were being treated at various hospitals, Yadav said. The bus was completely gutted, he said, adding that at least 30 passengers had a narrow escape. The minister issued directives to officials to ensure advanced medical care for the injured and to dispatch medical specialists to the location.

## HC Gives Punjab leeway, keeps issue on fast track



The case, heard on March 20, arises from a petition filed by Sabha member Karan Randhawa, who has sought completion of the election process and publication of the electoral roll of eligible voters.

GNS News Agency, March 27

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has granted limited time to the Punjab government in an ongoing matter concerning delayed elections to the NRI Sabha Punjab, while continuing to treat the issue as urgent amid growing concerns over institutional paralysis. The case, heard on March 20, arises from a petition filed by Sabha member Karan Randhawa, who has sought completion of the election process and publication of the electoral roll of eligible voters.

During the hearing, counsel for State submitted that approval for conducting the elections had been granted by the Chief Minister — also the Chief Patron of the Sabha — on March 16, 2026. The government requested approximately one month to place a formal election schedule on record. The HC, however, stopped short of allowing the full period sought and instead adjourned the matter to April 2, 2026, effectively giving the State a shorter window to respond while keeping the proceedings under the urgent category.

In its order, the court noted that while the election process had earlier been stated to be initiated, a crucial step—the publication of the list of eligible voters—remains pend-

ing. The petition highlights that the absence of an electoral roll has stalled the process, even after the expiry of the President's tenure earlier this year. This marks the second round of litigation on the issue. In an earlier petition disposed of on December 23, 2025, the High Court had recorded the State's position that the election process had already been initiated. The current plea contends that little tangible progress has followed since that assurance.

As per the Sabha's governing rules, elections to the President's post are to be conducted every two years. The tenure of the previous President expired on January 5, 2026, leaving the body without an elected head for over two months. The delay in preparing and publishing the electoral roll has emerged as a key bottleneck.

Alongside the election delay, Randhawa and some members have raised allegations regarding the functioning of the Sabha during the outgoing President's tenure, including non-constitution of the Central Executive Committee, non formation of the Administrative Sub-Committee, not convening of Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and no presentation of financial statements. They have also alleged that a government order dated January 31, 2024, appointing office bearers, was not implemented, and that an RTI application seeking financial details did not receive a response. These allegations form part of the petition but have not been adjudicated upon by the Court. Members have expressed concern that the continued delay may be impacting not just the central body but also district-level units, where elections are required once membership thresholds are met. The NRI Sabha Punjab—established in 1996 and operational since 1998—serves as a representative platform for Non-Resident Indians from the state, with participation limited to registered members through physical voting. With no election schedule announced so far, members have called for early finalisation of the process to restore the functioning of the Sabha and prevent further erosion of its institutional credibility. When contacted, outgoing President Parvinder Kaur she did not respond. The matter is now listed for April 2, 2026, when the State is expected to update the Court on steps taken towards conducting the elections.

## As wheat procurement season & gunny bag shortfall go hand in hand, farmers, agents question execution gaps



GNS News Agency, March 27

Punjab is entering a critical phase as it is seeing gunny bag shortage with the wheat procurement season set to begin in April — raising serious questions about the state's preparedness at a time when a bumper crop is expected to flood the mandis. It is estimated that Punjab would require nearly 26 crore gunny bags, considering each bag carries 50 kg of wheat. However, there is an anticipated shortage of around 5 crore (50 million) gunny bags for the upcoming procurement cycle — an alarming gap that could disrupt procurement operations at the peak of arrivals.

The Central government may release approximately Rs 33,000 crore to Rs 34,000 crores to Punjab for wheat procurement, which can make the situation even more concerning. Despite the significant financial allocation, the apparent lack in arranging the basic packaging infrastructure exposes serious gaps in planning and execution. Sources in the Punjab Food and Civil Supplies Department indicate that a DBA tender was floated to address the shortfall. However, the delay in ensuring timely availability of the gunny bags raises concerns about whether corrective measures have come too late. The scale of production also amplifies the concern.

Punjab typically contributes 12 to 13 million tonnes of wheat annually to the Central pool. This year, experts anticipate a bumper harvest, with procurement likely to exceed 13 million tonnes subject to favourable weather and logistics. Such increased volumes will place even greater pressure on the system, making the timely availability of

gunny bags critical. Any disruption at this stage could lead to procurement delays, mandi congestion, and financial distress for farmers. A senior officer, Punjab Food and Civil Supplies Department, said this mismatch between requirement and supply is not merely a statistical concern — it has direct on-ground implications. Without adequate gunny bags, procurement agencies may be forced to slow down lifting operations, leading to congestion in mandis. For farmers, this could mean longer waiting periods, exposure of harvested produce to weather risks, and potential distress.

The crop has been sown across more than 35 lakh hectares this season, with wheat arrivals beginning in early-April and intensifying by mid-April — this leaves no room for administrative or logistical lapses. Prem Goel, Aggarwal & Company and President, Arhtiyas Association Suman, said, "In a system where timing is everything, the question remains — will the administration be able to bridge the gap in time, or will the shortage turn into a full-blown procurement crisis?" Another procurement agent said, "Despite the scale and predictability of the procurement cycle, preparations appear to be lagging. It is learnt that the state has floated tenders for the procurement of gunny bags... execution timelines are tight. Any delay in finalising and supplying these bags could directly impact procurement speed and storage management."

Sources said certain external factors are also aggravating the supply crunch. Reduced availability of raw jute has affected the domestic production of jute bags — all of it partly linked to import disruptions. While authorities maintain that contingency measures are under consideration, stakeholders on the ground remain unconvinced. Commission agents and farmer representatives said such bottlenecks are avoidable, given that wheat procurement in Punjab is an annual and highly structured exercise. "The crop cycle is known, the procurement window is fixed and the requirements are predictable. Yet, every year, some critical gap surfaces at the last minute," said a mandi trader. "If the shortfall is not addressed on priority, Punjab could find itself grappling with avoidable chaos in mandis at the peak of the harvest season — undermining both farmer confidence and the efficiency of the procurement system," said a senior officer in Pungrain, state procurement agency.

## A cleric, lawyer, 4 others held under UAPA for 'JeM links', a Ghaziabad village shrouded in silence



A few days after the US and Israel launched their attacks on Iran, with the killing of its Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Mohd Javed, a cleric at a mosque in Nahal village of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, watched and shared videos of speeches made by Khamenei. On March 12, Javed was arrested along with five others. "Where is that a crime? We cannot watch Khamenei's videos? Police told us they found chats on Javed's phone... but all we know is that he used the word talwar (sword). How is that a crime?" says a villager. As per the Ghaziabad Police, however, the crime of the six — all belonging to the entirely Muslim village of Nahal, with a population of 22,500 — is much more serious. They accuse Javed, 45; Mohd Savez, 20; Mohd Junaid, 23; Mohd Fardin, 22; Ikram Ali, 36; and Mohd Fazru, 48, of being in touch with members of the banned Jaish-e-Mohammad and seeking to join it, and of using social media to "spread anti-national content and radicalise others". They claim to have seized mobile phones as evidence.

Barring Ikram, who is a lawyer at district court in Ghaziabad, Junaid, who works as an assistant at the same court and Javed, who is a cleric, all others are in irregular jobs. Masuri gram pradhan Tassawar Ali says Fazru has a small cart in which he transports scraps, Fardin is a labourer and Savez owns a small kirana shop.

At Nahal village, with houses that are badly in need of paint, there is a hush, marked by disbelief. Men stand in clusters, women rush by, and from terraces, half-open windows or from behind iron doors, faces appear only to quickly pull back. Almost no one claims to know any of the six. Savez's brother who does not want to be identified, and who is temporarily running the Zeeshan Kirana store owned by Savez, also brushes away all queries. A neighbour, who lives just 50 metres away, says: "Savez was the last person we thought would be arrested in a case like this and be called a terrorist."

Savez's sister, who also doesn't want to be identified, says three of her brothers, all elder to Savez, are in good

jobs. "One of them is employed with the Indian Air Force, another is an engineer and a third lives in America." Savez was more religiously inclined, stopped studies after Class 10 and hoped to become a maulana, she adds. She says police picked up Savez from his shop around 4.30 pm on March 12. "No one had any idea what he had done. When we asked police, they did not say anything," she says. The arrest of the others followed. Villagers say Ikram was arrested around 10:30 pm on March 12, Fardin was arrested when he came to the police station to enquire about Savez, and Fazru was held after he went to get his phone from police. A cousin of Junaid's says police first arrested his brother and brother-in-law, and put pressure on the family to hand him over. "Junaid's father thought that it was an investigation and he will be free soon, and so sent him." A lawyer who works with Ikram, Mohammad Chand Alam, says he has been practising for over a decade. "When Ikram was arrested, a group of senior lawyers gave a memorandum to the Ghaziabad Police Commissioner saying he was not involved in any anti-national activities," Alam said. The president of the Ghaziabad Bar Association, Bramhadev Tyagi, confirms this, adding that Ikram was among the senior-most lawyers in the district court.

District Commissioner of Police, Ghaziabad (Rural), Surendra Nath Tiwari calls Savez "self-motivated". "We have recovered his mobile phone and have evidence against him. We are questioning him," Tiwari says, calling Savez and Javed the main accused. On Javed, the DCP adds: "His uncle was wanted in an incident of violence and fled to Pakistan. We have found that Javed has been in touch with him. We are investigating the case further." Javed is the only one among the six who does not live in Nahal any more, having shifted to Masuri, where he is maulana at a mosque. Earlier, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Ghaziabad, Lipi Nagaich said Instagram chats showed Savez was in touch with a Jaish-e-Mohammad member called Hamza. "Hamza shared some videos of the outfit with them, and the six were planning to join it. They also used the Signal application (to ensure secure exchanges)," Nagaich told. Tiwari claims they stumbled upon the six during routine surveillance. "We were informed that some men of Nahal village were involved in anti-national activities. When police began an investigation, the names of the six accused came to light."

They have been booked at Masuri Police Station under Sections of endangering unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country, promoting enmity and criminal conspiracy of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). The pradhan says he has made several visits to the police station to enquire about the men. "We always get into trouble. Even if some people are responsible, all of us are blamed," he adds.

## What must we do about plastic waste? Fix accountability.



GNS News Agency, March 27

India is not only one of the world's most populous nations, it is also at the epicentre of a rapidly escalating plastic crisis. As per research conducted by the University of Leeds, India generates approximately 10.2 million tonnes of plastic waste each year, more than double that of the next highest-polluting countries. It has implications on our shared environment. At this juncture, it is pertinent to pause and reflect on the drastic transitions of Indian civilisation in the last few decades. From being a nature centred people, who co-existed sustainably with an eco-friendly lifestyle, we have turned into a consumerist society that generates tonnes of waste everyday.

India's cultural memory is rich with sustainable practices: cloth bags in every household, metal tiffin boxes passed through generations, glass bottles that were returned and reused, and earthenware commonly used in daily life. Waste, in the modern sense, barely existed because nothing was designed to be thrown away. Our transition is best reflected through the widespread use of plastic. Multi-layer plastics and single use plastics, once hailed as innovations, gradually displaced traditional, eco-friendly alternatives. Convenience became paramount, and business models optimised around speed, scale, and disposability. What was missing in this reconfiguration was a fundamental truth: the environment does not recognise convenience as a justification.

The numbers are alarming. India burns roughly 5.8 million tonnes (MT) of plastic every year and releases another 3.5 MT into the environment across land, air, and water in the form of debris. Presently, in our consumerist market, almost every item for consumption is packed in multi-layered plastic packaging. The plastic packaged goods increase shelf life, aesthetic value, and most notably profits for conglomerates, while on the other hand the disproportionate waste that gets generated is externalised for collection, processing and disposal to citizens, local governments and informal workers from marginalised communities. These materials are non-biodegradable, persist indefinitely in the environment, and silently infiltrate soil, water bodies, and the food chain in the form of microplastics and nano plastics. Cows routinely die due to plastic ingestion, rivers remain choked with waste, and urban fringes transform into growing mounds of discarded packaging. Unfortunately, the leviathan of plastic pollution moves faster than our regulatory systems can keep pace.

Recognising the scale of the crisis, the Government of India introduced the Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016. These rules strengthened reporting requirements and introduced the foundational concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). Later amendments, especially those notified in 2018, 2022, 2024, and 2025, attempted to address gaps related to multi layer plastics, biodegradable plastics, recycled content, penalties, and traceability. Yet the most critical element remains unchanged. Producers, importers, and brand owners must assume primary responsibility for the plastic waste their products generate. However, in practice, the EPR framework faces several challenges. Targets are geo-neutral, allowing obligations in one state to be offset by questionable efforts elsewhere. This complicates monitoring and undermines local accountability. Credit certificates also require strict auditing to ensure they reflect genuine waste collection and recycling rather than mere paperwork. A recent order dated 26.07.2024 of the National Green Tribunal, which issued notices to the

CPCB and MoEFCC after nearly six lakhs fake EPR certificates were uncovered from plastic recycling companies, illustrates the severity of the problem and the need for much stronger verification systems. Despite the presence of a strong legal framework, it only takes a casual walk through any city to witness its limitations. Plastic packaging sprawls across markets, highways, canals, and farmlands, revealing the gulf between regulatory intent and ground reality.

