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## Telangana groundwater improves after years even as El Nino threat looms

Hyderabad: The groundwater levels in Telangana have shown a marked improvement in March this year, after remaining low for two consecutive years. Thanks to excess rainfall this year, the average groundwater depth stood at 8.22 metres below ground level (mbgl). City & Local Guides

However, experts warned that the gains may be short-lived amid forecasts of El Nino conditions this year.

## Biker dies in road accident on Cable Bridge in Madhapur

Hyderabad: A 32-year-old man died after a car rammed into him at Madhapur on Sunday. City & Local Guides  
The man, Shyam Raj, a resident of New Hafeezpet and a native of Ghatkesar parked his bike on the Cable Bridge when a speeding Benz car rammed into him at around 3.15 am.

The victim suffered serious injuries and was shifted to a hospital, where he succumbed to injuries while undergoing treatment later in the evening. A case has been registered at Madhapur police station.

## Firecracker Mishap In Tamil Nadu Kills 23 People



Virudhunagar: At least 23 people were charred to death, and six others sustained grievous injuries following a massive explosion at a private firecracker manufacturing unit in Tamil Nadu's Vachakarapatti, police said on Sunday. The explosion occurred at the 'Vanaja' fireworks factory owned by one Muthumanickam, in Kattanarapatti near here. The place is located within the Vachakarapatti police station limits.

According to police and fire rescue officials, four of the six injured are in critical condition and are undergoing treatment at the Virudhunagar Government Medical College Hospital.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the unit reportedly holds a license from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), Nagpur. Over 100 labourers were reportedly engaged in work in the complex.

The blast is believed to have originated in the front veranda area, where work-

ers were allegedly handling raw materials and giving finishing to the firecrackers.

The impact of the blast was so severe that at least three rooms were reduced to rubble, and several adjacent structures were completely levelled.

"We have recovered 18 bodies so far, many of which were charred beyond recognition," a police official told PTI.

Of the six injured, three are women and have sustained 60 per cent burn injuries, the official added.

Sources said fire and rescue services personnel battled the flames for several hours. Rescue operations were significantly hampered as crackers continued to burst long after the initial explosion. There are fears that more workers may be trapped under the debris.

This incident marks the deadliest industrial accident in the region this year. It comes just days after a similar blast in the Vembakottai area of the same district that claimed

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four lives.

Further details are awaited as the search and rescue operation continues.

Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin expressed his sorrow and said he rushed two ministers to the site to expedite rescue operations.

In a post on X, he said, "The tragic news of the deaths of several people in the firecracker unit explosion that occurred in Kattanarapatti, Virudhunagar district, causes immense sorrow. My deepest con-

lences to the families of those who lost their lives".

"I have requested Ministers K K S S R Ramachandran and Thangam Thennarasu to rush to the scene immediately to expedite and monitor the rescue operations and to offer solace to the affected families," he added.

"Upon learning of this accident, I have contacted the district collector and instructed him to coordinate all necessary assistance," he further said.

## CM Revanth Asks Gov. To Hurry Up MLC Seat For Azhar

Hyderabad, April 19

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Sunday called on Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla against the backdrop of the fast-approaching April 30 deadline to nominate minorities minister Md Azharuddin to the Legislative Council under the Governor's quota to avoid disqualification from the Cabinet.

The Chief Minister, according to sources, explained to Governor Shukla that the Supreme Court did not issue

any order preventing the latter from clearing the nomination of Azharuddin and Prof. M. Kodandaram. The file pertaining to their nomination has been pending with Lok Bhavan for several months.

Sources said some clarity would emerge on April 22 when the ongoing case was listed for hearing in the Supreme Court. The government is likely to seek a clarification from the apex court once again on nominating Azharuddin and Prof. Kodandaram under the Governor's quota, sources added. IT and industries minister D. Sridhar Babu and adviser Vem Narender Reddy, MP, accompanied the Chief Minister.



an amicable solution could lie in nominating both Azharuddin and Prof. Kodandaram in the Governor's quota because the Supreme Court has not stopped the Governor from doing so," a senior minister pointed out. Azharuddin was sworn in as minister on October 31, 2025, without being a member of either the Legislative Assembly or Council. To remain in the Cabinet, he must be elected to either House within six months of his appointment, a deadline that expires on April 30.

In case of failure to get approval within the deadline, Revanth Reddy is likely to get Azharuddin sworn-in again as minister, later this month. The Chief Minister, who is making all-out efforts to push Azharuddin's candidature, is also seeking legal opinion in case the former cricketer needs to resign. Revanth Reddy is exploring all options to get him onboard, sources added.

During the meeting the Governor and Revanth Reddy also discussed effective measures to control the spread of narcotic drugs. Shukla emphasised on initiatives like drug control programs in educational institutions and suggested making students take a pledge to remain drug-free and secure a mandatory declaration

from them at the time of admission. As part of measures to control substance abuse amongst youth, Governor Shukla emphasised the need to create awareness among students on the dangers of drug abuse and suggested that effective measures be taken to control substance use in educational institutions. The measures, if implemented by the government, may come into effect from 2026-27 academic years starting in June.

The Governor further proposed that students be administered a pledge against drug consumption as part of awareness initiatives. He also discussed the upcoming awareness programme scheduled to be held under his leadership at LB Stadium on June 12.

The Chief Minister assured the Governor that all the suggestions would be carefully considered and appropriate action would be taken.

## State To Run 100 E-Buses To Connect MMTS Stations

Hyderabad: The municipal administration and urban development (MA&UD) department is planning to procure 100 electric buses to connect to the railway Multi-Modal Transport System (MMTS) stations as a part of its proposal seeking free travel on the train service. These buses will also offer free services.

Sources said the department within the next two to three days would send a draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) to the South Central Railway (SCR) seeking free travel on MMTS trains and offering to pay for the charges. If the Railway Board gives the green signal, the free MMTS service, along with free connecting bus service, will start from Telangana Formation Day on June 2.

This is part of the government's proposals aimed at reducing traffic congestion and reducing pollution by encouraging public transport. The state government has proposed to pay SCR ₹10 crore annually to reimburse it for ticket fares, irrespective of the number of passengers who use the service.

The government also asked SCR to increase the frequency of MMTS during peak hours, improve punctuality, and upgrade station facilities. The state government on its part will provide last-mile connectivity through shuttle bus service run by RTC

Government departments including the MA&UD had on April 4 submitted a proposal to the SCR offering to pick the tab for passengers who could travel for free. In its response, SCR sought a draft MoU outlining the terms of implementation which could be forwarded to the Railway Board for clearance.

SCR said MMTS services were being operated based on passenger demand and subject to operational constraints. However, no final decision has been taken at this stage and the matter remains under due process. "The proposal is on hold, it has neither been accepted nor been rejected. The Board will take a call," said an official from the SCR.

Recently, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy also directed officials to align and strengthen MMTS services. In a review meeting on MMTS services, the Chief Minister expressed concern over the dip in the number of people using



The Hyderabad Metropolitan Area (HMA) and Urban Development Department & Sports Department, Government of Telangana has formally submitted a proposal to the South Central Railway for implementation of a free ridership scheme for all categories of passengers using MMTS services

the services.

While the SCR retains the authority to determine number of service, timings and scheduling, facilities at MMTS stations are provided as per Railway Board norms.

## Thunderstorms lash Hyderabad, trees uprooted across city; HYDRAA steps in

A sudden spell of gusty winds and thunderstorms hit Hyderabad and Cyberabad on Sunday evening, leading to waterlogging on major roads and uprooting of trees in several localities including Quthbullapur, Kompally and Alwal.

### Geographic Reference

Hyderabad, April 19

Gusty winds and thunderstorms were reported in several areas of Hyderabad and Cyberabad on Sunday evening. The accompanying rain also resulted in waterlogging of some main roads while in Suchitra, Kompally, Alwal, Gajularamaram, Pragathi Nagar and Quthbullapur, trees were uprooted.

Complaints of waterlogging and uprooted trees causing traffic jams were received at the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA) control room. DRF teams swung into action and cleared the obstructions promptly.

According to a press release, 4 cm of rainfall was recorded in Quthbullapur, while strong winds caused trees to fall in 53 locations.

The northern part of the city received 4 cm of rain, and water stagnated on roads in eight locations. The HYDRAA team addressed the complaints and also cleared all uprooted trees by around 8.30 pm, it said.



# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Branding judges threatens India's constitutional culture

political attacks on his role in the Salwa Judum case. He also expressed quiet surprise that a "mighty Home Minister" would resurrect a 15-year-old judgment in this manner. The restraint in his words stands in sharp contrast to the gravity of the moment. What unfolded in Parliament on March 31, 2026, and in the political discourse preceding it, is not a disagreement over a judicial verdict. It is something considerably more consequential: the transformation of constitutional adjudication into a site of political vilification.

At the centre of this storm lies the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Nandini Sundar v State of Chhattisgarh* (2011), where a bench led by Justice Reddy struck down the Salwa Judum policy. The court held that arming tribal civilians as Special Police Officers to fight Maoists was unconstitutional — that the state cannot outsource its monopoly on violence to private actors, however pressing the threat. The ruling reaffirmed a foundational constitutional principle. Yet years later, that judgment is being recast not as principled constitutional reasoning but as ideological complicity. The claim that the ruling "aided naxalism" or prolonged insurgency collapses a fundamental distinction between judicial review and political governance. This is where the debate becomes genuinely dangerous.

Criticism of judicial decisions is not only legitimate but essential in a democracy. Courts are not infallible, and their reasoning must remain open to scrutiny. But what we are witnessing today is not critique, it is attribution of motive. To suggest that a judge, while deciding a case, was guided by ideology rather than constitutional principle is to cross a constitutional red line. In *CK Daphtary v OP Gupta* (1971), the Supreme Court held that while judgments may be criticised, imputing motives to judges is impermissible — it strikes at the very foundation of the rule of law. The court characterised such conduct as "scandalous" within a constitutional framework that prizes judicial independence above political convenience. This distinction is not technical; it is civilisational. A democracy that allows judgments to be robustly debated is healthy. A democracy that allows judges to be branded is not.

Justice Reddy's own defence is disarmingly precise; the judgment did not prevent the state from combating Maoism, it merely held that the state cannot outsource that fight to civilians. This clarification exposes the fragility of the criticism being levelled against him. The Salwa Judum ruling did not weaken the state. It disciplined it. It insisted that constitutional ends cannot be pursued through unconstitutional means, and reaffirmed that internal security, however urgent, must operate within the boundaries of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.

To assert that the judgment empowered insurgency is to misconstrue both insurgency and constitutionalism. Insurgency is a structural, socio-political phenomenon with deep historical roots. Courts do not create it; nor can they end it. What courts can and must do is ensure that the state's response does not erode the Constitution itself. If that principle is abandoned — if courts are expected to look the other way when the executive transgresses constitutional limits — then the Constitution becomes contingent on convenience rather than supreme in application. The deeper concern here is institutional, not personal. When a former Supreme Court judge is labelled in political discourse for a judgment delivered years ago, it sends a message, not backward, but forward. It tells sitting judges that their decisions may invite not just criticism, but character assassination.