It is against this backdrop that the Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB) undertook a comprehensive plastic waste brand audit across the state. The objective was straightforward. The PPCB sought to identify the principal contributors to the plastic waste footprint in Punjab and to create a data backed foundation for accountability and systemic change. The audit revealed what many have long suspected. A relatively small number of large, powerful brands contribute disproportionately to the problem. These are entities with deep financial resources, sophisticated supply chains, and the capacity to influence consumer behaviour at scale. With such capacity comes moral and regulatory responsibility.

The purpose of this exercise is not to create another stack of documents. It is meant to trigger a shift in intent. If companies can invest in market expansion, product design and advertising campaigns featuring top celebrities, they can certainly invest in building effective mechanisms to retrieve plastic waste from consumers. We recognise that the gap is not technological rather ideological. In our aim to move from an externalisation of waste regime, brands are being encouraged to take moral, legal and ecological responsibility for their waste. One of the key directions being strongly encouraged is the development of incentive-based schemes for consumers. For years, waste management has relied excessively on municipal bodies, informal waste sector workers ragpickers, and citizen goodwill. This approach is fundamentally unfair. The burden of cleanup must fall on those who profit from the production and sale of plastic packaging. Deposit return systems, loyalty-based collection incentives, doorstep buyback models, take back kiosks, and digital reward systems are entirely feasible. When brands innovate, markets respond. The same creativity that fuels market growth must now be applied to waste recovery. At its heart, the brand audit is more than a compliance exercise. It is a call to conscience. Plastic pollution is not the inevitable price of development. It is the result of choices made without foresight. The responsibility cannot rest solely with consumers or municipal authorities. In Punjab, the PPCB is nudging investment directly in infrastructure including collection points, material recovery facilities, and modern recycling plants. India's EPR regime has to hold brands genuinely accountable for delivering a cleaner, waste-responsible India and Punjab currently is leading the charge.

## Drug and Socio-Economic Census: Behind Punjab move to count its addicts, policy shift from enforcement to targeted rehabilitation



The Punjab government is set to roll out its first comprehensive Drug and Socio-Economic Census in April, with nearly 28,000 government employees tasked to survey around 65 lakh families across the state. The exercise is expected to be completed within three months. The initiative aims to create a "scientific" strategy to combat the drug menace by collecting household-level data, shifting the focus from enforcement to targeted rehabilitation. The state has allocated Rs 150 crore for the census and related de-addiction efforts. Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Cheema said the census would provide crucial insights into the scale and impact of substance abuse. "The census aims to determine the magnitude of drug abuse, identify specific substances used, and assess the impact on socio-economic factors like employment, poverty, and education levels," he told The Indian Express.

The decision to conduct the census followed a pilot survey in 11 villages, where authorities found that families were willing to share information about drug addiction despite concerns about stigma. A government official said, "We carried out a dipstick test. There were apprehensions that the families may not be forthcoming due to social stigma involved. However, we realised that they are so sick of the menace that they see everyone approaching them as a God-sent opportunity. They want help, no matter who is willing to offer it. Such is the state of affairs."

Cheema said the initiative would only strengthen the government's anti-drug campaign. "We have achieved enormous success with our Yudh Nasheyen Virudh campaign. But we want to identify even the last person hooked to drugs. This will not only help us in tackling the menace

by making it the responsibility of the government to send every addict to a de-addiction centre but also to identify the peddlers supplying to him. This will also help break the nexus of law enforcers with the peddlers, if any," he said. The Panchayats and Rural Development Department has been designated as the nodal agency for the exercise. It will coordinate with other departments to carry out the door-to-door survey. School teachers, including computer instructors, will be deployed as enumerators.

Announced in the Punjab Budget for 2025-26, the census is also expected to contribute to the government's "Badalta Punjab" roadmap. Previous studies, including the Punjab Opioid Dependence Survey and research by the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, had estimated that over 30 lakh people in Punjab use some form of drugs, with higher prevalence in border districts. However, officials say the new census will provide more accurate and updated data. "The upcoming census will provide up-to-date, definitive data to replace these older estimates," an official said, adding that it could also help the state shed its image of "Udta Punjab".

The drug menace is a politically contentious issue in Punjab. In 2012, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had sparked controversy by claiming that 70 per cent of Punjab's youth were addicted to drugs. Speaking to students at Panjab University in Chandigarh he had said that "seven out of 10 youth in Punjab have drug problems," subsequently blaming the then Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP coalition government for not providing opportunities and failing to tackle the menace. This had invited criticism, with the ruling combine accusing him of defaming Punjab. Presenting the Budget earlier this month, Cheema said preparations for the census were complete. "The necessary groundwork has been completed, including development of the dedicated software platform and comprehensive training of field functionaries to ensure accuracy, transparency and data integrity. Building upon this preparedness, the census will be rolled out from April," he said. Highlighting progress under the state's anti-drug drive, Cheema added, "Over the past year, 36,686 cases have been registered against 52,331 drug traffickers under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, leading to the seizure of more than 33,000 kg of narcotics through intelligence-led operations."

## CU enters global top 300 in 3 subjects, ranked in 11 disciplines

ing, and Mechanical, Aeronautical & Manufacturing Engineering. Additionally, it now ranks among the top 400 globally in six subjects, a significant jump from just two subjects last year.

Expressing satisfaction, Vice-Chancellor Dr Raviraja N Seetharam said, "It's truly gratifying to see that Chandigarh University secured top rankings in 11 subjects in the QS World University Rankings by Subjects-2026, which is more than double compared to five subjects in 2025." He added, "The 11 subjects include Computer Science and Information Systems, Chemical Engineering, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Mechanical, Aeronautical & Manufacturing Engineering, Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Environmental Sciences, Mathematics, Physics, Business and Management Studies, and Economics. Chandigarh University has always been committed to nurturing young talent

through academic excellence, quality placements, industry-centric research, and a flexible learning environment."

Senior managing director Deepinder Singh Sandhu termed the achievement a matter of pride, stating, "Within just 14 years of its inception, Chandigarh University continues its upward march in global rankings by debuting in six new subjects and improving performance in five key disciplines. This underscores our commitment to excellence in higher education." The university recorded notable improvements across disciplines. In Computer Science, it moved up from the 301-350 bracket to 250-300. Electrical & Electronics Engineering saw a major leap from 401-450 to 251-300, while Business & Management climbed over 100 ranks to 301-350. Chemistry witnessed a sharp rise from 551-600 to 351-400. In a significant milestone, the Chandigarh University made its debut in six subjects:

## India's carbon emissions in 2025 grew at slowest rate in two decades: CREA analysis



New Delhi: India's carbon dioxide emissions grew in 2025 at the slowest rate in more than two decades, according to an analysis by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA). The analysis also pointed out that emissions in the power sector fell by 3.8 pc as record clean-energy growth combined with weak electricity demand. Also, consumption of imported coal at power plants fell by 20 per cent in 2025.

"India's carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions grew by 0.5 per cent in the second half of 2025 and by just 0.7 per cent in the year as a whole, the slowest rate in more than two decades. "This is a sharp slowdown from the growth of 4-11 per cent in the preceding four years and marks the lowest rate of increase since 2001, excluding the impact of Covid in 2020," said the analysis on India's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuels and cement, based on official data for fuel use, industrial production and power output.

"This is the second in a new series of half-yearly analysis on India's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuels and cement, based on official data for fuel use, industrial production and power output," it added. According to Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at CREA, the analysis shows that India's power sector is poised for a potential inflection point, where clean-energy additions can meet or exceed the growth in electricity demand. If clean energy matches expectations, allowing this inflection point to take place, then coal-fired power output and the associated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions would see sustained falls. "In addition, oil demand is falling in the petrochemical industry and is expected to slow down in the steel and cement sectors. Despite these trends, which could signal a lasting slowdown in emissions, India is planning major expansions in its capacity for coal power, petrochemicals and coal-based steel. "The path of India's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over the coming years depends on how it resolves these apparent contradictions regarding its future demand for fossil fuels," it said.

The report noted that while India's carbon emissions have been growing rapidly for decades, with annual increases averaging 4.9 pc per year since 1990 and 4-11 per cent during 2021-24, the 0.7 per cent rise in 2025 was the slowest since 2001, excluding the impact of COVID in 2020. The fall in power-sector emissions is particularly notable, given it was the largest driver of emissions increases in 2021-2023, responsible for half of the total growth.

Across the sectors, the reductions and weak growth in fossil-fuel consumption eased India's vulnerability to the recent price and supply disruptions taking place in the wake of the attacks on Iran by the US and Israel, as well as Iran's subsequent retaliation. Notably, India's fossil-fuel imports were disproportionately affected by falling demand overall. Consumption of imported coal at power plants fell by 20 pc in 2025. There were two key reasons why emissions fell in India's power sector in 2025.

First, the country added 47 gigawatts (GW) of solar, 6.3GW of wind, 4.0GW of hydropower and 0.6GW of nuclear power in 2025. "The annual electricity generation from this new capacity, calculated based on the average capacity utilisation of each technology, amounts to 90 terawatt hours (TWh). This is twice as much as the clean generation added in 2024, which in itself was a record," it said. The largest reductions in coal-fired power generation took place in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan, the three states that also led the buildout of new solar and wind power. "Power demand is expected to pick up again, with Indian credit-rating agency ICRA projecting growth of 5.0-5.5 per cent in the financial year starting in April 2026. These capacity additions would deliver additional annual generation of more than 100TWh, enough to cover demand growth of up to 5.8 per cent. "This means that India's power sector could reach an inflection point this year, where clean-energy growth matches the expected average rise in demand," it said. For oil demand, which slowed from 3.9 per cent growth in 2024 to 0.4 per cent in 2025, the key drivers came in the petrochemical and cement industry, where demand fell.

"Specifically, demand fell for naphtha, petcoke and other oil products. Naphtha is used as chemical industry feedstock, while petcoke is used mainly in cement production. Part of the fall in demand was due to an increase in India's imports of plastics and precursors, which rose by 7 per cent in volume terms, while exports fell. "The increase in imports came almost entirely from China, where the petrochemical industry is expanding, leading to complaints in India of price dumping. Mirroring the shift of plastics production to China, India began exporting large volumes of naphtha to the country," it added.

## Nipah virus could turn into something "far more severe", scientists warn



Surveillance, ecological monitoring, and cross-border communication cannot wait for the next outbreak, authors said. The Nipah virus, which was first identified in Malaysia in 1999, is still not a priority in South and Southeast Asia despite its repeated emergence, says a correspondence by scientists published in The Lancet. "The danger of Nipah virus is its persistence, that is, it is periodic, lethal, and preventable," the authors say. They caution that the way South and Southeast Asia respond now, will determine whether Nipah virus remains a regional epidemic or if it "escalates into something far more severe." Recent outbreak responses. The correspondence warns that the recent cases in India (and Bangladesh) are not anomalies but reminders of a virus with recurrent outbreaks, high mortality, frequent infections of health-care workers, and no approved vaccines or treatments.

Most recently, on 26 January 2026, two laboratory-confirmed cases of Nipah virus infection were recorded in West Bengal. The patients were both nurses at a hospital in the North 24 Parganas district and slipped into a coma.

While one had to be placed on mechanical ventilation and died in February, the other nurse was eventually discharged. The Nipah virus infection is a serious but rare zoonotic disease and is transmitted to humans through infected animals such as bats, or food contaminated with saliva, urine, and excreta of infected animals, according to WHO. It can also be transmitted between people through close contact. Even today, there are no licensed medicines or vaccines for Nipah infection, but early supportive care can help survival.

Amplifying the risk of contracting the Nipah virus are deforestation, urban expansion, agricultural intensification, and increase human-bat interactions, says the correspondence. "Fruit bats roost near homes, forage in cultivated areas, and contaminate food and surfaces, creating opportunities for spillover," it added. Pigs, in particular, magnify the risk of disease. While the Nipah virus is well understood and reservoirs have been identified, translating this knowledge into action has been poor, say the authors. "Surveillance is activated too late, research funding is sporadic, and preparedness is episodic."

Much like South Asia, Southeast Asia is susceptible too. Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines with high populations, growing agriculture, and abundant fruit bats, has conditions similar to south Asia, say the scientists, adding that "Cross-border movement and informal animal trade elevate regional spillover risk." The authors call for One Health strategies -- linking human, animal, and environmental health--along with regular funding, and regional coordination. "Surveillance, ecological monitoring, and cross-border communication cannot wait for the next outbreak," they say. And preparedness cannot be episodic: short-term responses might contain outbreaks but do little to prevent the next occurrence.

## India buys first Iran LPG cargo in years after U.S. eases sanctions, sources say

India has bought its first cargo of Iranian liquefied petroleum gas in years after the U.S. temporarily removed sanctions on Tehran's oil and refined fuels, LSG trade flows and three industry sources said. India had shunned energy purchases from Iran in 2019 under pressure from Western sanctions. The tanker was initially bound for China, according to LSEG data. Sanctioned tanker Aurora carrying Iranian LPG is expected to shortly reach the west coast port of Mangalore, the sources said and LSEG data showed.

The South Asian nation has been hit hard by the disruption of energy shipments via the Strait of Hormuz caused by the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran. Three retailers to share LPG cargo

The Iranian LPG cargo will be shared among the three fuel retailers, Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum Corp, and Hindustan Petroleum Corp. The cargo has been purchased from a trader, and payment will be made in rupees, the sources said, adding India is exploring buying more Iranian LPG cargoes.

Still, an official said he was not aware of Iranian cargoes being bought. "There are no loaded cargoes from Iran, we have not heard of that," said Rajesh Kumar Sinha, special secretary in the federal shipping ministry said Wednesday at a press conference. The three companies and India's oil ministry did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comments. Most of imported LPG from West Asia. The world's second-largest LPG importer is battling its worst gas crisis in decades with the government cutting supplies for industries to shield households from any shortage of cooking gas.



**Sanctioned tanker Aurora carrying Iranian LPG is expected to shortly reach the west coast port of Mangalore, the sources told Reuters and LSEG data showed**

India consumed 33.15 million metric tons of LPG, or cooking gas, last year, with imports accounting for about 60% of demand. About 90% of those imports came from West Asia. India is gradually moving out of its stranded LPG cargoes from the Strait of Hormuz, with four LPG tankers moved so far--Shivalik, Nanda Devi, Pine Gas, and Jag Vasant. India is also loading LPG onto its empty vessels stranded in the Persian Gulf.

## With NavIC setback, India unable to use satellite system for security purposes: experts



With India's navigation satellite system -- Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) -- not fully functional, one of the biggest concerns is that the country will be unable to use it for security and strategic purposes, say experts. A major setback occurred after the last atomic clock on board the Indian Regional Navigational Satellite System-1F (IRNSS-1F) stopped functioning on March 10, leaving only three satellites of the constellation capable of providing position, navigation, and timing services.

At least four satellites with operational atomic clocks are required for the navigation satellite system to function properly. Ananya Ray, a former scientist with the Indian

Space Research Organisation (ISRO), said: "Systems like NavIC have two signals -- an open signal for common people and a restricted military signal that increases accuracy roughly tenfold." Armed forces of countries use the navigation satellite system for logistics, mapping and operational planning, and relying on a foreign navigation satellite system could pose security issues, especially during wars.

"If you are in a war and using someone else's system, they could add errors to the signals or spoof you, making you think you are in the wrong position. Depending on another country's satellites is a dependency out of your control that can prove fatal during war," said Ms. Ray. India began to develop NavIC after the 1999 Kargil War, during which the United States refused to share GPS data. The first-generation satellites for NavIC, known as the Indian Regional Navigational Satellite System (IRNSS) series, were launched between 2013 and 2018.

However, the constellation of satellites soon began to face issues, with the atomic clocks aboard several IRNSS series satellites repeatedly stopping to work. Atomic clocks are the heart of such navigation satellites, as they provide the high-precision timing necessary for the navigation and positioning technology. E.A.S. Sarma, former bureaucrat, said, "Usually, each of these satellites carries three or four atomic clocks for redundancies. So, if one goes bad, then one should be able to switch to the other one. In the case of IRNSS-1F, all of its atomic clocks have stopped working."

To make matters worse, the space agency had on August 31, 2017 attempted to replace the IRNSS-1A with IRNSS-1H, but the mission failed to insert the satellite into the desired orbit. Subsequently, ISRO began launching the second generation of satellites for NavIC, known as the NVS series. While it successfully placed NVS-01 in the desired orbit in 2023, the 2025 launch of NVS-02 failed. This has delayed the launch of NVS-03, NVS-04, and NVS-05, leaving the NavIC system with only IRNSS 1-B, IRNSS 1-L, and NVS-01, which are currently capable of providing navigation services. Mr. Sarma suggested that ISRO and the government have been distracted by missions such as Gaganyaan and the Axiom Mission 4, which involved Shubhanshu Shukla going to the International Space Station -- the first Indian to do so. "India cannot afford to rely on foreign navigation systems like GPS... Our priority must be strategic application, followed by other purposes, and lastly, political optics," he said.

## Iran, U.S. harden their positions as Tehran keeps its grip on Strait of Hormuz



Tehran moved to formalise its control over the crucial Strait of Hormuz while Washington prepared for the arrival of U.S. combat forces in the region that could be used on the ground in the Islamic Republic. Iran is instituting a "de facto toll booth" regime, industry experts say, with some ships paying in Chinese yuan to pass through the strait, where 20% of all traded oil and natural gas is transported in peacetime. Meanwhile, a strike group anchored by the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli drew closer to the West Asia with some 2,500 Marines. Also, at least 1,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne have been ordered to the region. The troop movements don't guarantee U.S. President Donald Trump will try to use force to compel Iran to open the strait and halt its attacks on Gulf Arab states.

Mr. Trump previously deployed a large force in the Caribbean before the American military captured former Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro in January. In the current situation, the U.S. is seen as focused on possibly seizing Iran's oil terminal at Kharg Island or other sites near the strait. U.S. Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, who commands the American military in the region, said his forces have hit more than 10,000 targets since Israel and the U.S. started the war February 28, destroying 92% of Iran's largest ships and more than two-thirds of the country's missile, drone and naval production facilities.

People gather at the missile impact site, after Iranian missile barrages were launched at Israel, amid the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran, in central Israel, on March 26, 2026. People gather at the missile impact site, after Iranian missile barrages were launched at Israel, amid the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran, in central Israel, on March 26, 2026. "We're not done yet," said Admiral Cooper, who heads the U.S. Central Command, in a video message. "We are on a path to completely eliminate Iran's wider military apparatus." Iran seen as operating Strait of Hormuz as de facto toll booth With its stranglehold on traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which leads from the Persian Gulf toward the open ocean, Iran has been blocking ships it perceives as linked to the U.S. and Israeli war effort, but letting through a trickle of others. The Fars and Tasnim news agencies, both close to Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, quoted lawmaker Mohammadreza Rezaei Kouchi as saying that parliament was working to formalise the process of charging fees to let ships pass. "We provide its security, and it is natural that ships and oil tankers should pay such fees," he was quoted as saying. Lloyd's List Intelligence called it a "de facto toll booth" regime. The shipping intelligence firm said vessels have to provide manifests, crew details and their destination to Iran's Guard for sanctions screening, cargo alignment checks that currently prioritises oil over all other commodities, and for what is described as geopolitical vetting.

"While not all ships are paying a direct toll, at least two vessels have and the payment is settled in yuan," Lloyd's List said, referring to China's currency. Members of the Israeli emergency services, security officials and onlookers gather at the missile impact site, after Iranian missile barrages were launched at Israel, amid the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran, in central Israel, on March 26, 2026. Members of the Israeli emergency services, security officials and onlookers gather at the missile impact site, after Iranian missile barrages were launched at Israel, amid the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran, in central Israel.

Iran's grip on the strait and relentless attacks on Gulf regional energy infrastructure has sent oil prices skyrocketing and concerns of a global energy crisis surging. Brent

crude, the international standard, traded at \$104 early Thursday (March 26, 2026), up more than 40% from the day the war started. "To make it crystal clear, this war is a catastrophe for world's economies," German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius told reporters during a visit to Australia. U.S. maintains negotiations are ongoing but Iran says there are no talks. Using Pakistan as an intermediary, Washington has delivered to Iran a 15-point ceasefire proposal, which includes the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. Mr. Trump, speaking at a fundraiser Wednesday night in Washington, insisted that Iran still wants to cut a deal. "They are negotiating, by the way, and they want to make a deal so badly, but they're afraid to say it because they figure they'll be killed by their own people," Mr. Trump said. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in an interview on state TV, however, that his government has not engaged in talks to end the war, "and we do not plan on any negotiations".

Mr. Araghchi said the U.S. had tried to send messages to Iran through other nations, "but that is not a conversation nor a negotiation". Press TV, the English-language broadcaster on Iranian state television, said Iran has its own five-point proposal, which includes "sovereignty they'll be the Strait of Hormuz". A wave of Israeli airstrikes hits as Iran fires on Gulf neighbours Israel said it carried out a wave of attacks early on Thursday targeting Iranian infrastructure, and air defences were heard in Tehran, while heavy strikes were also reported around Isfahan, a city some 330 kilometers (205 miles) south of the Iranian capital.

Ifahan is home to a major Iranian air base and other military sites, as well as one of the nuclear sites bombed by the U.S. during the 12-day war between Israel and Iran in June. Sirens sounded very early on Thursday (March 26) morning in parts of Tel Aviv and cities in central Israel. Rescue workers said two people were injured in a blast in Kfar Qasim. Saudi Arabia's Defence Ministry said it intercepted multiple drones over its oil-rich Eastern Province, the United Arab Emirates' air defences also worked to intercept incoming fire, and Bahrain reported extinguishing a blaze in a neighbourhood that is home to the Bahrain International Airport. Since the war began, more than 1,500 people have been killed in Iran, its Health Ministry says. Twenty people have been killed in Israel; two Israeli soldiers have also been killed in Lebanon. At least 13 US military members have been killed. More than a dozen civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gulf Arab states have also died. Nearly 1,100 people have died in Lebanon, authorities said. In Iraq, where Iranian-supported militant groups have entered the conflict, 80 members of the security forces have been killed.

## U.S. to deploy 1,000 elite troops to West Asia

Amid the escalating strikes, counterattacks and rising tensions in West Asia, the United States military is preparing to deploy at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to the region in the coming days, according to people with knowledge of the plans.

The unit is considered the Army's emergency response force and can typically be deployed on short notice.

The force would include a battalion of the 1st Brigade Combat Team as well as Maj. Gen. Brandon Tegtmeier, the division's commander, and the division staff, according to the people who spoke on Tuesday on condition of anonymity. It's the latest addition of American troops to the Iran war effort after U.S. officials recently said thousands of Marines aboard several Navy ships will be heading to the region. Diplomats from various countries said they were working behind the scenes to ferry messages between the warring parties. But there was no let-up in the military activity, with targets in Iran, Israel, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia all coming under fire. The Israeli military said on Wednesday it had completed several waves of airstrikes in Tehran. The semi-official Iranian SNN News Agency said the strikes hit a residential area in the city, with rescuers searching the rubble.

## Cybersecurity breaches top risk for India Inc: FICCI-EY survey



New Delhi: About 51 per cent of India Inc rank cybersecurity breaches as the top risk to organisational performance, a survey showed. This is followed closely by changing customer demands and expectations at 49 per cent, while 48 per cent point to geopolitical events as a key risk factor, according to the FICCI-EY 'Risk Survey'. The report draws on inputs from senior leaders across sectors, on factors affecting pricing, supply chains, talent strategies and technology investments, making risk management central to business strategy.

"In a business environment shaped by volatility, the ability to anticipate, absorb and adapt to risk is emerging as a defining capability for sustained growth. The report indicates that organisations are moving away from treating risk as episodic and are instead embedding it into strategic de-

cision-making, governance structures and long-term planning," said Rajeev Sharma, Chair, FICCI Committee on Corporate Security and Disaster Risk Reduction. Technology risk is now tightly linked to operational continuity. The survey shows that 61 per cent of respondents feel that rapid technological change and digital disruption are affecting their competitive position, while an equal proportion (61 per cent) identify cyber-attacks and data breaches as major financial and reputational threats.

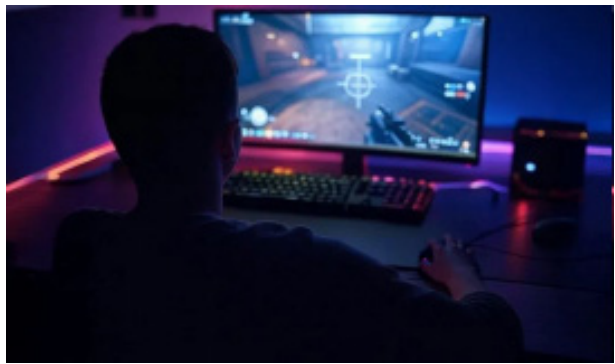
More than half, 57 per cent, report potential data theft and insider fraud as significant risks, and 47 per cent acknowledge difficulty in addressing increasingly sophisticated cyber threats, said the report. Artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a dual risk area, where both under-adoption and weak governance are sources of concern. The survey indicates that 60 per cent of respondents believe inadequate adoption of emerging technologies, including AI, can adversely impact operational effectiveness. At the same time, 54 per cent feel AI-related risks, including ethical and governance issues, are not being effectively managed. Sudhakar Rajendran, Risk Consulting Leader, EY India said, "Organisations are navigating a phase where multiple risks are converging rather than occurring in isolation." "Inflation, cyber threats, AI governance, climate exposure and regulatory change are interacting in ways that directly influence India Inc's performance and resilience. Boards are being pushed to strengthen oversight, improve data quality and integrate resilience into core strategy," Rajendran mentioned.

## Digital addiction fuelling mental health crisis among youth: Economic Survey

New Delhi: Digital addiction is growing as a significant health problem among children and the youth and is also contributing to the mental health crisis in the country, said the government on Thursday in the Economic Survey 2025-26. The Survey tabled in the Parliament by the Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Nirmala Sitharaman, noted that digital addiction is closely linked with the degrading mental health of the youth in the country. "Digital addiction negatively affects academic performance and workplace productivity due to distractions, 'sleep debt', and reduced focus. It also erodes social capital," it said.