## Government Legislative Council Chief Whip Patnam Mahender Reddy inaugurates new hotel 'Bagara Buva.. Kodi Kura'



"Indian Chronicle Vikarabad (April 19)" "In Shankarpally, Government Chief Whip of the Legislative Council Dr. Patnam Mahender Reddy and Chevella MLA Kale Yadaiah inaugurated the 'Bagara Buva - Kodi Kura' New Hotel' on Sunday. Former Gudimalkapur Market Committee Chairman Dharamanna Gari Venkata Reddy, Municipal Chairman Satha Praveen Kumar, Vice Chairman, and leaders Sudhakar Reddy, Chandramouli, among others, participated in the program.

# Demand for 11% Reservation for Madigas in Telangana: Dr. Pidamarthi Ravi

"KHAMMAM APRIL 19 INDIAN CHRONICLE:" "Dr. Pidamarthi Ravi has demanded that the Telangana government allocate positions and opportunities to the Madiga community in proportion to their population, which stands at around 11% in the state. "According to caste census data released by the government, the Madiga community constitutes the largest segment among Scheduled Castes in Telangana, with a population of approximately 3.7 million (37 lakh), accounting for about 10.4%. Dr. Ravi emphasized that reservations in all sectors should reflect this proportion and be rounded to 11%. "He expressed concern that despite their significant population, representation of Madigas in political and nominated positions remains inadequate. Currently, there are only five Madiga representatives from the Congress party, with no Members of Parliament (MPs), no Members of Legislative Council (MLCs), and only one individual in nominated posts. He stated that there is a clear mismatch between the population data presented by the government and the opportunities being provided. "Dr. Ravi urged the government to ensure that all future appointments, including nominated posts and local body elections, strictly follow the 11% reservation for Madigas. He also called for corrective measures in past recruitments to ensure fair representation. "Madhira is the Self-Respect Symbol of Madigas: TPCC Former Secretary Vakkalagadda Chandrasekhar" "Speaking on the occasion, TPCC former secretary Vakkalagadda Chandrasekhar said that the caste census conducted in Telangana and made public reflects transparency, and he expressed gratitude to Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy for releasing the data. "He stated that the Madiga population in Telangana exceeds 3.7 million, with over 200,000 people in Khammam district alone, making them a dominant community. However, despite their numbers, representation remains minimal. Out of two SC-reserved constituencies in Khammam district, both are currently represented by leaders from other SC sub-castes. "Chandrasekhar alleged that even in areas like Madhira, which has a large Madiga population of nearly 60,000 (from the united Andhra Pradesh era), the community has not been given proper political representation. He termed this as a serious injustice. "He



further stated that they would meet Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to present the facts and seek justice. "He asserted that Madhira represents the self-respect of the Madiga community and vowed that they would secure political representation in the upcoming elections. He also demanded that both SC seats in Khammam district be allotted to Madiga candidates. "Chandrasekhar highlighted that Madigas have consistently supported the Congress party and played a key role in its victories, yet they have not received due representation. He urged the government to correct this imbalance by allocating positions in corpo-

rations, TPCC posts, and other appointments to Madigas from Khammam district. "Additionally, he pointed out that Backward Classes (BCs), who make up over 50% of the population in Khammam district, have also faced injustice. He demanded that at least one MLA seat and the Khammam Lok Sabha seat be allocated to BC communities in the upcoming elections. "The meeting was attended by former Sarpanch Bobbili Bharat Chandra, former MPP Edavalli Muthaiah, Kanakam Maisaiah, Kotamarthi Bhaskar, district SC cell leaders Thola Rakesh, Vijay Kumar, and several women activists.

## Uttarandhra Seva Samithi Services Praised-Water Distribution Camp Launched in Kushaiguda Industrial Area

"MEDCHAL- MALKAJGIRI, April 19 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): Kushaiguda, Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy said the services being rendered by Uttarandhra Seva Samithi are commendable. On Sunday, he inaugurated a water distribution camp set up in the Kushaiguda industrial area under the leadership of Samithi president Dandugula Tarakeswara Rao. Speaking on the occasion, he said that organizing such camps every year to quench the thirst of passersby during summer, along with other social service activities, reflects strong community commitment. He assured full support for all initiatives taken up by the Samithi. He also stated that roads in the Kushaiguda industrial area have already been developed. He asked small-scale industry owners in the area to bring any issues to his notice and assured efforts toward their resolution. He further mentioned the need to address problems in the Shantivanam crematorium located adjacent to the industrial area. Former corporator Kotta Ramarao, BRS AS Rao Nagar division president Kasam Mahipal Reddy, minority leader M.K. Badroddin, Kapra Press Club president Merugu Chandramohan, and several members of Uttarandhra Seva Samithi including A. Chandu, B. Lakshman Rao, K. Lakshmi Narayana, T. Yerrannaidu, T. Umashankar, K. Ravishankar, C. Anil Kumar, B. Appunna, B. Shaman, P. Dhanunjaya, Rambabu, B. Jagadeesh, Ramu, B. Anand Reddy, Venkata Rao, Sheshagiri, K. Neelakantham, Shankara Narayana, B. Prasad, Uma Maheshwara Rao, Shankar and others were present.



## Former Library Institution Director dies of heart attack

Former ZP Floor Leader Peddi Swapna Sudarshan Reddy consoles the bereaved family

"Narsampet/Warangal, April 19 (Indian Chronicle): Senior BRS leader, Telangana movement activist, and former Library Institution Director Puttapaka Kumaraswamy passed away suddenly on Sunday due to a heart attack. "Upon learning the news, former ZP Floor Leader Peddi Swapna Sudarshan Reddy visited the deceased's residence in Sarvapuru and paid floral tributes to his mortal remains. Consoled the family members and expressed her condolences and sympathy. "She recalled that Puttapaka Kumaraswamy worked with great dedication to the party and said his untimely death is an irreparable loss to the BRS party. She remembered his active role in the Telangana statehood movement and said his services to the party's growth will always be remembered. Peddi Swapna expressed deep sorrow, stating that it is hard to believe he is no more. "Constituency coordinators, district leaders, former MPP, town party president, BRTU district president, councillors, town party general secretary, former councillors, ward presidents, Party leaders were present on the occasion.



## Congress government is committed to farmers' development

MLA T. Rammohan Reddy "Indian Chronicle Vikarabad (April 19)" "Parigi MLA Dr. T. Rammohan Reddy, along with local leaders and public representatives, inaugurated an agri-drone through PACS at the Kulakacharla mandal headquarters. "Speaking on the



occasion, the MLA advised farmers to adopt modern agricultural practices and make use of the agri-drone. He said the availability of these services to farmers through PACS will be very beneficial for agriculture. "He stated that the Congress government is implementing several programs for farmer welfare and that farmers' development is their main goal. "He further revealed that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will release the second installment of funds at a public meeting to be held tomorrow in Kataram, Bhupalpally district. He said that in this second installment, Rs 5,653 crore will be credited to 45.11 lakh farmers owning 1 to 5 acres of land. MLA TRR said Rythu Bharosa will be provided to every eligible farmer in phases.

## Rain with thunder and lightning in Vikarabad district Rain that brought relief from the humidity

"Indian Chronicle Vikarabad (April 19)" "It is raining with thunder and lightning in Marpally, Vikarabad district. After suffering from the scorching heat of the sun for the past few days, the rains have brought some relief to the district's people. "For the past month, severe heat in



Tandur, Vikarabad, parigi and Kodangal constituencies of Vikarabad district made people afraid to even step outside. People were distressed due to the sultry weather. With temperatures ranging from 40 to 43 degrees Celsius, the heat left people struggling. As a result, groundwater levels depleted in villages across several mandals. "The rain that lashed a few areas of the district on Sunday evening brought relief.

## Naguluri Saibaba Felicitated as DCC Treasurer



"Indian Chronicle / Secunderabad, April 19:" "Naguluri Saibaba, who was appointed as the Treasurer of the Secunderabad District Congress Committee (DCC), was felicitated on Saturday at his office by representatives of the Chilakalaguda Park Walkers Development and Welfare Society and the Secunderabad Shuttle Riders Association. On the occasion, he was honored with a shawl and extended warm congratulations. "Speaking on the occasion, Naguluri Saibaba stated that the Congress government under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is committed to the development of education, healthcare, as well as sports and sportspersons. He assured that he would extend his support to local athletes by making sports grounds more accessible and providing necessary assistance. "Balraju, Anil Benhar, Jitendra, Srikanth, Chandrasekhar, S.N. Reddy, Jayanth, Srinivas, and others were present at the program.

# A casteless society is beneficial for society

Everyone should strive for the eradication of caste  
The district-level casteless, religion-free equality cultural festival in Tandur town on April 22 should be made a success



KVPS District General Secretary Uppali Malkayya (April 19) said it is regrettable that caste and religious differences among people continue even after 78 years of independence, and called for fostering a sense of equality that all fellow humans are equal to oneself, asking how much longer caste and religion-based honors and insults should continue. "A pamphlet was released today under the aegis of KVPS and social people's organizations, calling to make the district-level caste and religion-free equality cultural festival a success at the People's Degree College in Tandur town at 10 AM. Speaking on the occasion, KVPS District General Secretary Uppali Malkayya and CITU District Secretary K. Srinivas said... "They gave a call to observe the entire month of April as "the Month of Great Personalities" and hold caste and religion-free cultural festivals. He said that the caste discrimination and untouchability prevailing in Vikarabad district should be eradicated and awareness should be created among people through caste and religion-free cultural festivals. He stated that the Indian Constitution itself aspires for a casteless society and everyone should work towards caste eradication. "He said that caste, which exists nowhere else in the world, continues in our country with caste-based honors and insults, and that caste embodies the vile culture of being unable to see a fellow human as a human. He said that in rural areas, festivals are organized caste-wise, and efforts are being made to solidify castes. While many countries continue life in various modern ways, he said that in our country, even today, there is a situation where fellow humans are not respected as humans in the name of caste and religion. He said the Manusmriti ideology of thousands of years has been ingrained in people's minds. "He said Indian society will progress only through a casteless society. He said folk artists, dappu artists, and artists of various art forms should participate in the casteless festivals. He said that according to government statistics, after the BJP came to power at the Centre, atrocities against Dalits are occurring across the country at a rate of 10,000 per month. He said the BJP government has failed miserably in curbing these atrocities and that BJP policies are instead encouraging them. "He said the Supreme Court's verdict that Dalits who convert to another religion will not have SC status — while caste discrimination and untouchability based on birth continue — amounts to a three-pronged attack on Dalits. He said judgments based on a religious perspective

are against the spirit of the Constitution and that this verdict insults Articles 25 and 15 of the Constitution. He demanded that the central government immediately approach a bench and that the Supreme Court review its verdict. "He called upon everyone who opposes caste discrimination and untouchability to become partners in casteless cultural movements, urging poets, artists, and intellectuals to participate. He demanded that the state government's cultural wing 'Samskruthika Saradhi' artists should undertake a widespread campaign throughout April to create awareness among people against caste discrimination and untouchability, initiated by the government itself. "He said that preacher Garikapati Narasimha Rao made arrogant and insulting comments about providing eggs in mid-day meals in schools, and demanded that he immediately withdraw his comments and issue a public apology. He demanded that the Padma Shri award given to him, who belittled a government scheme, be revoked and that legal action be taken against him. "He said it is regrettable that caste discrimination and untouchability continue even today. He said that in recent times, 143 caste-based honor killings, social boycotts in the name of VDCs, and attacks and atrocities against Dalits are continuing, and that laws in place to curb them are being diluted. He said governments are treating castes as vote banks and are turning a blind eye to caste-based atrocities. "He demanded that organizations claiming all Hindus are relatives should answer why Dalits were driven out of temples in Narayanpet and Shamirpet during Sri Ramanavami celebrations. He criticized that while even animals have the quality of love, humans are being viewed with contempt. "He said district-level casteless equality cultural festivals will be held on April 22 in Tandur town, Vikarabad district. He said these festivals will be organized collectively with various organizations, intellectuals, and well-wishers from Vikarabad district. He said they will unearth the progressive and forward-thinking elements hidden in ancient arts and conduct the event as the "Month of Great Personalities" through dance, song, and speech. He requested that various poets, artists, and intellectuals from the district attend in large numbers. "Agricultural Workers' Union District President Y. Buggappa, SC/ST/BC Minority Rights Struggle Committee District President Kothuru Chandrayya, TMHPS Tandur Constituency President Sadiq, MRPS Tandur Town President Balaram, and leaders Raju, Balaraj, among others, participated in the program.

## Fight for Eight-Hour Workday in the Spirit of May Day: AITUC Leader



"KHAMMAM APRIL 19 INDIAN CHRONICLE:"All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) State Secretary Shingu Narsimharao has called upon workers to continue their struggle to protect the eight-hour work system, a right achieved through historic labor movements, in the spirit of International Workers' Day. "On Sunday, Narsimharao, along with AITUC State Executive Member B.G. Clement, unveiled the 141st May Day wall posters at Giriprasad Bhavan in Khammam. Speaking on the occasion, he expressed concern over the growing violations of workers' rights across the world. "He alleged that since Narendra Modi came to power, labor rights in India have been gradually eroded. After the introduction of the four new labor codes, he said, the situation of workers has become uncertain and alarming. "Narsimharao emphasized that no government had voluntarily granted labor rights; rather, workers had achieved them through long struggles and sacrifices. He questioned the need to replace existing labor laws with the new labor codes, arguing that if the government truly cared for workers, it should strengthen the implementation of existing laws instead of weakening them. "He further alleged that while the government has not significantly increased spending for workers in the past decade, it has written off massive loans for corporate sectors. He criticized the rise in MPs' salaries while claiming that the minimum wage for workers has been drastically reduced. "Referring to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, he said the scheme has been weakened by reducing funds and workdays, affecting rural employment. He also pointed out that rising prices of essential commodities, along with increases in petrol, diesel, and gas prices, have severely impacted workers, particularly those in the transport sector. "Narsimharao stated that both organized

and unorganized sector workers have been facing increasing hardships in recent years. He urged workers to unite and intensify their struggles to safeguard the rights they have earned. "The event was attended by AITUC district leaders, including President Gade Lakshmi Narayana, General Secretary Thota Ramanjaneyulu, Working President Ravi Shivaramakrishna, women's wing leader Potu Kalavathi, Vice President Md. Zakiruddin, Treasurer Sheikh Ibrahim, Venkanna, and others.



A bullock died due to heavy rain with lightning that lashed Morangupalli in Vikarabad district. "Indian Chronicle Vikarabad (April 19) "In Morangupalli village of Vikarabad district, a bullock tied under a tree in a farmer's field died after being struck by lightning during heavy rain with thunderstorms. The farmer was left helpless by the incident and has requested government assistance.

## MP and MLAs attend the tenth-day ceremony of E.V. Satish Kumar



"KHAMMAM APRIL 19 INDIAN CHRONICLE : The tenth-day ceremony of E.V. Satish Kumar (brother of TPCC General Secretary and Red Cross Society State Governing Body Member E.V. Srinivas Rao), who passed away recently, was held on Sunday at Teachers Colony in Hanamkonda. "Warangal MP Dr. Kadiyam Kayya, MLAs Nayini Rajender Reddy and KR Nagaraju, KUDA Chairman Inugala Venkataram Reddy, City Mayor Gundu Sudharani, and State Women's President Errabelli Swarna attended the program, paid floral tributes to the portrait of the deceased, and expressed their deep condolences to the family members. "Public representatives, Congress party leaders, and party workers also participated in the ceremony.

## Remove Unscientific Courses from Higher Education: Speakers Demand at JVV Education Conference "Proposal for Introduction of Common School System

"KHAMMAM APRIL 19 INDIAN CHRONICLE:"A strong demand was raised to completely remove unscientific courses from higher education during an educa-

win theory, the periodic table, and genetics. They also alleged that medieval Muslim history has been completely removed from history textbooks, while unscientific and unverified content is being introduced. "The speakers highlighted that nearly 340 million people in India remain illiterate and emphasized the lack of government initiatives to address this issue. They suggested reviving mass literacy movements similar to those conducted in the 1990s with public participation. "They further recommended that pre-primary education should focus on the psychological development of children rather than formal academics. At the intermediate level, they cautioned that excessive competition could foster unhealthy rivalry and reduce emotional bonding among students. "Key Resolutions of the Conference: "Provide free and quality public education from early childhood to higher education "Stop privatization and commercialization of education "Allocate at least 6% of GDP to education "Repeal NEP-2020 and protect states' rights "Rewrite NCERT textbooks through independent educationists "Increase teacher recruitment and reduce their workload "Implement community-based literacy programs "Reform funding mechanisms in higher education and research to give more role to states "Introduce a people-centric education system based on equality, social justice, scientific temper, and democratic federal principles "Introduce a Common School System "The conference was coordinated by JVV State General Secretary Raja. Among those present were State Vice President Alavala Nageswara Rao, Audit Committee Member Shivanna Narayana, State Secretariat Member L.V. Reddy, Committee Member Arunashree, Honorary President Mallempati Veerabhadra Rao, Vanjaku Lakshminarayana, District President V. Mohan, and District General Secretary K. Rama Rao, among others.



tion conference organized under the aegis of Jana Vignana Vedika (JVV). The conference was held on Sunday at the DPRC Bhavan in Khammam under the aegis of JVV State President Chelimala Rajeswar. "Prominent speakers addressed various topics at the seminar. Analyst Dr. Ande Satyam spoke on NEP-2020 and trends in higher education, while retired professor Koya Koteswara Rao discussed changes in NCF-2023 curriculum. Edama Srinivasa Reddy, State General Secretary of the Society for Change in Education, Telangana, spoke on challenges in school education in Telangana. "The speakers criticized the current system where universities are required to generate their own funds, stating that this approach limits access to higher education to wealthy students. They also expressed concern that the grading system and the four-year degree structure could discourage students from pursuing higher education. "Concerns were raised over recent changes in NCERT textbooks, including the removal of fundamental scientific topics such as the Dar-

## Felicitation Ceremony for Dalita Ratna Awardees Held in Khammam

"KHAMMAM APRIL 19 INDIAN CHRONICLE:"A grand felicitation ceremony was organized by the BC, SC, ST JAC Khammam District Committee to honor the recipients of the prestigious Dalita Ratna Awards. The event was held at the Martyrs' Memorial under the Presidentship of District Convener Mulakalappalli Sangeswara Rao. "The awardees, including prominent Telangana folk artist, poet, writer, singer, and activist Pammi Ravi—founder of the Telangana Janapada Dhoom Dhaam—and JAC Co-Convener Korlapati Veera Raghavulu Kommula, along with Khammam constituency contesting candidate Anthony Suresh Dakkali, received the Dalita Ratna Awards at Ravindra Bharathi. The awards were presented by the Telangana State Government's Scheduled Welfare Department on the occasion of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's 135th birth anniversary. "Following their recognition, the Khammam District BC, SC, ST JAC Committee honored the awardees with shawls and extended their congratulations. "Several prominent leaders and representatives from various communities participated in the event and conveyed their best wishes. Among them were BC, SC, ST leaders including LHPF state leader and JAC Co-Convener Badru Naik; Veeranari Savitribai Phule Sadhana Samithi President Upendra Bai; Mudiraj Coordination Committee District President Nara Sheshayya Mudiraj; Yadav community leader Anike Nageswara Rao Yadav; Nai Brahmin Association Town President and JAC Co-Convener Elamandala Jagadeesh; District Co-Convener Katakam Venkata Lakshmi; Mala Mahanadu District President Telangana Srinu; Vaddera community leader Venkateshwarlu; and artists Pagi Venkanna, Ramdas, Srikanth, and Mothe Ramu, among others. "The event witnessed active participation and enthusiastic support from community leaders and members, making it a memorable occasion celebrating social contributions and achievements.



## Khammam: New Shops Allotted to Displaced Small Traders Under Cable Bridge Project



“KHAMMAM APRIL 19 INDIAN CHRONICLE:” Under the directions of State Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao, documents for 66 newly constructed shops worth ₹2 crore were distributed to small traders who lost their shopping complexes in Divisions 46 and 47 due to the cable bridge construction in Khammam city. The distribution took place at the camp office, where Dr. Tummala Yugandhar and Khammam Mayor Punukollu Neeraja handed over the allotment papers to the beneficiaries. The initiative has brought relief and hope to small vendors who depend on daily business for their livelihood. Beneficiaries expressed happiness and gratitude to the minister for fulfilling his promise within a short span of time. “Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Tummala Yugandhar stated that Khammam city is witnessing rapid development under the leadership of Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao. He highlighted key projects such as the cable bridge construction, the Munneru retaining wall to prevent floods, Khilla ropeway, and the new agricultural market, all contributing to transforming Khammam into a top city.” Mayor Punukollu Neeraja also remarked that the city is progressing in all aspects under the minister’s leadership. “The beneficiaries shared that many had earlier discouraged them, saying the project was not possible. However, they appreciated Yugandhar’s efforts in expediting the process and ensuring justice for them.” The event was attended by Agricultural Market Committee Chairman Yaragalla Hanumantha Rao, City Congress President Nagandla Deepak Chowdary, leaders Nalam Satish, Mohammed Ashrif, and others.

## Grand Annual Day Celebrations Held at Shine High School

“KHAMMAM APRIL 19 INDIAN CHRONICLE:” The Annual Day celebrations of Shine High School were conducted with great enthusiasm and grandeur. The event witnessed the presence of distinguished guests, including

for securing commendable results in the 10th class examinations last year and assured his continued support for the school’s future development. “Correspondent Ansar Pasha stated that Shine High School is always



ing Bonakal Sarpanch Banoth Konda and Ravinutala Sarpanch Bhukya Bhadrui Naik, who attended as chief guests. “A large number of parents participated in the Program making it a vibrant and memorable occasion. The students impressed everyone with their colorful cultural performances, including dance programs and fancy dress shows. “Speaking on the occasion, Sarpanch Banoth Konda appreciated the efforts of the school management and teachers for their dedication towards achieving excellent academic results. He congratulated the institution

committed to shaping a bright future for students by providing quality education. Director Lal Mohammed expressed gratitude towards the parents for their continuous support and trust in the institution, emphasizing that their encouragement plays a key role in achieving success. “The event was attended by Correspondent Ansar Pasha, Director Lal Mohammed, Principal Aitipamula Swetha, Administrator Degala Veladri, media representatives, teachers, students, and parents, making it a successful and joyful celebration.