Buy vitamins and supplements To address this problem, the CBSE has issued guidelines on safe internet use in schools and school buses. Other measures include the Ministry of Education's Pragyatah framework, which guides digital education planning with attention to screen time, and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights guidelines on screen time limits and online safety. Further, the Survey also mentioned the high prevalence of social media addiction among those aged 15-24, which is strongly associated with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and cyberbullying stress. Other issues plaguing Indian youth include compulsive scrolling, social comparison, and gaming disorders. These are increasingly leading to sleep disruption, aggression, social withdrawal, and depression, with adolescent populations being especially vulnerable. To address this issue, the government has taken multiple measures, the Survey said.

This includes the Tele-MANAS (Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States), which has



since its launch in October 2022, received over 32 lakh calls; the SHUT (Service for Healthy Use of Technology) Clinic at NIMHANS, Bengaluru, which provides specialised care for excessive and compulsive technology use, focusing on adolescents and young adults; and the Online Gaming (Regulation) Act, 2025, which represents a major step to address digital addiction and financial harm among youth. As digital access cannot be fully restricted, the Survey suggested the establishment of offline youth hubs, particularly in urban slums and rural areas, to provide alternatives to digital spaces; moderated online safe spaces hosted by schools or similar institutions. "Schools play a critical role in shaping digital habits, and hence, they should introduce a Digital Wellness Curriculum covering screen time literacy, cyber safety, and mental health awareness," it said, while calling for a "holistic approach, including physical and mental health, is essential to ensure a resilient future".

## India's internet user base crosses 950 million in 2025: IAMAI report

Bengaluru: India's internet user base crossed 950 million in 2025, driven largely by rapid growth in rural connectivity, rising short-video consumption, and increasing adoption of AI, according to a report released by IAMAI on Thursday. The report also revealed that rural India accounts for 57 per cent of India's active internet users, i.e. approximately 548 million active users.

The 'Internet in India Report 2025,' jointly prepared by Internet and Mobile Association of India and KANTAR, which highlights these trends, was released at the India Digital Summit in the presence of Manjula N, Secretary to the Government, Department of Electronics, IT/BT and Science & Technology, Government of Karnataka. According to the report, India now has 958 million Active Internet Users (AIU), marking an approximate 8 per cent year on year growth, reinforcing India's position as one of the world's largest and fastest-evolving digital markets.

It also reveals that 44 per cent of users have engaged with AI enabled features such as voice search, image based search, chatbots, and AI filters. "This growth of internet users continues to be led decisively by rural India, which is now home to approximately 548 million active internet users," the report said. Rural regions now account for over 57 per cent of India's active internet users and are growing at nearly four times the pace of urban India, signalling a structural shift in where and how digital adoption is expanding, it added. The report highlighted that artificial intelligence has reached mass adoption in India, with 44 per cent of users engaging with AI-enabled features such as voice search, image-based search, chatbots, and AI filters. "Usage is highest among younger audiences, with 57 per cent of users aged 15-24 years and 52 per cent of those aged 25-44 years reporting AI usage in the past year," it added.

The report further revealed that short-video consumption has emerged as a key growth driver within this expanding user base. It noted that in 2025, 588 million (61 per cent) internet users consumed short-video content, with rural users marginally outnumbering urban users. Adoption is strongest among younger audiences, cementing their role as a key driver of digital engagement. In the statement, citing the report, IAMAI said that quick commerce is leading a fundamental shift in how Indians shop online, with social commerce close behind, as the e-commerce ecosystem expands beyond traditional online marketplaces. Among urban users, 230 million people (56 per cent of the urban active internet base) shopped online in the past year, with quick commerce and social commerce gaining prominence alongside established marketplaces, it added. IAMAI also noted that multi-device usage is on the rise, with India now having 193 million multi-device internet users, representing 20 per cent of all active internet users, up from 165 million in 2024. "Urban adoption stands at 31 per cent, while rural India is catching up at 12 per cent. Shared device usage continues to be a key enabler of digital access: 18 per cent of internet users go online through someone else's mobile device, and nearly 80 per cent of these users are based in rural areas," the report stated. It also revealed that despite



strong momentum, 38 per cent of India's population—about 579 million people—remains non-active internet users. "However, this proportion has been steadily declining year after year, signalling substantial headroom for the continued expansion of India's digital economy," it said. The 2025 edition of the Internet in India report is based on a sample of nearly 100,000 consumers across more than 400 towns and over 1,000 villages, it added.

## Gold, silver surge on weaker dollar and geopolitical tensions

Mumbai: Gold and silver prices surged sharply on Monday due to a weaker US dollar and persistent geopolitical uncertainties.

MCX gold February futures jumped 1.31 per cent to Rs 1,57,484 per 10 grams around 10.45 am on an intraday basis. Meanwhile MCX silver March futures climbed 4.81 per cent to Rs 2,61,900 per kg.

On the MCX, silver prices, earlier in the day, had jumped as much as 6 per cent to its day's high of Rs 2,64,885 per kg before a round of profit booking. The US dollar touched its lowest level since February 4, making greenback-priced metals cheaper for overseas buyers.

Even as Iran's top diplomat called US-Iran nuclear talks a "good start" on Friday, Tehran has reiterated that the country would retain its right to enrich uranium. Experts anticipate that geopolitical tensions may persist for longer, continuing to drive investors to safe-haven assets. Market hopes of further rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve got stronger after San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly called for one or two more interest rate cuts to alleviate weakness in the labour market. US Fed rate cut hopes remain another supporting factor for gold and silver prices, analysts said. "Gold has support at Rs 1,54,000 and Rs 1,51,800 zones while resistance at Rs 1,57,700 and Rs 1,60,000. Silver has support at Rs 2,36,600 and Rs 2,44,000 levels while resistance at Rs 2,55,500 and Rs 2,62,600," an analyst said.

## Budget may cut reliance on foreign telescopes, but trips on space spending



The budget has brought some cheer to India's research community, particularly for those involved in astronomy and space research, as it has earmarked ₹13,416.20 crore for the Department of Space for 2026-27. A large chunk of the allocation has been set aside for deep-space exploration and astrophysics, including to build two advanced telescope facilities: the 30-m National Large Optical-Infrared Telescope and the National Large Solar Telescope near Pangong Lake in Ladakh.

Also in focus is the COSMOS-2 planetarium in Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, to be completed soon, and improving the control systems of the Himalayan Chandra Telescope in Hanle, Ladakh. Currently, only the U.S., China, Japan and the European Union prioritise astronomy research to a high degree and constantly invest large sums to upgrade their terrestrial and space telescopes. So, astronomers have said, the telescope allocations will improve space research capability and science outreach in India. Frontier research However, experts also raised concerns about a significant drop in expenditure, with the actual expense falling short of budgetary estimates. This underutilisation has in the past led to bottlenecks in the planning and executing major projects. "There were several proposed space missions which were finally not supported," Bhaswati Mookerjee, professor and chairperson of the Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, said. Dr. Mookerjee added that although this budget "is an extremely positive step for astronomy in India," the importance of following it through couldn't be overstated: "The execution of big projects in India would still require some streamlining of resources with checks and balances." "Only a few large astronomical observatories are capable of frontier research and groundbreaking discoveries worldwide, which means researchers have to compete for observation time. And when funding agencies favour their own national researchers, international scientists' access becomes increasingly restricted, and Indians are no exception.

Relying on overseas facilities To make matters worse, an astrophysicist (who didn't wish to be identified) told this reporter that India's problem is compounded by the attitude of bureaucrats and administrators. "They are close-minded regarding concepts like buying fractional time on large telescopes or missions — measures that are not only essential to foster stronger international collaborations and keep us at the forefront of astronomy research, but also serve as a stop-gap arrangement till we have our own large telescopes," the astrophysicist said. For far too long has the country relied on overseas facilities for high-resolution data and specialised equipment to do space science, including collaborative projects such as radio, optical, and space-based observations. Acquiring strong domestic capabilities

in space science and astrophysics is thus imperative if India is to reduce its dependence on foreign observatories.

Steadily strengthened Building large-scale, next-generation observatories for cutting-edge space research, however, involves overcoming formidable financial and technological hurdles. These challenges often require collaborative partnerships with international teams and pooling resources and expertise with them is often the only way for Indian scientists to participate in ambitious projects. Adequate funding, effective governance and partnership with domestic industry offer a realistic solution to shrug off this dependence on foreign facilities and research data.

Fortunately, India's astronomy and space research ecosystem is being steadily strengthened with the addition of cutting-edge technology platforms. These include optical and radio telescopes, such as the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) near Pune, and data processing centres capable of AI-driven data analysis. These efforts, alongside the new budgetary push, could boost India's research capabilities, with the growing shift towards public-private partnerships in space research adding to the optimism. "Basic science and big budget experiments all over the world require funding from state agencies" Dr. Mookerjee said. "While there are many private enterprises in the space sector, proper channeling of their efforts and overall quality control and monitoring would require setting up of statutory bodies involving government agencies." "In the past decade or so we have seen many startups in the space sector, often working in close collaboration with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) experts," Abhinav Susobhanan, assistant professor of physics at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Thiruvananthapuram, said. "The Department of Space established the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre in 2020 to promote such partnerships. This is a positive sign as such partnerships will promote innovation and attract private investment in the space sector." "Sub-millimetre skyFor that to happen, however, policymakers should acknowledge "the imperative for strategic resource allocation and collaborative initiatives to maximise the scientific output from the country's astronomical assets." But, he cautioned, "we also have to keep in mind that private interests may not always align with the interests of the nation as a whole." An important upside of developing homegrown cutting-edge resources in space science is that it will encourage students to engage in advanced research in the country, arresting the steady brain drain to institutions abroad. But that has been easier said, with a lot of homework still being required before it becomes a reality. For instance, the GMRT is the world's largest radio telescope array operating at low frequencies and attracts astronomers from across the world. But in the absence of a comparable optical telescope in the country, Indian scientists are forced to stand in line for telescope time at foreign facilities, as they do for doing research in high frequency radio astronomy. Similarly, India doesn't have any telescope that operates in the critical sub-millimetre wavelengths. "The sub-millimetre sky is a unique window for probing the architecture of the universe and structures within it, from the dusty sub-millimetre galaxies to the ringed nature of protostellar disks," Dr. Mookerjee said. "A proposal is in the pipeline and it is also a part of the Astronomy & Astrophysics Mega Science Vision 2035." "Only when such projects are realised can India's march towards becoming a leader in space exploration gather pace.

## Gujarat exchanges Letter of Intent with Starlink for high-speed internet connectivity

The Gujarat government exchanged a Letter of Intent (LoI) with Starlink for mutual cooperation in high-speed satellite-based internet connectivity in remote, border and underserved areas of the State. The LoI was exchanged with Satellite Communications Private Limited, a subsidiary of Elon Musk's SpaceX, at a ceremony in Gandhinagar in the presence of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi, an official release said. It took place between State Industries Commissioner P. Swaroop and Head of Starlink India Prabhakar Jayakumar.

The aim is to provide high-speed satellite-based internet connectivity in the State's remote, border, and underserved areas that currently have limited telecom infrastructure, the release said, adding it is part of the Digital Connectivity Mission and other strategic initiatives. "Under the pilot project of this LoI, it is planned to connect Common Service Centres (CSCs), e-Governance facilities, government schools, district disaster management control rooms, ports, and wildlife sanctuary regions. The project aims toward digital inclusion in tribal districts, including Aspirational Districts such as Narmada and Dahod," it said.

With strong connectivity for police outposts, disaster management centres, wildlife monitoring, and agricultural research centres, the implementation of this LoI will enhance security and stability while ensuring reliable digital service delivery, the release informed. "Under this initiative, smart



connectivity will be enabled in state schools for education, and healthcare and telemedicine services will be made easily and rapidly available at Primary Health Centres (PHCs). Moreover, joint training programs will be planned in the future for capacity building of various government agencies, departments, schools, and disaster response teams," it added. The LoI also covers strengthening connectivity in GIDC industrial parks, highway safety systems, maritime and port connectivity, and coastal police operations across the State. A Joint Working Group comprising representatives of the Gujarat government and Starlink will be formed to ensure effective implementation of this LoI, the release said.

## Iran's FM Abbas Araghchi strikes hard line on U.S. talks, saying Tehran's power comes from saying 'no'

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on ruled out Tehran ever giving up uranium enrichment in its negotiations with Washington, insisting it will not be intimidated by the threat of war with the United States. The Minister, Abbas Araghchi, told a forum in Tehran attended by AFP, that Tehran had little trust in Washington and even doubted that the U.S. side was taking renewed negotiations seriously.

"Why do we insist so much on enrichment and refuse to give it up, even if a war is imposed on us? Because no one has the right to dictate our behaviour," Mr. Araghchi said. "Their military deployment in the region does not scare us," he said, referring to the arrival of an aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln, in the Arabian Sea.

The United States and Iran reopened negotiations on Friday (February 6) in Oman for the first time since Israel's 12-day war with the Islamic republic in June of last year. Iran is seeking to have U.S. economic sanctions on the country lifted, in exchange for what Mr. Araghchi said at the forum could be "a series of confidence-building measures concerning the nuclear programme." "Western countries and Israel, thought to be the Middle East's only country with nuclear weapons, say Iran is seeking to acquire a nuclear bomb, which the Islamic republic denies." They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not looking for one. Our atomic bomb is the power to say 'no' to the great powers," Mr. Araghchi

said.