## UGD Works Launched in Gopal Reddy Nagar – Rajeev Enclave

“MEDCHAL- MALKAJGIRI, April 19 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): Kapra, Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy inaugurated underground drainage (UGD) works in Gopal Reddy Nagar – Rajeev Enclave under Kapra Division. The project is being taken up at a cost of ₹1.32 crore and marks a key step toward improving basic infrastructure in the area. Speaking at the event, the



Mohan, and Divyalatha also attended. Officials stated that the project will enhance sanitation facilities in the area and provide long-term relief to residents.

MLA said the government is committed to public health, sanitation, and infrastructure development. He stated that providing permanent solutions to drainage issues in every colony remains a priority. He added that such development works will significantly improve the quality of life for residents. Kapra Division BRS President Bairi Naveen Goud, Water Works General Manager Appala Naidu, Deputy General Manager Harshita Reddy, and Assistant Engineer Amarnath were present at the programme. Colony association members and local leaders including Badruddin, Indraiah, Gilbert, Mallareddy, Mahesh, Bhaskar Goud, Ganesh, Saroja, Srinivas, Linga Reddy, Shivalingam, Krishna Goud, Srikanth Goud, Seenu,

## BC leaders leave for BC Jana Jagarana Jathara under the leadership of BC JAC leader Nerdham Bhaskar Goud

“UPPAL, APRIL 19 (INDIAN CHRONICLE):” A large number of BC leaders from the Uppal constituency left for the BC Jana Jagarana Jathara, organised under the aegis of the Mana Alochana Sadhana Samithi, at the Nampally Exhibition Grounds on Sunday. The leaders, under the leadership of BC JAC leader Nerdham Bhaskar Goud, proceeded in large numbers to make the public meeting a grand success. “Among those who participated in the programme were Chiluka Nagar BC Convener Venkatesh, BC State Co-Convener Gajjela Satyaraj Goud, Puppala Venkateswarlu, Bachanaboyina Srinivas Yadav, Jeripothula Nagaraju Goud, Boda Vidyasagar, Nagarjuna, Sakinala Prasad, Shraavan Goud, Raju Neta, Suman, women leaders Matta Jayanthi Goud, Rajeswari, and Prasanna, along with several others.



## Advanced Medical Services Now Available in Khammam

### KGH Hospital Services Accessible to All

“KHAMMAM APRIL 19 INDIAN CHRONICLE:” An advanced healthcare facility, Khammam Gastro Hospital, was inaugurated on Sunday in Khammam city, marking a significant step toward providing modern medical services to the local population. “The hospital was formally inaugurated at Mayuri Center by city Mayor Punukollu

enue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy), and MLC Tata Madhu. “Speaking on the occasion, the dignitaries highlighted the growing need for advanced medical facilities due to increasing lifestyle-related gastric issues. They emphasized that along with creating awareness, it is essential to make high-quality healthcare accessible to the public. “They appreciated the initiative of establishing a state-of-the-art hospital in Khammam, stating that providing Hyderabad-level medical facilities in the city is a commendable and bold step. “Mayor Punukollu Neeraja praised the hospital management for setting up such a modern healthcare facility as part of their social responsibility. Dr. Tummala Yugandhar congratulated the KGH medical team for bringing advanced healthcare services to Khammam. “MLC Tata Madhu noted that there is a growing demand for gastroenterologists in the city, and the launch of KGH Hospital would help address this gap. Tumburu Dayakar Reddy added that many people suffer from gastric problems without proper treatment, and this hospital would greatly benefit them. “The hospital has been established in a building near the old bus stand, which has served as a medical center for over 50 years. With its reopening as KGH Hospital, advanced gastro care services are now more accessible to the public. “Doctors and Dignitaries Extend Congratulations” On the occasion, several prominent doctors, political leaders, businesspersons, and social figures congratulated the hospital team, including: “Dr. Gongura Venkateswarlu (Managing Director) “Dr. Mudireddy Animesh Reddy (Medical Gastroenterologist) “Dr. Vishnu Priya (Gynecologist) “Admin Director Aruna Gogireddy “Marketing Director Swathi Reddy Parupati “Many well-known specialists from various fields such as urology, psychiatry, orthopedics, pulmonology, neurology, and pediatrics attended and appreciated the initiative. “Participation from Various Sections” Leaders from different political parties, representatives of social organizations, business community members, and journalist associations also attended the event and extended their support and congratulations.



Neeraja along with Congress leader Dr. Tummala Yugandhar, Tumburu Dayakar Reddy (Secretary to Rev-

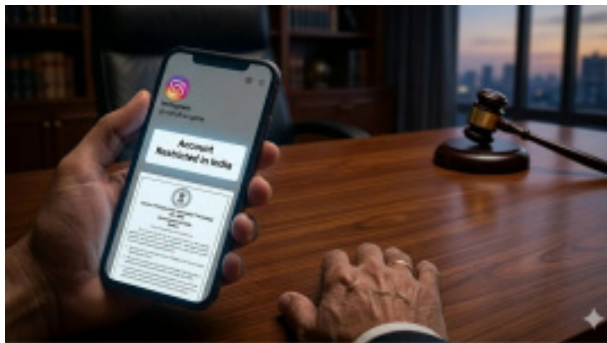
## Police raid gambling den four arrested, two absconding — CI D.Visweshwar



“Geesugonda/Warangal, April 19 (Indian Chronicle) : Police raided a gambling den and arrested four gamblers, while two others escaped. According to Geesugonda CI D. Visweshwar, acting on credible information that some persons were gambling at the agricultural field of Kadari Raju on the outskirts of Kommula village in the mandal, Geesugonda Police Station conducted a joint raid on Sunday along with the Warangal Police Task Force. “During the raid, four persons were apprehended and two fled the scene. Police seized 5 mobile phones, 4 motorcycles, ₹4,840 in cash, and playing cards from their possession. A case has been regis-

tered and an investigation is underway, the CI said. “Those arrested were identified as: Kadari Raju (40), farmer from Kommula; Duniike Komurayya (41), farmer from Vishwanadhapuram; Basike Prabhakar (57), farmer from Kommula; and Lakavath Ganesh (24), a student from Vishwanadhapuram. “The absconding persons were identified as Vankudoth Raju (30), farmer from Vishwanadhapuram, and Palle Naresh (32), farmer from Kommula. “CI Visweshwar warned that strict action will be taken against anyone involved in illegal activities and advised youth to stay away from gambling, drugs, and other harmful habits.

## ‘Attempt to silence my voice’: Maharashtra educator Vitthal Kangane to move HC after Meta restricts his Instagram account in India



Vitthal Kangane, a private educator from Parbhani in Maharashtra with a massive social media following, announced Tuesday that he would move the Bombay High Court against Meta after his Instagram account was restricted in India, an action Kangane claims is an attempt to silence his criticism of the BJP-led Mahayuti government. Kangane, who provides career guidance to 17 lakh followers, recently posted content regarding the case of Ashok Kharat, a self-styled godman currently facing multiple FIRs for extortion and sexual assault. Speaking to The Indian Express, he said, “Instead of deleting my account, Meta could have deleted that particular post. This attempt to silence my voice on public issues has caused me immense mental agony.” On March 28, I got calls from a few followers who told me that my Instagram account was not visible to them. Later, I found that my account was not visible to my followers in India but was accessible in other parts of the world,” said Kangane, who has uploaded 1,700 posts, most of which focus on social and civic issues affecting citizens.

Kangane said that after he found his account had been disabled in India, he emailed Meta. “Meta replied that they have restricted my content in India in pursuance of a notice from the Government of India under Section

79 (3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.” This section requires intermediaries, such as Meta, to remove or restrict access to content upon receiving actual knowledge of a government order or court directive. Meanwhile, a Meta spokesperson told BBC News Marathi, “After getting valid blocking order, we have restricted this account as per the current legal requirement.” “How did Ashok Kharat become such a big shot?” Kangane said that a few days ago, he had posted a video criticising Ashok Kharat and the politicians associated with him. “The question is, how did Ashok Kharat become such a big shot? How was he able to run his shady activities for nearly ten years? How was he allowed to do this so brazenly?” “Obviously, this cannot happen without the blessings of those in power. Did anyone see him in pictures with common people? No. Instead, we all saw his pictures alongside ministers, political leaders, and even the Deputy Chief Minister. This is what I aimed to highlight in my post,” he said. Kangane said in his posts that he has only criticised the government’s misguided plans and policies. “Now, I will have to approach the Bombay High Court. This is not just for me, but for everyone who raises their voice against the government’s wrong decisions and faces attempts to silence them.” “If the government takes a wrong step and the media remains silent, but the common person speaks out, will they then try to silence his voice by deleting their accounts? This is what I want to bring to the high court’s attention. I hope the court will provide its guidance in this matter.”

Kangane said his legal challenge leans heavily on the landmark 2015 Shreya Singhal vs Union of India ruling. In that case, the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the IT Act, which had previously criminalised “offensive” online messages, calling it unconstitutionally vague. “But my message was not offensive; it only highlighted the wrong measures and inaction of the government, which allowed a monster like Kharat to hold fort for long,” said Kangane, who has worked with the state forest department but later left that position to start his own private teaching academy.

## From a bookseller on Red Fort pavements to a ‘publisher’: How one man churned out thousands of fake copies of bestselling books



In 2010, Jwala Prasad was a regular fixture on the pavements near Delhi’s Red Fort, which petered out to the cramped lanes of Chandni Chowk Market. He was among the booksellers who sat on the pathways, their stacks of fake copies of best-sellers beside them. Last week, the 67-year-old was arrested for allegedly running a full blown printing press, churning out fake copies of popular books — mostly by publisher Penguin Random House — and supplying them en masse, the Delhi Police had said. After over a decade of book selling, police officers said Prasad had established contacts across the supply chain of fake books. “He soon started hoarding these books, and got a godown in Fatehpuri to store them. He started selling them in bulk to other stall owners,” a police officer investigating the case said. In 2011, the police were tipped off about Prasad’s venture and he was arrested by the Economic Offences Wing of the Delhi Police under the Copyright Act.

“He got out on bail later that year, and took a hiatus from the business. Both his sons were also getting settled at that time, so he stayed out of trouble,” the officer said. During the Covid pandemic years, one of his sons went to Australia while the other married a woman police officer of UP Police. “In 2021, he came up with the idea of reviving his business. This time, as a publisher. He bought two second-hand printing machines and rented a two floor house in Anand Parbat area, where he set up the press,” a police officer said. Prasad’s sons, according to a police officer, said in their statements that they asked their father to stop. They were earning decent money for Prasad to pass his days of old age in comfort.

But, police said, Prasad’s business plan was all mapped out: he hired three workers to look after his new godown in Rohini, two to run the printing press, and ordered metal plates to copy original books. Explaining how Prasad worked, a police officer said, “First, he ordered original copies of the books. He then prepared the negatives of these books. The negatives were placed on the plates, and were used to print the pages. One negative could print about 1,000 copies.”

This way, original books worth Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 would be turned into soft copies costing just Rs 150 to Rs 200. A police officer said Jwala started to supply these books

to wholesalers across North India: Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh. From there, these books would reach roadside corner stores, and even old and established book shops. On March 13, a team led by Inspector Sohan Lal, Inspector Satender Punia and ACP Ramesh Lamba got a tip-off about a godown near G3S mall, Rohini, which had stacks of fake books. To verify it, one of the investigators got a copy of the book from the godown, and called a representative of Penguin Random House to verify it. “In one glance, he verified that it was a fake. He then filed a complaint, stating that an unknown person, in the name of Penguin Random House, has been publishing pirated books,” a police officer said.

“A total of 8,593 pirated books were recovered and seized. During further investigation, another raid at a nearby premises led to recovery of 11,544 more pirated books, taking the total seizure to over 20,137 books,” DCP (Crime) Aditya Gautam said. Prasad was arrested the same day. During questioning, he told the police about his factory in Anand Parbat. A raid was conducted there too, and police uncovered the printing press. “Two printing machines from a press located in Anand Parbat Industrial Area, negatives of four pirated books, 12 printing plates used for reproducing copyrighted material, and dyes to colour code the books were recovered from the press,” DCP Gautam said. Prasad has been arrested under the Copyright Act, but the menace of pirated copies has hardly ended for publishers.

Fake copies have been piling up losses for publishers in an already volatile industry. A publishing professional, associated with Penguin Random House, with over 25 years of experience in verification of original books, said fakes have become a major dent in publishers turning a profit on any book. “One of our latest publications, Arundhati Roy’s ‘Mother Mary Comes to Me’, was only launched as a hardcover initially. But within a day of its launch, its soft cover was also available in the market. A Rs 800 book was being sold for Rs 150,” he said. “Dan Brown’s Secret of Secrets was launched in September last year. It was expected to do better... And though it seemed a lot of people were liking it and reading it, the sales were not reflecting that. Its soft copies were easily available at traffic signals of CP. Online platforms have made it worse. There is no mechanism through which they verify if books sold on their website are from authorised retailers or not,” the publishing professional said.

He said that on behalf of Penguin Random House, he filed multiple complaints with the Delhi police last year, like every year, about fake copies of books being hoarded. The difference between the quality of the original and the fake is glaring, he added. “Paper quality, bind quality, colour pallet, even the font size. Most copies have smaller fonts, as they are trying to print fewer pages. We also run campaigns before the launch of a book, trying to make booksellers, and library owners more aware about this,” he said. “It’s (fake books) been growing year by year. And sales are decreasing because of that. At least we should turn a profit on a book, before it’s rolled out for cheap. It’s a very expensive business,” said the professional.

## How BMC Drove a 23% Jump in Property Tax Collections in Mumbai

At a time when the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has recorded a consistent dip in its reserves, civic records show that for the financial year 2025–26, which ended on March 31, the BMC recovered ₹7,610 crore in property taxes—the highest in its history. Officials have attributed this surge largely to the consistent crackdown on property owners who had long pending dues. It marked a significant rise of 23.29% compared to last year’s collection of ₹6,172 crore, reflecting a sharp improvement in recovery. The recovered amount however was only 3.68 per cent above the ₹7,341 cr target that the BMC had set to attain in the last financial year.

Officials said the turnaround was driven by a stricter approach towards defaulters. From last year, the BMC initiated a crackdown that included seizing properties and listing them for auction to recover dues. In many cases, property owners came forward to clear their pending taxes soon after their properties were seized. At the same time, these actions sent a wider message, prompting other defaulters to make payments voluntarily. “The moment we initiated seizures and auction proceedings, many owners cleared their dues. It also created awareness and urgency among others,” a senior civic official said.

In October last year, the BMC issued notices to auction four properties to recover pending dues worth ₹120 crore—marking the first such move since 1984. More recently, the civic body also seized multiple properties in South Mumbai, including two at Kamala Mills, for non-payment of dues, further reinforcing its stance. Civic records show that the highest recovery this year came from K East (Andheri East) ward at ₹719 crore, followed by G South (Worli, Prabhadevi) with ₹670 crore and K West (Juhu, Vile Parle) with ₹622 crore. H East (Bandra East, Khar) and H West (Bandra West) also contributed significantly with ₹572 crore and ₹536 crore respectively. In contrast, the lowest



recovery of ₹47 crore was recorded in B ward covering Dongri and Sandhurst Road areas, while C ward (Kalbadevi–Chirabazar) saw collections of ₹90 crore. Property tax remains one of the biggest sources of revenue for the BMC, with Mumbai having among the highest property tax rates in the country. Despite the improved recovery, outstanding dues still stood at ₹10,899 crore as of December 2025, underlining the scale of the challenge. Officials also pointed out that the absence of large-scale elections last year worked in their favour. Without election duties, staff were able to focus on systematic tax recovery, ensuring better follow-ups and enforcement. Even as collections rose, the BMC’s financial records show that its reserves have declined by nearly ₹10,000 crore over the past five years. From ₹91,690 crore in 2021, reserves stood at ₹81,774 crore in 2025–26, after having peaked during the previous decade. For now, officials see the record-breaking recovery as a result of consistent enforcement and a clear message to defaulters. Whether this momentum continues will depend on how firmly the civic body sustains its action in the coming years.

## ‘PM Modi likes Punjabis, and me too’: Joining BJP, HS Phoolka recalls 1984 trauma, targets Congress and AAP

“Modi ji likes Punjab and Punjabis a lot. Modi ji likes me a lot too, as I fought for the justice of the 1984 genocide victims. The BJP fought for the 1984 victims from the front as their own personal issue. I assisted them legally in fighting the cases,” Phoolka said, signalling an ideological alignment with the BJP while underlining his long association with the cause. “I can understand the pain of the 1984 victims as I myself was a victim. I cannot forget November 2, 1984, when a mob entered the house where I was living on rent... Our landlord, a Punjabi Hindu family, saved me and my pregnant wife... had they not hidden us in their storeroom... we would not have been alive today,” he recalled. Rejecting the narrative of communal conflict, he added, “Congress has time and again said that it was Hindus versus Sikhs... no, it was Congress versus Sikhs, as Congress supporters did not spare even the Hindus who were helping Sikhs.” Phoolka went on to allege that former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had planned the action against Sikhs during her lifetime, “but it was executed after her death.” He also highlighted his past association with the BJP, stating, “BJP leader Madan Lal Khurana was so committed to the 1984 victims that he was involved in all the cases against the victims. In addition to this, he even made me his advisor when he became Delhi chief minister in 1992. From 2003 to 2013, I guided the BJP’s Delhi team legally, without taking any fees.” Reflecting on his political journey, Phoolka said his decision to join AAP in 2014 was a “mistake”. “I committed a mistake in 2014 and joined a party which claimed to bring change...,” he said, adding “haathi ke daant khane ke aur dikhane ke aur the”, suggesting that appearances can be deceptive. “I even became Leader of Opposition in 2017... but the Bar Council told me I could not fight cases while holding a political post. I had to choose between justice for 1984 victims and the LoP post, so I quit politics,” he said, adding that it was after this that Congress leader Sajjan Kumar was convicted and “is still



behind bars”. Turning to present-day Punjab, Phoolka painted a grim picture. “The condition of Punjab is deplorable... extortion calls are being made to every second person in Punjab; law and order has collapsed; groundwater is falling... Punjab can become barren. Only one party can save Punjab, and that is the BJP,” he said, alleging that “Kejriwal has placed his people in government offices in Punjab and corruption is widespread.” He also referred to his proximity to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, recalling, “During the 350th martyrdom day of Guru Tegh Bahadur ji at Red Fort last November, PM made me sit next to him... Congress never made such efforts organise such programmes.” He added that recognition of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s sacrifice was corrected in textbooks only after Murlu Manohar Joshi became the Union education minister. Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, welcoming Phoolka, said he is “a household name among Sikh families” for his role in securing justice for 1984 victims. BJP Punjab chief Sunil Jakhar, along with party leaders Ashwani Sharma and Tarun Chugh, was present at the induction. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann reacted to the development, saying, “He was my former colleague. I was in Parliament, and he was in the Punjab Assembly.

## From ‘Digital Democracy’ dialogue to ‘Samajwadi TV’: Inside Samajwadi Party’s digital game plan for 2027 polls



A YouTube channel, a ‘digital democracy’ dialogue with influencers, and a talk show in the works: The Samajwadi Party and its leaders in Uttar Pradesh are upping their digital game as the state goes to polls next year, with sources saying these initiatives will gain momentum over the next six months. The goal, sources said, is to build a structured network to amplify the party’s message via digital mediums and engage specific voter segments.

One of the initiatives launched last August is Samajwadi Party TV. A YouTube channel handled by party spokesperson Naved Siddiqui, it gives daily updates about the party’s point of view on prevailing issues and statements by party chief Akhilesh Yadav. From 8 pm to 9 pm, Siddiqui, a former popular radio jockey and voice-over artist, gives daily updates about “Samajwadi news.” “It was observed that many times, the party’s message was not being effectively conveyed through print or other mediums. So, I suggested this platform and it was approved by the party chief.

Now, it has become a daily update mechanism to ensure that the message reaches a wider audience in the format of a news update,” Siddiqui. Sources said a plan is in the works to start a talk show, giving party leaders a platform to speak about the SP’s point of view on prevailing political or public issues. The SP has also been reaching out to influencers and content creators as part of its digital push, who can help take the party message forward during polls. Recently, Akhilesh interacted with around 100 social media influencers at the party office as part of a “digital democracy dialogue”. Sources said while most of these influencers are not big names, they have a good following, especially in their local regions, and were selected after screening their social media content. Another digital initiative, ‘Vision India: Plan, Develop, Ascent’ Summits, was launched by the party last year.

“In these summits, Akhilesh Yadav ji interacts with experts of the field concerned and young minds, listens to their opinions and shares his vision on these issues. The ideas collected in these summits will be included in the party’s manifesto in future elections,” Rajeev Rai, the SP’s Ghosi Lok Sabha MP and the chief coordinator of the Vision India summits, had told The Indian Express earlier. “These are not paid platforms, it is merely the love of party supporters and party leaders for Akhilesh ji and they are undertaking these individual initiatives on their own to take forward the party ideology,” said a party leader. Sources said as elections draw closer, the party and its leaders are also preparing to upgrade their existing digital platforms and connect to larger audiences through digital dialogues and interactions. Party leaders said the formation of a dedicated social media wing is also under consideration.

## Stalin says AIADMK will surrender TN to BJP; seeks clean sweep for DMK

Tiruchy: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on the opposition AIADMK, alleging that its leader Edappadi K. Palaniswami (EPS) would “pledge” the state to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) if voted to power. Addressing a public meeting in Tiruchy, Stalin campaigned for candidates of the Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA) across nine Assembly constituencies, urging voters to deliver a “100 per cent victory” for the DMK-led front in the upcoming elections.