"Peace through strength" Mr. Araghchi's comments came after U.S. lead negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner visited the aircraft carrier on Saturday, signalling the persistent threat of U.S. military action against Iran. The U.S. military's Central Command (CENTCOM) said the two top officials visited the nuclear-powered vessel. In a social media post, Mr. Witkoff said the aircraft carrier and its strike group was "keeping us safe and upholding President Trump's message of peace through strength". The threat of war continues to hover over the negotiations, even as Mr. Trump called the talks "very good" and Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian posted on social media that they "constitute a step forward". Following Friday's (February 6) first round in Oman, Mr. Trump signed an executive order calling for the "imposition of tariffs" on countries still doing business with Iran despite U.S. sanctions. The United States also announced new sanctions against numerous shipping entities and vessels, aimed at curbing Iran's oil exports. At the Tehran forum Sunday (February 8, 2026), Mr. Araghchi called into question the United States' commitment to negotiations. "The continuation of certain sanctions and military actions raise doubts about the seriousness and readiness of the other side to conduct genuine negotiations," he said.

## Disruption hits chemicals, steel, aluminium, textile, breweries



As the energy shock waves from the war in West Asia travels deeper, Indian manufacturers, ranging from steel, aluminium, textiles and even alcoholic beverages, are beginning to report operational disruptions on account of surging freight rates, stuck shipments, gas shortages and payment issues. Much of this originates, either directly or indirectly, from the trade disruption caused due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The Indian manufacturing sector is grappling with uncertainty due to cargo stuck at different stages of the supply chain, which could raise the cost of operations and even limit production hours. A Mumbai-headquartered leading textile brand told The Indian Express that they were facing a severe shortage of raw materials and were only left with 30 days of stock as the West Asia conflict had delayed their import cargo.

The company executive, who did not wish to be named, said that import consignment of their key raw materials, flax, which they import from Europe, especially Belgium and France, is stuck due to conflict in West Asia and closure of the Strait of Hormuz. "One of our consignments has been stuck up in Jebel Ali for the last 20 days. It reached there on February 28, and until today, we don't have any clue when that consignment will come to India. Another two to three consignments are on the way to the UAE. One is going to Al-Faqan, and another is going to Khalifa," the executive said. While Al-Faqan, located on the eastern side, is unlikely to pose any issues, the shipment heading to Khalifa would have to pass through the Strait of Hormuz and could therefore face disruptions, the executive said, adding that the company could run out of stock for its raw materials if they didn't get the consignments in transit in the next 10 days. Ajay Joshi, a chemical-sector analyst and founder of an eponymous advisory firm for chemical companies, said the West Asia conflict is not just an oil story; it is a raw-material shock that will travel through seventeen different chemical value chains before reaching the Indian consumer. "The industries most acutely at risk are agriculture, construction, and FMCG. For Indian farmers, the most dangerous chain is sulphur (& sulphuric acid). The prices

have increased by 80% on a year-on-year basis," Joshi said.

Roughly 35% of globally traded sulphur originates from West Asia; any disruption tightens sulphuric acid, which then squeezes phosphoric acid, and ultimately hits Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Mono Ammonium Phosphate (MAP) fertiliser prices — right into the Kharif sowing window, Joshi said. "This is food-security critical, not just a commodity pricing issue," he said. One of India's largest aluminium producers has halted output of extruded aluminium, a value-added aluminium product, due to a gas shortage in the wake of supply disruptions.

The Aluminium Extrusion Manufacturers Association of India (ALEMA) has also urged the government for urgent relief measures as the industry is grappling with severe LPG and PNG shortages triggered by the escalating West Asia crisis. ALMA represents nearly 250 of India's 450 aluminium extrusion companies — with 90 per cent being MSMEs. According to the association, without intervention, the capital-intensive sector risks defaulting on working capital and term loans. The Brewers Association of India (BAI) said that the rising costs due to the war in West Asia may make beer supplies unviable in some states. The brewing industry in India is currently facing high cost and supply challenges due to the ongoing war and the resultant global energy crisis, BAI said.

"Just in the last 3 weeks, primary inputs have seen sharp inflation. Glass bottle prices have risen by approximately 20%, paper cartons have increased by almost 100%, and the cost of materials such as LDPE, BOPP and adhesives have gone up by 20–25% in prices. Freight and logistics costs have also risen by 10%. The rupee has fallen by almost 3% against the US dollar due to geopolitical tensions, adding to the cost of imports. The collective impact of these increases is estimated to be around 12–15% more in costs for brewers," the association said. Severe shortage of commercial LNG supply has put glass bottle manufacturers also under significant strain, and they too face partial or full shutdown of units. Supplies of glass and cans may be severely strained in the coming months, the association said, adding that the cost increases and inadequate packaging material supplies are likely to affect beer supplies in the upcoming summer season. A stainless steel manufacturer said that the challenge that they are facing is mainly with the seamless pipes and tubes division, where LPG is used. "Also the prices of the gas that we are still getting are also expensive, so the process cost has increased a bit in this period of time," the executive said, adding that they are not affected in the rolling and melting divisions, since they use electric furnaces for it. He said if the war and resulting supply chain disruptions persist, leading to material shortages, prices are likely to rise. "In the long term, prices will definitely increase," he said.

## Govt measures have helped mitigate LPG crisis, says Vaishnav; oil ministry says large number of LPG cargoes lined up



Vaishnav said that the average daily demand had come down to 55 lakh per day (as on March 19) from a peak of 89 lakh that it hit on March 13. Vaishnav said that the average daily demand had come down to 55 lakh per day (as on March 19) from a peak of 89 lakh that it hit on March 13. Even as the West Asia war has created a serious energy crisis across the world, measures taken by the government such as enhanced refinery output, extended LPG booking intervals, prioritisation of household consumers, and promotion of alternative fuels have contributed significantly in managing the LPG crisis so far, Minister for Information & Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnav said Tuesday. Separately, the Petroleum Ministry said that while LPG supply to the country has been hit due to the war—given India's high dependence on West Asia for the fuel—a number of cargoes have been lined up to augment supplies. The effective halt in vessel movements through the Strait of Hormuz due to the West Asia war has hit India's energy supplies, particularly those of LPG, given that India depends on imports to meet around 60 per cent of the fuel's needs and 90 per cent of those imports came through the critical maritime chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz. This means that around 54 per cent of India's LPG supplies are effectively disrupted, which has forced the government to heavily cut supplies to commercial and industrial consumers in an effort to ensure uninterrupted supplies to crores of households that use the fuel for cooking.

Apart from prioritising LPG supplies to households over commercial and industrial consumers, the government ordered refiners to maximise LPG production, and directed them to divert propane, butane, and other streams from petrochemical manufacturing to LPG production. These measures have led to an increase of 40 per cent in domestic LPG production vis-à-vis pre-West Asia conflict levels. The government has also increased waiting times between cylinder bookings by households from 21 days to 25 days in urban areas and 45 days in rural areas to check hoarding behaviour and manage demand and supply. It has also activated alternative fuel streams like kerosene, fuel oil, biomass, and even coal for commercial consumers to help them cover their LPG shortfall. The government has also been appealing to consumers to switch to piped natural gas (PNG) if it is available in their vicinity to take some pressure off of LPG supplies. Some CGD companies have also announced incentives like some volumes of free gas and waiver of connection charges to encourage consumers to sign up for PNG connections. The Centre has also urged states to help expedite PNG network expansion, and has even offered additional commercial LPG allocation if they take certain specific measures in this regard.

Vaishnav said that in the first three weeks of March, city gas distribution (CGD) companies have activated over 3.5 lakh PNG connections—domestic as well as commercial—and can activate another 15 lakh over the next 10 days. "This should further reduce the average demand for domestic LPG and it should come down to around 50 lakh

cylinders a day," Vaishnav said. Data shows that panic bookings for LPG cylinders by households has reduced, with daily booking levels now around the pre-conflict average of 55.7 lakh cylinders a day. Vaishnav said that the average daily demand had come down to 55 lakh per day (as on March 19) from a peak of 89 lakh that it hit on March 13.

To further increase PNG adoption and reduce the pressure on LPG demand, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) on Monday directed CGD entities to prioritise PNG connections for residential schools, colleges, hostels, community kitchens, and anganwadi kitchens, within five days where pipelines are available, Petroleum Ministry Joint Secretary Sujata Sharma said Tuesday. Over 7,500 domestic and commercial PNG connections were issued or activated on Monday alone.

Although natural gas supplies to India have also been hit due to the Strait of Hormuz's closure, the situation is not as concerning as in the case of LPG. The effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz has hit roughly 30% of India's natural gas supplies, as against 54% of the country's LPG flows. Also, in the most vulnerable segment of household consumers, India has a huge LPG consumer base with 33.3 crore domestic connections. Households with PNG connections are far fewer at about 1.5 crore. Sharma said that while the supply of LPG has been affected by the prevailing geopolitical situation, a large number of cargoes have been "lined up" to ensure continued availability of the fuel, but did not provide further details on the number of such cargoes and the LPG volumes they are carrying. India has been making efforts to source LPG from non-West Asia geographies, particularly North America. She added that the fact that commercial LPG allocation has increased from 20% to 50% of requirement, while domestic supplies are being maintained at pre-war levels, goes to show that the supply situation has been improving.

## Govt plans to redirect 90 lakh tonne FCI broken rice to ethanol industry from next year: Food Sec

New Delhi: The Centre is set to approach the Cabinet with a proposal to reduce the allocation of broken rice in grains distributed under the public distribution system from 25 per cent to 10 per cent, a move that would free roughly 90 lakh tonne of broken rice annually for the ethanol sector, Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra said on Tuesday. The move comes as global crude oil prices have jumped around 40 per cent in the past three weeks. Chopra said India's ethanol blending in petrol has already reached 20 per cent, up from just 1.5 per cent in 2013, saving the country over Rs 1.63 lakh crore in foreign exchange and cutting crude imports by 277 lakh metric tonne since 2014. The government is now looking beyond supply and focusing on getting more ethanol into the market, Chopra said, adding that raising the blending limit above 20 per cent, mixing ethanol with diesel, and promoting flex-fuel vehicles are all being actively considered, with decisions expected soon. Speaking at the All India Distillers Association (AIDA) conference here, Chopra said the broken rice proposal would fix a long-standing problem— in 2023, a poor sugar harvest and fears over rice production had forced the government to restrict feedstock supply to distilleries, hurting the industry.

## 10 Indian wetlands for every bird lover's bucket list



India's wetlands are among the most vibrant bird habitats in the world, serving as critical stopovers for migratory species and year-round homes for resident birds. Spread across diverse ecosystems, from coastal lagoons to inland marshes, these wetlands attract birdwatchers eager to witness the spectacular avian diversity they support. Many are also recognised under the global Ramsar Convention on Wetlands for their ecological importance. Here are 10 wetlands in India that offer remarkable birdwatching experiences. One of India's most famous birding destinations, this wetland sanctuary in Bharatpur hosts over 350 species of birds. During winter, migratory birds from Central Asia and Siberia arrive here, including pelicans, cranes, and various duck species. Its network of marshes, woodlands, and grasslands makes it ideal for both amateur and serious birdwatchers.

### 2. Chilika Lake, Odisha

Located along the coast of Odisha, this vast brackish lagoon is the largest coastal wetland in India. Each winter, hundreds of thousands of migratory birds — including flamingos, pintails, and gulls — arrive here. The Nalabana Bird Sanctuary within Chilika is a major birding hotspot.

### 3. Sultanpur National Park, Haryana

Just a short drive from Gurugram and Delhi, Sultanpur is a compact wetland that becomes a haven for migratory birds during winter. Species such as Siberian cranes, rosy pelicans, and several varieties of storks and herons are frequently spotted here.

### 4. Loktak Lake, Manipur

The largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, Loktak, is famous for its floating islands known as phumdis. The wetland supports numerous waterbirds and migratory species and lies near the Keibul Lamjao National Park, the world's only floating national park.

### 5. Kolleru Lake, Andhra Pradesh

Situated between the rivers Krishna and Godavari, Kolleru is a critical habitat for pelicans, painted storks, and openbill storks. The lake transforms into a bustling bird refuge in winter when thousands of migratory birds arrive.

### 6. Deepor Beel, Assam

Located near Guwahati, Deepor Beel is a permanent freshwater lake and an important wetland ecosystem in the Brahmaputra valley. It attracts a wide variety of migratory waterfowl, including kingfishers, storks, and several species of ducks.

### 7. Pulicat Lake, Andhra Pradesh—Tamil Nadu

India's second-largest brackish-water lagoon, Pulicat, lies along the Bay of Bengal and is especially famous for its large congregations of flamingos. The surrounding marshes and sandbars provide rich feeding grounds for many waterbirds.

### 8. Harike Wetland, Punjab

Formed at the confluence of the Beas and Sutlej rivers, Harike is one of North India's most important wetlands for migratory birds. Species such as bar-headed geese, coots, and diving ducks are commonly sighted here in winter.

### 9. Vembanad Lake, Kerala

Part of the larger Vembanad-Kol wetland ecosystem, this expansive lake in Kerala supports numerous resident and migratory birds. The nearby Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary is a well-known birdwatching site within this wetland system.