He framed the contest as a decisive battle to protect Tamil Nadu’s political identity and governance model. The Chief Minister said the people had placed their trust in the DMK during the 2021 Assembly elections, enabling the formation of what he described as a “Dravidian Model” government. According to him, the administration has largely fulfilled its electoral promises and ensured social harmony across the state. Contrasting Tamil Nadu with BJP-ruled states, Stalin claimed that the state has remained free from conflicts based on caste and religion. He alleged that the BJP was attempting to create divisions along religious

lines in Tamil Nadu and accused Palaniswami of facilitating such efforts. “If the BJP contests alone here, they would secure fewer votes than NOTA. That is why they are relying on the AIADMK,” he said. Stalin further alleged that the AIADMK was functioning under the influence of the BJP, citing an incident during an NDA meeting in Madurai where a portrait of Dravidian icon Periyar E.V. Ramasamy was reportedly removed. He questioned whether former AIADMK stalwarts like M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) and J. Jayalalitha would have allowed such an act. The DMK president also cast doubt on Palaniswami’s leadership within the alliance, noting that key decisions were being made in New Delhi. Referring to statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Stalin said the BJP leadership had projected the formation of an NDA government without clearly endorsing EPS as the chief ministerial candidate. Reiterating his central charge, Stalin warned that an AIADMK government would effectively hand over Tamil Nadu’s autonomy to the BJP, and called on voters to reject the opposition alliance decisively at the polls.

## ‘Make him famous’ post: Why Delhi HC castigated Richa Chadha, news platforms for ‘unverified’ allegations against PwC partner



The Delhi High Court castigated news platforms as well as actress and producer Richa Chadha for amplifying alleged unverified allegations against a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), saying such amplification “acts as a catalyst for public shaming and digital vigilantism”. While Chadha had sought that she be deleted from among the defendant parties in the suit, given that she has deleted her post, the court refused to accede to the request on March 20.

Justice Vikas Mahajan observed, “The endorsement and amplification of an unverified allegation, accompanied by the instigatory text ‘Make him famous’, transcends mere free expression and acts as a catalyst for public shaming and digital vigilantism. A public figure, such as (Chadha), bears a legal and moral responsibility to verify... facts before leveraging her platform to amplify grave accusations. The Court is, prima facie, of the view that endorsement of unverified allegations has inflicted immediate, exponential, and incalculable harm on the plaintiff’s reputation.” In his plea, the partner at PwC sought permanent injunction and damages owing to alleged unverified accusations of misconduct on an IndiGo flight by a co-passenger on social media. He sought damages to the tune of Rs 2.01 crore for the “grave and irreparable harm” caused to his reputation and professional standing, and public apologies from the defendants as well. As an interim measure, Justice Mahajan has now directed social media intermediaries — Google

LLC, X Corp and Meta Platforms — to take down social media posts in this regard.

The co-passenger, a female journalist, had accused the man of allegedly inappropriately touching her mid-flight while she was asleep and had posted about the incident on social media on March 11. It was subsequently amplified across the media, including being reposted by Chadha, with the remark ‘Make him famous’. News platforms such as NDTV Hindi, ABP Live; and OBNews, which is an online platform operating on Google LLC, too had published articles reproducing the alleged unverified allegations. Noting that the complainant had taken to social media before lodging an FIR, Justice Mahajan observed that such conduct transgresses on the plaintiff’s right to live with dignity and a fair trial.

“The overhasty public disclosure, prima facie, suggests an attempt to sensationalise the issue and subject the plaintiff to a trial by public opinion, rather than a bona fide pursuit of legal redress. While defendant no. 1 (complainant) has an unhindered right to report a grievance, but using social media to circulate allegations of inappropriate touching and revealing the identity of the plaintiff, along with his photograph, before a formal investigation even commences, in a prima facie view of this Court, is a severe transgression of the plaintiff’s fundamental right to live with dignity and have fair trial,” Justice Mahajan recorded. Also castigating news platforms amplifying such social media posts as news, the court noted, “The narrative set by media houses and digital platforms has clearly breached the contours of the FIR. The publications do not merely report the allegations in the FIR; they prematurely adjudicate the matter. By suggesting the plaintiff to be the ‘culprit’ and categorically labelling him a ‘molester’, the defendants have effectively usurped the adjudicatory function of the competent courts. Such pronouncements grossly violate the foundational principle of criminal jurisprudence viz. the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, and create an unwarranted parallel investigation that has the potential of severely prejudicing the ongoing investigation in the aforesaid FIR.”

## 1984 anti-Sikh riots survivor, ‘messiah for other victims’, Vajpayee admirer: Who is HS Phoolka, who joined BJP

A prominent Sikh voice who has fought the cases of 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims pro bono for over three decades, Harvinder Singh Phoolka said he is returning to politics to work for Punjab, as he joined the Bharatiya Janata Party on Wednesday. Phoolka, 70, a senior Supreme Court Advocate and human rights activist, known as “messiah” of 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of the 2027 Punjab assembly polls. “I have been fighting the fight for the 1984 riots (victims) for the last 40 years, and I have been supported by the BJP since then... I have fought my fight together with them,” he told reporters after joining the saffron party. A graduate in agricultural sciences from Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, and a law graduate from Panjab University, Chandigarh, student politics played a crucial role in shaping Phoolka’s pro-people ideology.

He often mentions the 1972 Moga police firing incident as the “turning point of his life”, in which two students were killed. The students were protesting against black marketing of tickets at the Regal Cinema in Moga. Phoolka said he participated in the protests and was also jailed for seeking justice for victims. A native of Bhadaur in Barnala district of Punjab, Phoolka entered politics in 2014, when he joined the then-newbie Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and contested the Lok Sabha polls that year from Ludhiana. Though he lost to Congress’s (now in the BJP) Ravneet Singh Bittu by a whisker, he polled the highest votes in the rural segment of Dakha. In the 2017 Punjab Assembly polls, the AAP fielded him from Dakha. Phoolka won even as Congress came to power in Punjab. The AAP, the main opposition party, named him Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Punjab Assembly. However, in 2018, Phoolka first resigned as LoP and then as Dakha MLA the same year, necessitating the Dakha bypoll in 2019 (won by SAD). The same year in 2019, he even resigned from the AAP altogether and left active politics.

He had cited two major reasons for resigning as Dakha MLA and eventually leaving AAP: the Punjab government’s inaction in the sacrilege cases and his commitment to the 1984 cases as an advocate. Speaking to The Indian Express in an interview with this correspondent, Phoolka while commenting on his resignation as LoP in 2018, had said: “The case of Congress leader Sajjan Kumar, an accused in 1984 riots, was coming up for final hearing in Delhi High Court and the Bar Council wasn’t allowing me to appear as I had the status of a Cabinet minister. I had to resign as LoP to appear in that case. The AAP leadership told me not to resign in the party’s interest and asked whether the 1984 cases were more important. I said yes, they are, as I have spent my whole life fighting them. So I told them I will quit politics.” Eventually, when he resigned as Dakha MLA in 2018, Phoolka attributed his decision to “inaction in sacrilege cases” by the Punjab government. Termed a “dhokebaaz” (traitor) by several AAP colleagues for resigning mid-term, Phoolka, while justifying his decision, told this correspondent in an interview: “I did not ditch the people of Dakha. In fact, I sacrificed my MLA’s post for a larger cause. My resignation as an MLA was for a larger cause, to protest against the inaction of the Capt Amarinder Singh-led Congress government in the sacrilege cases. I first resigned as Leader of Opposition as the Bar Council was not allowing me to fight the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case pertaining to (former Congress leader) Sajjan Kumar.”

“Then on August 28, 2018, the Congress government created a drama in Vidhan Sabha and refused to take any action on the enquiry report of Justice (ret’d) Ranjit Singh in sacrilege cases. It was then that I announced my resignation as MLA to protest this injustice, as not only I but also the people of Punjab were hurt. Finally, when Sajjan Kumar was convicted in December last year in a landmark judgment, I resigned from the AAP and politics because I did not want this landmark victory for the 1984 riots victims to be used for political gains by any party, not even the AAP.”

In 2018, when Phoolka was still the MLA from Dakha, he praised BJP stalwart and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for “releasing the actual number of 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims.” He said BJP-led governments “have

always supported his battle for justice for 1984 victims”. Phoolka told this correspondent after Vajpayee’s demise: “In November 1984, the Congress government in Parliament claimed that only 600 Sikhs died during the riots in Delhi. But it was then Delhi MP Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who went on to release the actual number of Sikhs killed during the riots. The Congress had then called Vajpayee saab “anti-national” for releasing a higher number, but he had replied ‘I don’t care what they call me’. That list of 2,700 Sikhs killed in riots was compiled by BJP leader Madan Lal Khurana after visiting relief camps and riot-affected areas in Delhi and was released by Vajpayee on November 16, 1984.

“Vajpayee saab had strongly opposed and rejected the claims of the Congress government that only 600 Sikhs were killed. Later on, the number of 2,700 Sikhs killed in Delhi came on record in the Ahuja committee report. Later, after becoming the Prime Minister in 1999, he asked me what could be done best to get justice for victims and their families. By then, Congress had already buried most of the cases against its leaders who led mobs to kill Sikhs. I told him to appoint a commission for re-enquiry and take action. He then constituted the Justice GT Nanavati Commission in 2000, which reopened all cases for a thorough probe.” In another press conference in 2019 after leaving the AAP, Phoolka said the BJP has “always always supported us in our fight for justice for 1984 victims”. “I met law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and home minister Rajnath Singh for support, and they backed me. Even the Vajpayee government supported my battle. My proximity with the BJP existed even when I was with AAP.” After leaving the AAP in 2019, Phoolka announced that he would not contest any polls again, nor would he join any political party, but would continue his activities as a social activist and support non-political groups.

However, in December 2024, Phoolka expressed his wish to join Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) to “strengthen a strong regional party”. He clarified that he would join as a volunteer (“sewadar”) to help strengthen the party and that he was not seeking any designation or planning to contest future elections. In 2017, Phoolka told The Indian Express in another interview that “Hindus did not kill Sikhs, but the 1984 riot was a well-planned mass murder against the Sikhs led by the then ruling Congress party.” “That is the reason why the riot was a genocide,” said Phoolka, who was honoured with Padma Shri in 2019. Speaking to The Indian Express, Phoolka said that there cannot be a better example than him and his family, who were saved by their Hindu landlord when riots broke out in Delhi, following the assassination of former prime minister Indira Gandhi. “We lived in the South Extension area of Delhi and my wife was four months pregnant. The mob attacked our rented accommodation, and it was our Hindu landlord who hid us in his storeroom. The mob came and searched his entire house, but our landlord stood as a shield,” he added. “Later, on November 5, we were safely sent to Punjab with the help of another friend in an Air India flight. My daughter Prabh Sahay Phoolka was born in April 1985 and had it not been for our landlord, we would have been killed that very day. How can you say that those riots were Hindus vs Sikhs? No, they were not. Hindus saved many Sikh families. It was Congress vs Sikhs,” said Phoolka.

## How a pink line on an Android phone led to a Mumbai judge losing Rs 93,000 in cyber fraud



Within a month of a Bombay High Court judge losing more than Rs 6 lakh to a credit card scam, another Mumbai judge has fallen prey to cyber fraud and lodged a First Information Report saying he was duped of Rs 93,000.