### 10. Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat

This shallow wetland near Ahmedabad is famous for its winter bird populations. Flamingos, pelicans, cranes, and a variety of waterfowl flock to the lake, creating one of western India's most rewarding birdwatching experiences.

## Sip your way to sleep: Why experts back Hina Khan's 'chamomile love'

Actor Hina Khan recently shared a glimpse of her nighttime routine, which includes a freshly brewed cup of chamomile tea. "Chamomile love," Khan shared in a video on her Instagram Stories, showing her brewing the tea at 10.26 pm. To determine whether there are any benefits to preparing freshly brewed chamomile tea, we asked an expert. Consultant dietitian and diabetes educator Kanikka Malhotra said that chamomile tea stands as a gentle, caffeine-free guardian of restful slumber. "This time-honoured elixir draws on apigenin, a natural compound that binds to brain receptors, quietly easing anxiety, soothing post-dinner digestion, and ushering in deeper, more restorative sleep," said Malhotra. For families navigating high-stress days filled with work, traffic, and endless responsibilities, Malhotra said that sipping 1-2 cups 30-45 minutes before bed offers a simple ritual akin to our cherished kadha, for mild insomnia relief and subtle blood sugar support, vital in diabetes-prevalent homes. Hina Khan chamomile tea Hina Khan's night routine includes a cup of chamomile tea (Photo: Hina Khan/Instagram Stories)

### How to brew the tea?

For brewing, steep 1-2 teaspoons of organic flowers in hot (not boiling) water for 5-10 minutes, releasing a delicate apple-like aroma. "Choose home-grown fresh blooms, rinsed meticulously, or trusted Indian brands for pesticide-free assurance," said Malhotra. According to Malhotra,

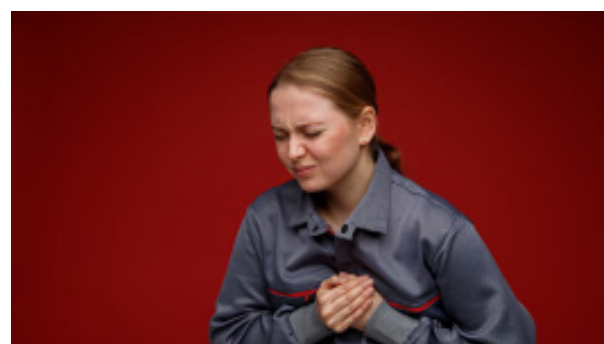


nightly use suits most adults, enhancing vitality without next-day grogginess. After heavy meals like dal-chawal or paneer, it eases bloating and tummy discomfort; many find it settles indigestion better than antacids, said Malhotra. "For sleep, sip warm 30-60 minutes before bed; the warmth signals your brain it's time to wind down, helping you nod off quicker and wake refreshed," said Malhotra.

### What to note?

Malhotra cautioned that diabetics on medication should monitor their glucose levels, as it may mildly lower them. "Pregnant individuals cap at one cup to sidestep uterine risks. Sweeten sparingly with honey and not refined sugar," said Malhotra.

## 'My heart hurts when I lift my left arm. Is this normal; is it a heart disease?'



Have you ever lifted your left arm and felt a strange pain near your chest, sharp enough to make you pause and wonder if something is wrong with your heart? This worry recently surfaced on Quora, where a user asked whether pain in the "heart area" while raising the left arm could signal heart disease. The query read: "My heart hurts when I lift my left arm. Is this normal? Is it a heart disease?" It's a common concern, especially given how closely we associate left-sided pain with the heart. To better understand this, we spoke to Dr Rahul Gupta, Director — Cardiologist, Gleneagles Hospital, Parel, who says that in many cases, the cause is far less alarming than it seems.

### When is it muscle pain—and when is it serious?

"Pain while lifting the left arm is often due to muscle strain, shoulder problems, or nerve compression in the neck," says Dr Gupta. This kind of pain is typically linked to movement—it may feel sharp and localised, and it may worsen when you raise your arm or press the area. He adds, "This type of pain is commonly related to muscle or joint issues, especially if it occurs with movement or specific positions." In such cases, the discomfort is usually not heart-related. However, the nature of the pain matters. If it feels more like pressure or heaviness rather than a sharp twinge, it could indicate something more serious. "If associated with heaviness, breathlessness, or sweating, it could indicate angina and needs urgent cardiac evaluation," he warns. Heart If associated with heaviness, breathlessness, or sweating, it could indicate angina and needs urgent cardiac evaluation.

In some situations, it may even point to a myocardial infarction. "In some cases, it can be a sign of a myocardial infarction, especially if accompanied by chest pressure, sweating, or breathlessness," Dr Gupta explains. The difference often lies in how the pain behaves. Muscle-related

pain is easier to pinpoint and is triggered by movement. Heart-related pain, on the other hand, tends to feel deeper—like pressure or tightness—and may spread to the left arm, jaw, or back, often along with symptoms like nausea or breathlessness.

Dr Gupta emphasises that certain warning signs should never be ignored. "Severe chest pressure or tightness, pain spreading to the left arm, jaw, or back, along with breathlessness or sweating, needs immediate attention," he says. He also advises seeking urgent care if there is "dizziness, fainting, nausea, or sudden unexplained weakness." While not every pain near the heart signals a serious problem, understanding these differences is crucial. Your body may not always point to the heart—but when it does, recognising it early can be lifesaving.

## Gold and silver prices tumble over 4 pc as West Asia tensions ease

Mumbai: Gold and silver prices witnessed a sharp decline on Tuesday, even as hopes of de-escalation in the West Asia conflict weighed on safe-haven demand after the US President announced a temporary pause on potential strikes targeting Iran's energy infrastructure.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold futures (April 2) fell as much as Rs 2,576 or around 2 per cent to hit an intra-day low of Rs 1,36,684 per 10 grams by 10:40 am. The yellow metal was last trading at Rs 1,37,100, down Rs 2,160 or 1.5 per cent.

Silver futures (May 5) also plunged 4.73 per cent, or Rs 10,667, to Rs 2,14,500 per kg during the session. In the global market, COMEX gold was trading at \$4,368.76, down 1.6 per cent, after slipping to an intraday low of \$4,340.

Meanwhile, COMEX silver declined around 4 per cent to \$66.56, after hitting an intraday low of \$66.16.

Precious metals came under pressure after the US President said Washington and Tehran had held "very good and productive conversations" over the past two days, adding that any military action on Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure would be deferred for five days, subject to further discussions.

## Shelter facility and backup power generator: FIDE reveals measures at Candidates 2026 venue in case of 'extreme scenarios'



GNS News Agency, March 27

After India's Koneru Humpy withdrew from the Candidates tournament in Cyprus citing fears for her safety while the war in Iran raged on, FIDE, the global governing body of chess, posted a long document concerning the safety concerns of players. In it, FIDE mentioned that in the hypothetical scenario of an attack, the hotel where the players will be staying and playing at, has its own shelter facilities. "Cyprus is a safe country to travel. There is no emergency situation, and the country continues to operate normally," FIDE mentioned in the document. "As a precautionary measure, the hotel is equipped with its own shelter facilities. While such scenarios are purely theoretical, appropriate infrastructure is in place to ensure the safety of all participants and guests."

Talking about the risk of playing in the Candidates, Humpy had told The Indian Express: "At the end of the day, you should be in a position to play the game in a peaceful and good atmosphere. Not surrounded by bomb or missile sirens. I think that should not be the stage for a world-class tournament. You don't need to be desperate to hold events in such environments." While none of the other players have directly spoken about security concerns, American grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura said that there were power cut issues on the Mediterranean island. "It's not a good sign when power goes out completely in parts of Cyprus and doesn't come back for an extended period of time," Nakamura had posted on his X account recently. Responding to queries about there being a risk of power outage during the Candidates 2026 tournament, FIDE stated: "The risk is extremely low and overstated. Power shortages in Cyprus are very rare and typically short-lived. For example, a recent incident, which caused outages in some areas of Cyprus on March 13, lasted only several minutes before full restoration. In addition, the tournament venue — Cap St Georges Hotel & Resort — is fully equipped with backup power generators, ensuring uninterrupted electricity supply throughout the event."

Q: Is it safe to travel to and stay in Cyprus given the

current situation in the Middle East region?

A: Yes. Cyprus is a safe country to travel. There is no emergency situation, and the country continues to operate normally. The Organising Committee is in constant coordination with the relevant national authorities and benefits from full support at the highest level. All necessary measures are in place to ensure a secure, comfortable, and well-organised environment for all participants, media, and guests.

Q: Is there any risk of power outages during the tournament?

A: No. The risk is extremely low and overstated. Power shortages in Cyprus are very rare and typically short-lived. For example, a recent incident, which caused outages in some areas of Cyprus on March 13, lasted only several minutes before full restoration. In addition, the tournament venue — Cap St Georges Hotel & Resort — is fully equipped with backup power generators, ensuring uninterrupted electricity supply throughout the event.

Q: Are there safety measures in place in case of extreme scenarios?

Yes. As a precautionary measure, the hotel is equipped with its own shelter facilities. While such scenarios are purely theoretical, appropriate infrastructure is in place to ensure the safety of all participants and guests.

Q: Is the location of the venue considered safe?

A: Yes. The venue is located in the western part of Cyprus, away from sensitive or strategic military locations. It is not situated along any routes related to the Middle East crisis.

Q: Are international flights to Cyprus operating normally?

A: Yes. International flights from regions not affected by the military situation in the Middle East continue to operate to Cyprus without delays or cancellations. Airlines regard the destination as safe for normal operations.

Q: Is FIDE monitoring the situation?

A: Absolutely. FIDE, in coordination with the Organising Committee, is closely monitoring the situation on an ongoing basis and remains in direct contact with the authorities of Cyprus to ensure preparedness and to mitigate any potential risks.

Q: What happens if the situation changes?

A: FIDE has contingency plans in place, as with any major international event. We remain ready to respond promptly to any changes in circumstances, with the safety and comfort of players, officials, media, and guests as the top priority.

## CSK's new opening act: Ruturaj Gaikwad confirms he'll open with Sanju Samson in IPL 2026



GNS News Agency, March 27

Chennai Super Kings will open this season with captain Ruturaj Gaikwad and newcomer Sanju Samson. Gaikwad has revealed before the start of IPL 2026 season. Speaking on the sidelines of the IPL captains' day event, Gaikwad did not get drawn into conversations about the spot where franchise cornerstone MS Dhoni will play. The team also has in its ranks Ayush Mhatre, who recently led the India U19 team to the ICC U19 World Cup title. Mhatre was one of openers CSK tried last season, partnering with Devon Conway or Shaik Rasheed. The New Zealand

opener was released by CSK ahead of the IPL auctions, where he went unsold. Another New Zealand player, Rachin Ravindra, who also opened for CSK in a few games last season was released by the CSK team and ended up at KKR via the auction.

CSK have traditionally relied on a tried-and-tested formula for their opening pair: one foreign player and an Indian player at the top of the order. They have had stalwarts like Matthew Hayden, Faf du Plessis, Mike Hussey—besides Conway and Ravindra—as their openers in the past.

With CSK acquiring Samson in a trade from Rajasthan Royals (with Ravindra Jadeja and Sam Curran headed the other way), it was likely that the man who inspired India to the T20 World Cup with three match-winning knocks would open. But Gaikwad, who usually played in the No 3 position, has also opted to promote himself up the order. "There is pedigree with Gaikwad and Samson. Pedigree means you making quality runs and sustaining that for a period of time. We must not forget that. For me, I would love to see both of them go hammer and tongs at the opening slot," Ravichandran Ashwin had said on his YouTube channel late last year. "Both of them have different strengths. One is a caresser of the ball, while the other guy hits it hard so both of those qualities are there. So I will look at it in that fashion that I have two good openers."

## Exotic to mainstream: How the wide yorker became T20s' dot-ball merchant

GNS News Agency, March 27

Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga used the wide yorker to devastating effect against the Indian team in a game. Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga used the wide yorker to devastating effect against the Indian team in a game. When Yuvraj Singh landed at the airport after the 2014 T20 World Cup final loss to Sri Lanka, he was abused. Soon, stones were thrown at his home. "I felt like I was a villain, a culprit, like somebody had shot somebody and was going to jail. I still remember how I felt in that moment," he would recall years later. A close game was lost. Yuvraj, Virat Kohli, and MS Dhoni couldn't finish. The reason was a delivery. Lasith Malinga kept firing yorkers well outside off stump. Yuvraj kept toe-ending them. Then came Nuwan Kulasekara, who came closest to the modern avatar of that ball. His deliveries skimmed the wide line, especially after he took out Yuvraj with a wide full toss that sank into long-off's palms. He began pinging that line to Kohli and Dhoni. Both tried to reach out and drag it to the on-side. Neither could. When they sliced it, a deep backward point and third man ensured there was just a single in it.

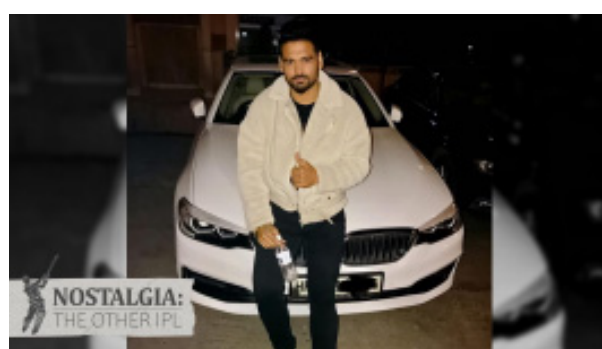
The visuals stay with you. Kohli banging his bat into the turf. Dhoni slipping and falling trying to drag a ball from way outside off. Two of the finest finishers in the game defeated not by pace or swing, but by width. It's difficult to say if that was the birth of the well-outside-off yorker. But it was certainly its prime-time debut. A few years later, the delivery began rearing its head in the IPL. From 2021, it took centre stage. Dwayne Bravo made it his own, punctuating his bewilderingly dipping slower balls with these wide yorkers. The rest began to catch up. Bhuvneshwar Kumar had 13 runs to defend in a final over against AB de Villiers. With 12 needed from four and AB on strike, Bhuvneshwar kept firing them wide. The fourth ball, he came straighter — smashed for six. The other three were all wide, all three dot balls.



When Yuvraj Singh landed at the airport after the 2014 T20 World Cup final loss to Sri Lanka, he was abused. Soon, stones were thrown at his home. "I felt like I was a villain, a culprit, like somebody had shot somebody and was going to jail. I still remember how I felt in that moment," he would recall years later.

That same year, Andre Russell made it his signature ball, with a twist — he delivered it from around the stumps. In one memorable over, he tied down Kieron Pollard with it, then eventually got his man, edging after attempting a wild shot, having walked across his stumps. Russell had tried it earlier seasons, but not with this consistency. The youngsters followed. Kartik Tyagi and Arshdeep Singh, who stopped a rampaging Sanju Samson that year with this delivery. "The field was set, and the plan was to feed him wide yorkers. If we could execute it all six balls," Arshdeep has kept his love affair with that ball since. The sweet irony arrived when Russell, who had almost made the wide yorker his own, found himself thwarted by it. He would keep flinging his bat, but often couldn't put them away. Sometimes a delivery finds its way back to the man who made it famous.

## 'Scooter se seedha Mercedes mil gayi': Delhi picked Pradeep Sangwan over Virat Kohli. Then he had to bowl to Hayden and Gilchrist



GNS News Agency, March 27

Every April, young cricketers from small towns across India enter the world of IPL — five-star hotels, foreign coaches, franchise millions, parties they would have never imagined. This series tells their stories, in their words, of what that crossing feels like. Pradeep Sangwan remembers the first time he saw his idol Adam Gilchrist in the flesh. It was 2008. He was eighteen. "Everything was a big surprise for us. We were just looking here and there. All were our idols. Jahan dekho sab bade players. It was a dream. It was a big surprise for that generation."

The Delhi left-arm pacer had been picked by Delhi Daredevils — chosen ahead of Virat Kohli. The two had come up together. At the VIKASURI Coaching Centre in West Delhi — the same corner of the capital that produced Kohli — Sangwan had been working on his bowling, knowing Sehwa's weakness for the cut shot and bowling at the crease accordingly. Sehwa noticed, had a word with the state selectors, and Sangwan was in the Ranji side. Seven wickets in two one-dayers was enough. On India's Under-19 tour of Sri Lanka, the two West Delhi boys had batted together — Sangwan contributing a half-century down the order to help India win. Same neighbourhood, same Under-19 squad, same draft. Then the IPL split them — Kohli to Bangalore, Sangwan to Delhi. Kohli himself would later recall the draft moment. "Delhi decided to go for him because they wanted their bowling strengthened and RCB picked me," he said on a podcast. "I remember the day when the draft was happening. The amount that we were picked for, when they revealed, we couldn't believe it. We went absolutely crazy."

The money arrived before anyone knew what to do with it. "Ranji had match fees of 10,000 then and suddenly we saw players getting 40-50 lakh. We didn't know what to do with so much money. Everyone had gone mad," Sangwan says. He and Kohli had just won the Under-19 World Cup together, collecting 16 lakh in prize money. "Virat landed and straight away went to book a Honda Civic. I said go home first but he said, nahi bhai, car lega pehle." Sangwan's team had Sehwa, Gambhir, Dilshan. Shikhar Dhawan sat on the bench. Mithun Manhas, now the BCCI president, didn't get a game for an entire year. "Scooter se seedha Mercedes mil gayi thi. Life changed."

In the 2008 IPL Draft, Pradeep Sangwan was picked by Delhi Daredevils instead of Virat Kohli. (Photo: Special arrangement) In the 2008 IPL Draft, Pradeep Sangwan was picked by Delhi Daredevils instead of Virat Kohli. (Photo: Special arrangement) The pressure came in the team meetings. Before a game against Chennai Super Kings, the room was talking about how to bowl to Matthew Hayden. Where

he hits. How far he hits. What he does when you pitch it up. What he does when you pitch it short. "Darr ka mahool tha ekdam." Sangwan's first encounter with Hayden taught him what the meetings couldn't. He bowled to Hayden and went for 13. The next over, Yo Mahesh went for 18 or 22. Sehwa called up Avishkar Salvi. In the first two balls, Hayden hit two sixes. Sangwan ran over. "Bhai, yorker daalo. Coaches have told us, whenever he walks down the track, bowl him full yorker." Salvi looked at him. "He has such a big thigh, I couldn't see the stump."

"I said, okay, tab jaise pheknai hai pheko." Sangwan was laughing on the field when Sehwa caught him. "Why are you laughing? Why are you biting your teeth?" Sehwa was furious. Sangwan told him after the game. Sehwa laughed a lot. Bowling to Hayden felt like facing the alien from Terminator. He would walk fifteen steps down the pitch. The quicker you bowled, the further he hit. Then came the mongoose bat.

"It was Umesh Yadav's debut match. Hayden came out with a small bat. We were thinking, yeh kya laya bhai? Bachpan mein thappi kehte tey. I felt he will get out." Hayden slammed Yadav straight. The ball came back to Sangwan at a crazy height. "He scored 70 and we were thinking, kahan run lagega is bat-sey." Even the umpires were afraid. Players like Hayden and Chris Gayle loved hitting straight. Sehwa once told the umpire: "Bowlers toh marengi hi, but tum bhi mar sakte ho." The umpire stood ten steps back.

But Sangwan could bowl. He had his own way of reading batsmen. In the same innings, he had dismissed Rohit Sharma — spotting a tendency to be late in shifting his weight forward from domestic cricket. A short extra-cover was placed. Rohit was lured into a fatal uppish drive. Pradeep Sangwan played for Delhi Daredevils, Kolkata Knight Riders, Gujarat Lions, Gujarat Titans, and Mumbai Indians. (Photo: Special arrangement) Pradeep Sangwan played for Delhi Daredevils, Kolkata Knight Riders, Gujarat Lions, Gujarat Titans, and Mumbai Indians. (Photo: Special arrangement) Then came Gilchrist. "Bhai TV pe he dekha tha and now I have to bowl to them. Pressure was at peak. Everyone was talking ke yeh yahan mara hai, wahan mara hai. But any bowler, who is a fan of someone, and suddenly that person stands in front of you — that is the moment you want to stay with your life. No feeling can express that." Sehwa brought Sangwan back in the eleventh over. He bowled Gilchrist with a full delivery. Not sensational. Just right. It did the trick.

Sehwa's captaincy was simple. When Sangwan looked to him for field changes or ideas, the answer was always the same. "Yeh mera kaam thodi hai, soch ke aaya kar." Bowl your plan. Set your field. Don't ask me. Sangwan played for Delhi Daredevils, KKR, Gujarat Lions, Gujarat Titans, and Mumbai Indians. Across those years and those franchises, he learned one thing that separated the players who lasted from the ones who didn't. "What defines a big player and an average player is showing and understanding of the game. Everyone has skill. But players don't need to get carried away seeing their idols. Players do feel low in confidence — but the ones who last find a way to overcome it." He had seen it from the first auction. An eighteen-year-old on a scooter one day, in a Mercedes the next. A teammate booking a Honda Civic before going home. A bowler who couldn't see the stumps past Hayden's thighs. The IPL gave them everything at once — the money, the stars, the pressure, the fear. What it didn't give them was time to understand any of it.

## Senegal appeal to get Africa Cup of Nations title from Morocco at CAS with no timetable for verdict

GNS News Agency, March 27

Senegal's appeal to be reinstated as Africa Cup of Nations champion was registered Wednesday by sport's highest court, which set no timetable for a likely long process toward a verdict in a heated soccer controversy. The Senegal soccer federation is challenging a surprise ruling last week by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to strip the title won in a chaotic final on the field in January and award it to host nation Morocco. An appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland was promised last week by the Senegalese government, which also called for an international investigation "into suspected corruption" within the African soccer body.

CAS said in a statement that the Senegal federation also asks for extra time to file an appeal brief because CAF has not yet given detailed written reasons to explain its verdict. "At this early stage of proceedings and considering the (Senegal federation) request to suspend deadlines, it is not possible to anticipate a procedural timeline and to indicate when a hearing will be scheduled," the court said. CAF appeal judges took the title from Senegal two months after the final in Rabat as punishment for a 15-minute walkoff by players to protest a penalty being awarded to Morocco in the last minute of regulation time. The referee restarted the game after the Senegal team returned, and the Morocco penalty was then saved. Senegal scored in extra time to



beat the host nation 1-0. The laws of soccer state the referee's decision on the field of play is final.

The CAF judges, however, cited a tournament rule that any team refusing to play "shall be eliminated for good from the current competition." An appeal to CAS can typically take several months to schedule a hearing then weeks or months more to announce a verdict. "We understand that teams and fans are eager to know the final decision," Matthieu Reeb, the CAS director general, said in a statement, "and we will ensure that arbitration proceedings are conducted as swiftly as possible, while respecting the right of all parties to a fair hearing."

## Former England captains Atherton, Hussain & Boycott blast ECB over lack of Ashes accountability

The England Cricket Board (ECB) continues to find itself at the receiving end of criticism after handing a clean chit to head coach Brendon McCullum, following a disastrous Ashes series in which England lost 4-1 in emphatic fashion during the five-match Test tour of Australia last summer. ECB chief executive Richard Gould recently confirmed that the positions of captain Ben Stokes, managing director Rob Key, and McCullum are safe following a thorough review conducted by the board. Former England captain Michael Atherton expressed surprise at the decision. He believes fans will find it "extraordinary" that no jobs were lost for the "mistakes" made during the Ashes defeat. "From the perspective of people out there, they will find it extraordinary that there's been no accountability for the mistakes made in the Ashes," Atherton said while speaking to Key on the Sky Sports Cricket podcast. "It's not necessarily bloodlust people want, but I think they want genuine accountability. If there's no change to key personnel, they will argue, 'Well, there is no accountability.'" One of the criticisms of the players over that two- or three-year period is that inadequate performance doesn't lead to accountability. It would seem that's the case at the top as well," he added. Another former England captain, Nasser Hussain,

was also displeased with the decision. He said: "You've talked about the learnings, but if I was an England fan sitting there, I would have gone, 'This is your job for before the Ashes, not two months after the Ashes.' Why are you learning now? Why weren't you doing these things? Why weren't all these things put in place? Have you been marking your own homework in the last few months?" McCullum faced stern scrutiny over his position after a disastrous Ashes campaign in Australia. McCullum's case was further undermined by reports of off-field incidents. Following the horrendous Ashes, the ECB launched a review process of the team. Earlier, former England captain and legendary batter Geoffrey Boycott had also criticised Gould and Key, questioning the process behind the conclusion that McCullum would remain in his role. "The worst pre-planned Ashes tour in my lifetime, and nobody is held to account or to blame? In the famous words of John McEnroe: 'You cannot be serious.' The review was done by Richard Gould, the England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive, who has never played county or Test match cricket, and he decided nobody is to blame." "What planet is he on? Is he oblivious to what the majority of former England players and cricket journalists are saying?"

## When Rekha walked up to hug Jaya Bachchan as Amitabh Bachchan won Screen Best Actor award



won the Best Actor award. Amitabh Bachchan won the Best Actor award for Piku at the 22nd SCREEN Awards held in 2016. He shared the honour that year with Ranveer Singh, who won the same award for his performance in Bajirao Mastani. But more than the awards, it was Rekha and Jaya Bachchan's reunion that night which grabbed everyone's attention.

For years, there has been widespread speculation about a strained equation between Jaya Bachchan and Rekha, reportedly stemming from Amitabh Bachchan's rumoured closeness with the latter. Fast forward to the Star Screen Awards in 2016, and the atmosphere was completely different. After nearly three decades, Jaya Bachchan and Rekha were seen together in the same frame, both looking graceful in traditional attire. After Amitabh Bachchan was announced as the Best Actor for his performance in Piku, Rekha walked up to Jaya and warmly hugged her, symbolically putting an end to years of perceived cold vibes and unspoken tension. Amitabh Bachchan and Rekha's association began in the early years of their careers, starting with Do Anjaane. Over time, their on-screen pairing sparked widespread speculation. While Bachchan never addressed the relationship rumours, Rekha spoke candidly about her admiration for him on several occasions over the years. Silsila ultimately marked their final film together.