According to a complaint by a small causes court judge, on the afternoon of March 30, while he was in the court premises, he observed a pink line on his Android phone, after which he searched online for the customer care service number of the mobile manufacturer, which was busy. A few hours later, he reportedly got a call from another number from a person posing as a representative of the mobile company, and the judge conveyed his grievances

about the mobile display. The person told the judge to register an online complaint and sent an APK file to his WhatsApp number.

The judge clicked on the said file, after which a customer support application was downloaded. The person then told the complainant to send Rs 10 twice through the Google Pay (GPay) app to register the complaint, which the judge reportedly followed. Thereafter, he received a ‘request in progress’ message, and after he reached home, when he checked his GPay account, he found that Rs 90,000 and Rs 3,000 were deducted from the bank account registered with the mobile payment service in which his mother is a joint holder. As per the complainant, the funds were traced to a PhonePe account in the name of one Pappu Sachin Yadav. After that, the judge called the cybercrime helpline and was asked to file a complaint with the Mumbai police.

The FIR was registered on Tuesday against an unknown person under offences punishable under sections 318(4) (cheating) and 319(2) (cheating by personation) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), and sections 66C (identity theft) and 66D (cheating by personation using computer devices) of the Information Technology Act. Earlier this month, a Bombay High Court judge had lodged a police complaint over losing Rs 6.02 lakh in a credit card scam. In December 2023, a retired chief justice of the Bombay High Court had lodged an FIR with the cyber cell of the Mumbai police after he lost nearly Rs 50,000 to cyber fraud.

## They came looking for discount, but got disappointment — and bouncers

The rush led vendors to deploy bouncers at multiple locations to manage crowds and avoid disorder. The rush led vendors to deploy bouncers at multiple locations to manage crowds and avoid disorder. With the new excise policy set to roll out from April 1, liquor vends across the city saw a surge in customers on Monday, as many city residents turned up expecting end-of-financial-year discounts and to stock up in advance. While heavy footfall was reported at several outlets, the usual last-day price cuts remained largely absent. Unlike previous years, most vend operators refrained from offering official discounts, leaving many buyers disappointed. Naveen Sharma, a Manimajra resident, said, “I came to buy liquor at a vend, thinking the prices would be very less, but there is hardly any discount. There is no relaxation in price, rather the liquor is sold at similar prices.” Another Sector 33 resident, Saurabh Sharma, said, “None of the liquor vends offered any discounts. I went to a couple of the vends in the city. Only on buying a 12-bottle box, a little discount was offered.” A liquor contractor said that operators who have secured vends for the upcoming policy period chose not to slash prices, whereas some others with unsold inventory offered informal rebates to clear their remaining stock. The rush led vendors to deploy bouncers at multiple locations to manage crowds and avoid disorder.

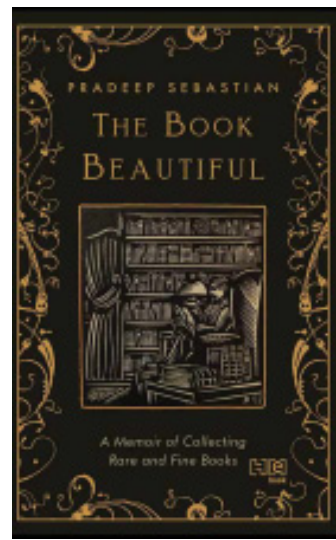
Under the new excise regime, 94 liquor vends will operate in Chandigarh. Three vends, which remain unallotted, are likely to be put up for auction next week. The administration has already crossed Rs 500 crore in revenue from this year’s auction of liquor licences. UT officials said the



policy is aimed at streamlining operations while maintaining revenue levels. Among the highlights, the vend at Palsora village attracted the highest bid at Rs 16.71 crore, driven in part by its proximity to Mohali. The policy also brings changes to service norms for hospitality establishments. A-category hotels will be allowed to serve liquor round the clock, while B- and C-category hotels can opt for 24-hour service by paying an annual licence fee of Rs 30 lakh. Bars, meanwhile, will operate from 11 am to 1 am, with last orders at midnight. Establishments can extend service till 3 am on payment of an additional ₹8 lakh, though final orders in such cases will close at 2 am. The quota for country liquor, IMFL and IFL remains unchanged, keeping the policy revenue-neutral compared to 2025–26. The administration has also reintroduced the L-10B licence, allowing liquor sales through organised department stores, a move aimed at improving accessibility for consumers, including women and senior citizens.

## From bookshops to a bibliomystery, Pradeep Sebastian on finding joy in collecting rare books

Dotted with bookstores, Bengaluru has no shortage of avid readers. But when it comes to collecting old and rare books—those with unique plate illustrations and more than a century old—such bibliophiles are few. Bengaluru-based author and book collector Pradeep Sebastian is one such exception. Uniquely, all his books are what he calls “books about books”—dedicated either to the love of reading or the journey of finding rare and old volumes. While The Book Beautiful (2023) is a memoir of his journey as a book collector and how it began, The Book Hunters of Katpadi (2017) is something Sebastian describes as India’s first “bibliomystery”. Like many works of fiction, it is a mystery, but one rooted in the world of rare books and book collecting.



Recalling where his love of books came from, Sebastian says, “I have been a bibliophile since childhood. I used to scour private circulating libraries—there were many in the 1980s. Since then,

spending time in Bengaluru bookshops is something I have been doing a lot... interacting with the owners and the people who come there.” However, the rare book bug bit him elsewhere. It was while he was living in America that he came across book fairs and shops dedicated to antiquarian books and met fellow collectors. “In India, we don’t really have a culture of rare book collecting and dealing. When you go to our bookshops, they don’t have something like a rare book section. Second-hand bookstores like Select (on Brigade Road) had some antiquarian and rare material which scholars accessed—but not a full-fledged antiquarian bookshop,” he says. Recently, Sebastian, collector V R Ferose, and others established the “Antiquarian Bookworm”, a space dedicated to rare and historically significant books, along with Krishna Gowda, proprietor of the Bookworm Bookstore (which also houses the Antiquarian Bookworm). Sebastian has also founded a society in Bengaluru devoted to collecting rare books—the Book Hunters of Bengaluru. “It is less than a year old and people are already showing interest in it. We are hoping that it will get people interested in collecting,” he adds. On the process of actually finding these rare books, Sebastian says that one may spot the occasional lucky find in the corner of a bookstore. (This journalist, for instance, once found a 130-year-old volume of Roman history in a Bengaluru bookstore).

But more often than not, today, the online medium is where one finds collectibles—on platforms such as

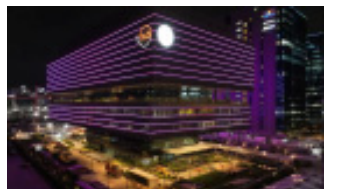
AbeBooks and viaLibri, he says. “It could be a book dealer somewhere in Japan, South America, or Australia,” Sebastian explains. “They are all there, and you have access to their inventory and can speak to them.” As far as expenses go, Sebastian says one can start at a reasonable price by collecting books that may be old and rare, but not highly sought after. As one moves into rarer titles and special editions, however, the prices rise. On his latest endeavours with The Book Hunters of Katpadi, Sebastian said, “If you are a book collector or very attached to the world of books, the best kind of mystery you can read is a bibliomystery. There has never been one in India... though there have been very fine mysteries. I wanted a book that is very intensely bibliophilic, and so in a very uncompromising way, I made it a hard-core bibliomystery.” He adds frankly, “There were some mixed reviews. People found that there was too much that slowed down the narrative through bibliographic details. I wrote the kind of book that I would like to read, and I know several people who enjoyed the very things that others found frustrating.”

## T-Hub, IN-SPACE host InveSt Space Hyderabad to boost SpaceTech funding

Hyderabad: T-Hub, in collaboration with IN-SPACE (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre), hosted InveSt Space Hyderabad Edition, bringing together SpaceTech founders, venture capital funds, angel investors, policymakers, and international delegations to bridge the gap between policy momentum and on-ground capital formation.

India’s space sector is at an inflection point. With IN-SPACE having authorised over 250 private entities to participate in the space economy, and policy momentum building through dedicated funding mechanisms for space and deep tech startups, the conditions for private capital formation in the sector have never been stronger, a press release said.

As the sector scales from \$8.4 billion to a projected \$44 billion by 2033, Hyderabad is at the forefront of SpaceTech innovation and enterprise. T-Hub is playing a critical role in accelerating this ecosystem, enabling access to capital, mentorship, and market linkages to high-potential startups, including Sanyark Space, Azista Space, Spantrik, Cosmoserve, Red Balloon Aerospace, ADT Core, and Stardour. The event convened more than 30 SpaceTech startups spanning the full value chain.



# The West Asia cauldron of conflict and its fallout



West Asia is currently enmeshed in what is essentially Benjamin Netanyahu's war, aggravated by Donald Trump's folly, lending itself to large-scale devastation. The conflict that began on February 28, 2026, when the United States and Israel launched large-scale joint military operations against Iran, is still continuing. What appeared to be a limited confrontation earlier in June (the 12-day war in June 2025) may now be seen as a kind of curtain raiser for this — the more devastating conflict taking place now. Titled 'Operation Epic Fury', the human cost of the war has been colossal, apart from other types of collateral damage. With several thousand Iranians killed, more than half of them civilians, it is apparent that the U.S. and Israel are preparing for a long campaign and, incidentally, in course of time, to commit troops on the ground. The world, nevertheless, needs to prepare for a long-drawn-out conflict

Iran survives the onslaught

To date, despite the widespread disruption and devastation, including the assassination of senior Iranian leaders such as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and National Security Chief Ali Larjani among others, Iran has not only survived but its uranium stockpile also remains safe. Iran appears ready for an extended war. Also, Iran hopes to get its own back on the U.S., Israel, and their allies in the region by provoking a serious oil crisis through a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 30% of the world's shipment of oil passes. There has been other collateral damage as well, including the fact that many U.S. allies in Europe and elsewhere have openly refused to respond to Mr. Trump's plaintive appeal for help in opening the Strait of Hormuz, even as Iran has made a tempting offer of safe passage (through the Strait) for countries friendly to it. Having survived the initial onslaught of the combined forces of the U.S. and Israel, Iran is now beginning to raise the stakes, at least as far as the U.S. is concerned, by calling for an American commitment to withdraw its bases in West Asia, to restrain Israel and arrive at an armistice of sorts.

Most experts believe that, if anything, time is on the side of Iran. Despite all the fire and fury visited on Iran in the first month of the conflict, and despite the loss of its top leaders, Iran has not only survived but has also managed to hit back, though with lesser intensity. The regime's command structure has been disrupted, but a collapse of the Iranian state has not occurred. On the other hand, for the U.S., its strategy of saturation bombardment from the air is leading to certain other repercussions, in terms of both cost and replenishments of key weapons such as Patriot missiles, Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) interceptors, Tomahawk cruise missiles and the like. Within the U.S., more so among sections of the U.S. Navy, signs of war weariness appear to have set in; while it is possible to overstate its significance, it cannot be ignored. In this respect, Israel's strategy of containing the threat posed by Iran, while firing from Mr. Trump's shoulders, may have gone awry. It would seem that the conflict has upended the Thucydides aphorism that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must", for in the present case, Iran has refused to accept suffering without hitting back with full ferocity. Notwithstanding this, the U.S. and Israel display few compunctions in persisting with a conflict that is focused 'on extracting advantage, rather than in underwriting order'.