Ahead of the Chetak Screen Awards 2026, set to take place on April 5 in Mumbai, we look back at some of the most memorable moments from past editions of the awards. One such highlight came in 2016, when Rekha walked up to hug Jaya Bachchan after Amitabh Bachchan

## Anupam Kher pays Mahesh Bhatt Rs 25,000 for every film he does, says it's a 'ritual': 'Started with Rs 250, he says there's inflation'

Anupam Kher made his debut in the movies back in the 1980s with Mahesh Bhatt's film Saaranish. And in a recent interview, Anupam revealed that he continues to pay his dues to the director for giving him his first break. Anupam shared that after every film that he does, he gives Rs 25,000 to Mahesh, and revealed that they started this ritual back in the day with just Rs 500, which has now increased to Rs 25,000.

Anupam, in a chat with Pinkvilla, was also asked if he would want to work in a remake of any of his 550 films and the actor said that if given a choice, he would like to do an action version of Saaranish. "I want to do Saaranish 2 as an action actor. I spoke to Mahesh Bhatt a month ago. I told him Bhatt saab, 'I really want to do action because I am working on myself'. I do display my body at the risk of being laughed at. I feel very happy about it. I would want my character to save people via action. Like in Taken, so I want to do something like that," he said.

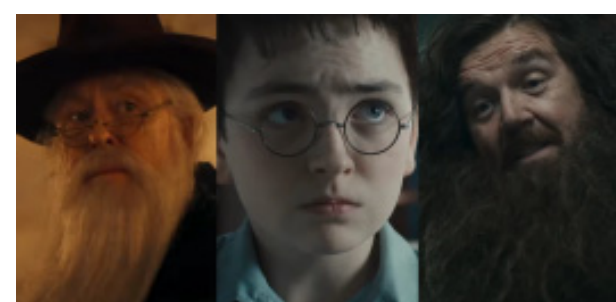
Anupam then recalled how he first started honouring his 'guru' Mahesh Bhatt in his early days and shared, "He gave me my first break so back then I would give him Rs 250 for every film. Now it's Rs 25,000. He says this is the result of inflation. It went from Rs 250 to Rs 500 to Rs 1000 to Rs 5000 and now is Rs 25,000. I just gave him an envelope last week. Now he just holds the envelope and he knows how much is in it. But I really like it. It's more of a ritual than anything else. It's a comedy." Anupam Kher had previously shared that when Mahesh Bhatt decided to recast him in Saaranish, and cast Sanjeev Kumar in his place, he "cursed" the director. In an earlier chat with ANI, he had shared that he had been rehearsing for his part for months



when he got to know, just days prior to the shoot, that he was going to be replaced by Sanjeev Kumar. This news broke Anupam, and he decided to leave the city of Mumbai, with all his belongings. But, before he left, he paid a visit to Mahesh Bhatt.

"I took the cab to his house, and I walked up the stairs. He praised me for taking the news sportingly, but I told him to look out of his window and see the car that was standing there. It had all my belongings, and I told him that before leaving, I wanted to tell him what a fraud he is... I wanted to make final climactic statement, and I told him that as a Brahmin man, I was cursing him," he recalled. Upon seeing his dedication, Bhatt changed his mind and decided to cast Anupam in this role.

## Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone cast: Who's playing whom in the new HBO show?



Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone 2026 cast: It's almost time for us to gear up for a trip to Diagon Alley, as the doors to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry are set to reopen again. Fifteen years after the release of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2 (2011), which brought to an end the film adaptations of British author JK Rowling's fantasy novel series, the Harry Potter books are currently being developed by HBO as a

television and streaming show, thus giving one of the most beloved literary works of all time a fresh start. Ahead of its scheduled release during the Christmas season of 2026, the show's makers unveiled the official teaser for the first season, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, on Thursday, March 26, thus marking the beginning of a new era. The 129-second promo video begins by offering a glimpse into Harry's childhood days at the house of his abusive aunt and uncle, Petunia and Vernon Dursley, before he realises his true identity and also that of his deceased parents. It soon transitions to show Harry stepping into the world of wizardry and exploring Hogwarts. The teaser also assures that the show will visualise those aspects of the novels that the films had to overlook due to the limitations of their runtime, thus staying as close to the books as possible. The series Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone has been readied with an absolutely fresh cast, and the teaser offers initial glimpses of several of them, including Harry's best friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, and the mighty Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts.

## 'I am not a Bhatt': Mohit Suri breaks silence on rumored film with Ranbir Kapoor and his 'outsider' journey

Mohit Suri has been making movies for almost two decades now but with 2025's Saiyaara, the director found new fans in the younger generation as he made a love story with newcomers Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda. Mohit is yet to announce his next film and in a recent interview with actor-producer Pooja Bhatt, she asked him about his probable next film with Ranbir Kapoor.

Is Mohit Suri working with Ranbir Kapoor?

Pooja and Mohit were talking on her podcast The Pooja Bhatt Show, where she asked him, "You might be working with Ranbir now, I am told. How do you plan to approach it?" Pooja and Mohit are cousins, as Pooja's father Mahesh and Mohit's mother Heena were siblings. Pooja and Ranbir are also related as Ranbir is married to Pooja's half-sister Alia Bhatt.

While Mohit refrained from commenting on his probable upcoming film with Ranbir, he said, "I have always not had a home. I found a little bit with Vishesh (Films) but it's always been somewhere else. I am not saying this in the wrong way, but I wasn't a Bhatt, I was still a Suri. So you are working with Luv (Ranjan), or working with Balaji (Telefilms), they are all different environments but also what



tends to happen is, as a filmmaker, what I have learnt is when you try and repeat the same thing that worked for you, again and again, it's the law of diminishing returns."

## Project Hail Mary gets only 9 IMAX shows amid Dhurandhar 2 wave; upset fans ask, 'What kind of greed is this?'



Dhurandhar 2's box office storm has come as a disappointment for some cinephiles, as it has left Ryan Gosling's space drama Project Hail Mary with barely any IMAX presence in India. The film's India release was pushed by a week due to Dhurandhar 2 occupying a majority of screens. Even after the delay, the situation hasn't improved much. Despite being shot specifically for IMAX, Project Hail Mary has secured nine IMAX shows across India till now, with most premium screens still dominated by Dhurandhar 2, which continues its strong theatrical run.

These IMAX shows are spread across key cities, Delhi-NCR, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Pune, and Kolkata. However, bookings are currently open only for the same day, with no availability for the coming days. Ticket prices for these shows range between Rs 500 and Rs 1000. Initially, by late Wednesday night, the film had no IMAX shows listed at all on major ticketing platforms. Some theatres in Kochi and Coimbatore briefly added IMAX screenings, only to remove them later without explanation. By Thursday morning, the number of IMAX shows rose to five and then nine, three in Mumbai, two in Pune, and one each in Kolkata, Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida.

Dhurandhar 2 limits IMAX shows for Project Hail Mary. The reason appears to be purely commercial. Dhurandhar 2 continues its blockbuster run, crossing the Rs 1,000 crore mark worldwide within just a week of its

release, making it the fastest Indian film to achieve the feat. The Aditya Dhar directorial collected Rs 47.7 crore in India on Wednesday taking its domestic total to Rs 744.58 crore, according to trade tracker Sacnilk. Globally, the film has reached Rs 1,006.5 crore. This has prompted exhibitors to prioritise the Hindi film over the Hollywood release. However, the irony hasn't gone unnoticed: a film designed for IMAX is largely unavailable in that format, while a non-IMAX film dominates those very screens. Directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, Project Hail Mary is based on Andy Weir's bestselling novel and stars Ryan Gosling as Ryland Grace, a man who wakes up aboard a spacecraft with no memory of how he got there. The film has been widely praised for its immersive visuals, with many insisting that its true impact can only be felt on large-format screens. Fans have taken to social media to voice their disappointment. Many tagged Sony Pictures India, questioning the lack of IMAX access. One user wrote, "There is no IMAX release for #ProjectHailMary in India. The film is specifically Filmed for IMAX and yet it is not released in its original format. Shame on you PVR! Please take serious action against them bro @IMAX. We Indians deserve to enjoy the Imax version of PHM."

"Won't be watching in a theatre unless it's on IMAX. Sorry, the Indian theatre experience isn't worth it anymore," another user added. A promotional post by PVR Cinemas urging viewers to watch the film on the "biggest screen" drew criticism. "No IMAX screenings available for Project Hail Mary in Delhi, and still you post about it. This is so disappointing," a user commented. Another user wrote, "I'm bored of your failed tactics, release the IMAX tickets now!!" Not a single IMAX show for Project Hail Mary in Bangalore? Not a SINGLE SHOW? Ya'll deserve to go bankrupt. Go to hell," wrote an angry fan. Director Phil Lord on release being postponed in India. Earlier, talking about the film being pushed a week, director Phil Lord described it as a sign of Bollywood's expanding reach. "I don't need to tell you that often, when you look at the top 10 films in the United States, there would be a Bollywood film. Those movies play in American theatres. Most Americans go 'what's that', but there is a big audience for it," he told Hindustan Times. He added, "And it's growing every year. Indian films in America have begun to gain broad cultural relevance, starting with RR, that really spread out beyond just those seeking it out."

## Aditya Dhar says Dhurandhar 2's image showing Ranveer Singh smoking while in turban AI-generated, warns strict action: 'Intended to provoke'



misrepresentation intended to provoke and create mischief," he added.

"Let me state this unequivocally: I hold the highest respect for the Sikh community, and every portrayal in the film has been handled with utmost sensitivity, dignity, and responsibility. Any attempt to suggest otherwise through any doctored content is malicious and dishonest. I urge audiences to rely only on official content and watch the film as it is intended, and not fall prey to AI-generated misinformation being circulated with ulterior motives. Such acts will be dealt with firmly," the official statement concluded.

Recently, a Mumbai-based Sikh organisation filed an FIR against Ranveer Singh and the makers of Dhurandhar 2 for allegedly hurting the religious sentiments of the community. The objection was raised after the group claimed that R Madhavan's character, Ajay Sanyal, recited verses from Guru Granth Sahib while smoking in the film.

R Madhavan's clarification. Other than Aditya, R. Madhavan had also shared a clarification on the same through a video message. He had said, "Recently, we came to know that some people were hurt because in one scene of the film, while reciting lines from Guru Gobind Singh ji's Dasam Granth, I was seen smoking a cigarette. I assure you, this is not correct—it is a misunderstanding. Before delivering those lines, Aditya Dhar, who is very mindful about such things, had clearly told me to put out the cigarette. There would be no smoke from my mouth, no smoke visible on screen, and no cigarette in my hand, because this is sacred and pure for us as well." He added, "I properly extinguished the cigarette. If you watch the scene carefully, you will see there is no smoke, no trace of it in the frame, and no sign of a cigarette till the end of the scene. We are aware that we should never hurt anyone's sentiments, even unknowingly."

After a complaint was filed by a Sikh community against the makers of Dhurandhar 2 for hurting religious sentiments, director Aditya Dhar has shared a note clarifying that the image in question is a fabricated AI-generated visual being circulated to "provoke and create mischief." He also warned of strict action against those responsible. The note Aditya shared read as, "I am deeply grateful & indebted for the overwhelming love that Dhurandhar The Revenge has received from audiences across the country and the world. However, it has come to my attention that certain individuals are circulating manipulated visuals by morphing officially released promotional material using artificial intelligence to create false and misleading narratives."

"One such fabricated image falsely depicts the character Hamza/Jaskirat smoking while wearing a turban. This is completely untrue and does not form part of the film or any official material released by us. It is a deliberate act of

## After Oscars snub, Dharmendra to be honoured at International Film Festival Delhi; Hema Malini says she 'will be there to receive it'

After expressing her displeasure over the Oscars snubbing late star Dharmendra as they did not pay tribute to him at the ceremony, Hema Malini recently shared that her late husband will be honoured at Delhi's first International Film Festival Delhi (IFFD) 2026. Hema revealed that she will be receiving the award in honour of Dharmendra at the event, which began in Delhi on Wednesday.

Speaking to ANI, she said, "I would like to congratulate Rekha Gupta ji for organising the International Film Festival in Delhi. It is going to be there for 4-5 days. She has also invited many artists. Many artists will be honoured at the festival. They are also paying tribute to Dharam ji... So, I will be there to receive it."

The first International Film Festival Delhi kicked off on Wednesday with a grand opening ceremony at Bharat Mandapam. It was hosted by Arjun Kapoor and Nimrat Kaur and saw many Bollywood actors in attendance, including Vicky Kaushal, Sanya Malhotra, Siddhant Chaturvedi, Anupam Kher, and Lauren Gottlieb. The festival, which started on March 25, will end on March 31.

Earlier, Hema Malini had expressed her disappointment after Dharmendra wasn't included at the Oscars' In Memoriam segment. She told Subhash K Jha, "It is a shame, of course. A shame for them to have overlooked an actor who means so many things to so many people in



many parts of the world. Dharamji was known and recognised everywhere." She added, "He never got too many awards during his lifetime. Why should he care about the Oscars? Both of us were happy to be loved in our country. But awards always eluded him. Even I didn't get any award for my best performances in Lal Patthar and Meera." Dharmendra passed away on November 24, 2025, at the age of 89 in Mumbai. He died at home following a long period of illness.