'Netanyahu's war' escalates This is undoubtedly Mr. Netanyahu's war, and while standard declarations may continue to be made, it is apparent that Mr. Netanyahu's plans to decimate Iran with the aid and the support of the

## An impeachment move with no winners

A win-win situation benefits all stakeholders even if a compromise is reached in search of a workable alternative. It could even be a way in which the winning side deduces the losing side to perceive its loss as a necessary price it paid for survival. The impeachment motion of the Opposition parties against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) is one such example. It is a motion destined not to carry. Yet its prime movers may not see the loss as a defeat. But can the CEC see their loss as his victory? The move of the Opposition parties is doubtlessly dramatic. However, the question that needs to be pondered by the well-wishers of the Election Commission of India (ECI) is what prompted them to don the gloves for a fight with no chance of victory. Perhaps, sometimes one fights not to win but to wound the opponent. And the troubling part is that political parties treat the CEC as an opponent.

Steadfast defiance The move to impeach the CEC is a first in the history of an institution that is supposed to be a vanguard of Indian electoral democracy. "India built many institutions after attaining freedom and adopting a Republican constitution... If anyone were to conduct an opinion poll on which of these institutions rendered the best service to Indian democracy with the highest degree of integrity, I have no doubt that the ECI will be our people's first choice," said Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister at the ECI's golden jubilee celebrations on January 17, 2001.

And now, 25 years later, 193 parliamentarians of the Opposition have submitted notices for an impeachment motion against the CEC citing charges of "partisan and discriminatory conduct", "obstruction of investigation into electoral fraud" and disenfranchisement via the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. The notice is as unprecedented as the manner in which the revision of electoral rolls has been undertaken despite serious challenge by most political parties, except the ruling dispensation. Such an alignment of thinking disconcerted the Opposition, which sharpened their attack against the CEC. The repeated press conferences by the Leader of the Opposition (LOP) exposing discrepancies in the electoral rolls of States where elections had been held, further eroded trust in the body.

While the aggressive style and severity of the LOP's attack on the poll body, questioning its integrity was surprising, what was more surprising was the poll body's obduracy in not providing a credible response to the doubts raised on its functioning and impartiality. As the attacks became more and more bitter, communication channels between the poll body and the opposition political parties seemed to choke. The nation had seldom seen such a re-

lentless campaign against a CEC even as the Supreme Court heard endless petitions against his decisions. As the petitions failed to yield any substantive relief, frustration mounted and so did the CEC's apparent indifference. The CEC persisted with the SIR despite the fortnight-long Vote Adhikar Yatra just before the Bihar State elections.

Not that there was no dialogue. The one between the poll body and the Trinamool Congress caused more rancour culminating in the theatrical presence of Mamata Banerjee in the Supreme Court. Never before had a Chief Minister appeared in Court arguing against the ECI's unfair decisions. The dharnas against the SIR in West Bengal or officials dying in the course of conducting the SIR failed to deter the CEC or change his avowed commitment to "purify" the electoral rolls. The ECI invented the "logical discrepancy" tool that pitted electors against the AI used to detect discrepancies. West Bengal saw 58,20,899 electors deleted at the draft stage and 60,06,675 "under adjudication" in the final list. But the ECI went on to announce elections in the State, where the fate of nearly 10% electors remained undetermined. It employed micro-observers for finalising the revised rolls, something never done in the past. The SC also took the extraordinary step of appointing over 500 judicial officers to decide the fate of these electors in a short span. It is unusual for a constitutional body mandated with electoral rolls preparation to involve another constitutional body in discharging its routine functions by disregarding the elector's voting right, which it was created to protect. The exclusion of even a single eligible voter due to the way the SIR has been conducted would legitimise the criticism of this arbitrary and aggressive exercise. However, does all of this justify the impeachment move? The answer depends on which side of the divide one stands. The crores of voters who figure in the final electoral roll might not protest, treating the tension and trauma during the revision process as part of the routine struggle that helpless citizens go through to secure their rights. The voice of those excluded doesn't count in the elections in any case. Eventually, the valid concern of protecting the right to vote turns into the lament of losers who are left with no choice but to resort to the ultimate constitutional weapon against the CEC. Meanwhile, the ECI has sounded the poll bugle asking players to contest against each other rather than against the referee. It is now in full control. The successful completion of the poll process will justify all its decisions. Victors will exult; losers will find reasons to complain. What the nation would be left with will be a poll body in which the Opposition, representing more than half the voting population, has expressed no confidence.

U.S. has gone wrong. What is surprising also is that, apart from U.S. support to Israel's devious plans, much of the rest of the civilised world has not upbraided Israel for embarking on a patently illegal conflict, which has no merit whatsoever. The world continues to remain a mute spectator, notwithstanding the price it is paying due to the escalating cost of oil.

Israel's obsession about seeking fulfilment of the 'Biblical Promise of the chosen land', notwithstanding the huge cost in human and economic terms, is unfortunately proving costly for the world at large as well. However, Israel remains adamant in pursuing the war with little regard for the costs involved, and, with Mr. Trump's backing, hopes to expand the ambit of the conflict across West Asia to include Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. All this, despite the already apparent severe maritime disruptions and retaliatory steps taken by Iran such as the closing of the Strait of Hormuz.

The Iran war today has entered a phase of 'no peace, no large-scale war', one defined not merely by military confrontation but through the weaponisation of the infrastructure underpinning the global economy. Energy prices, shipping lanes and logistical systems provide the essential backdrop to the current conflict and are, in a sense, central to the strategy of those involved. The U.S. has far more to lose than Israel if the world plunges into prolonged chaos — but the economies of most nations across the globe are already being, and would continue to be, adversely affected by the disruption of the oil economy and its fallout in every sphere. Notwithstanding the opinion of military experts that Israel's objective of effecting a regime change in Iran is impossible without a ground invasion, Israel is pursuing such an objective with vigour. Neither the U.S. nor Europe display any enthusiasm for this. The economies of most nations concerned are, once again, in no position to undertake such a conflict — including the U.S. Both China and Russia are almost certain to oppose it. A war of this kind is, moreover, certain to throw up many other issues often lost sight of in the Councils of the World. The fact that Iran is a large country is often ignored, as also that Iranian forces are better acclimatised to carry out a war of attrition. Reliance on air power provides no significant advantage to any 'aggressor'.

On Shia resistance Additionally, one must add a symbolic dimension to any conflict that is aimed at overthrowing a Shiite regime. Shiite political culture draws heavily on the memory of the 'Battle of Karbala' that symbolises civilisational resistance, and not just geopolitics. The narrative emphasises patience, sacrifice, resistance and strategic endurance. A war intended to change the present dispensation in Iran by outside forces such as Israel, would only provide an opportunity to enhance the religious, political and transnational aspects of Shiite Islam. Expansion of the current war launched by the U.S. and Israel is more likely to be perceived as approximating to striking at the roots of political Shiism — in Iran and elsewhere. Western military superiority does not guarantee strategic victory. Nor will a war automatically result in altering geopolitical outcomes inside Iran and across the region, or to a regime collapse in Iran. All this would pave the way for a long drawn-out war, irrespective of the consequences.

The appointment of Mojtaba Khamenei as the Supreme Leader following Ali Khamenei's killing on February 28, should again be viewed not as a mere rite of passage but as a triumph for the radical messianic-apocalyptic aspect of Shiite Islam. In a sense, it is triggering a revival of Shiite militancy — and in an aggravated form. This leaves little room for any expectation that the revolutionary fervour will diminish with the killing of additional Ayatollahs. The U.S. and Israel, hence, need to be careful before venturing into the 'spider's web', for the cost of delusion could be grave not only for Israel and the U.S. but also for the world at large. There is still time, at least for the U.S., to retrieve the situation and alter the policy direction that has been initiated under Mr. Netanyahu's instigation. Israel's deliberate provocation, including its latest attack very close to Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant (built with Russian collaboration) was a needless — and perhaps a deliberate — act of provocation by Israel. Such issues need to be avoided lest the world is plunged into third world war, with untold sufferings for mankind.

# Telangana Govt plans regulatory authority like EAGLE and HYDRAA to curb food adulteration: CM



Expressing serious concern over the growing menace of food adulteration in Telangana, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has said the State government is considering establishing a dedicated monitoring and enforcement authority on the lines of Telangana Elite Action Group for Drug Law Enforcement (EAGLE) and Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA).

In an informal interaction with reporters in Hyderabad on Monday (March 30, 2026), the Chief Minister observed that food adulteration had spread across sectors and was no longer confined to hotels and restaurants. "People are increasingly worried about the large-scale adulteration of food products, which is leading to unexplained and dangerous diseases. There is a growing demand for quality food materials," he said.

His remarks come in the wake of recent cases unearthed in Telangana, in which police and food safety officials uncovered large-scale adulteration through a series of raids. Authorities have seized adulterated cooking oil, spurious spices, synthetic milk, artificially ripened fruits, and misbranded packaged food products. Officials have also detected the sale of adulterated chilli powder mixed with artificial colours, turmeric laced with starch and chemicals, and edible oils diluted with cheaper industrial substitutes. The Chief Minister said a comprehensive regulatory and monitoring mechanism would be put in place. The proposed authority would function with focused enforcement powers, similar to EAGLE, which targets drug-related offences, and HYDRAA, which acts against illegal encroachments of lakes and lake beds in Hyderabad.

The Chief Minister noted that while the government had ensured the availability of nutritious food through the Public Distribution System (PDS) and maintained surplus food stocks, the primary concern now was the quality and safety of food reaching consumers. "There is no shortage of food. The worry is about adulteration. Even households are unknowingly purchasing adulterated food materials for daily consumption," he said.

Mr. Reddy warned that continued consumption of adulterated food could have long-term health consequences, contributing to the rise in lifestyle and unexplained illnesses. "It directly impacts public health. People are falling sick due to contaminated and substandard food," he observed.

## Gender and identity: New questions arise

The biggest news story this week, forget health story, was the effort to fix the Transgender Persons Amendment Bill that went south quickly. The government introduced the Amendment Bill in Parliament claiming it intended to correct the flaws of the original Act. It created a huge storm in India, with the Opposition walking out and the LGBTQIA+ community across the country protesting on the streets. Their main complaints were that the new amendment removed the principle of gender self-determination, there was an unfortunate conflation between the concepts of sex and gender identities, and that the community that it was meant to benefit was not consulted at all in a move that would affect their quality of life drastically.

We have reported this extensively, in our columns. Gopi Shankar Madurai writes a striking critique of the Transgender Persons Amendment Bill, calling it a flawed fix. The article lists: "It narrows the definition of 'transgender person' to only specific socio-cultural identities such as kinner, hijra, aravani, jogta, eunuch, or biologically-defined intersex variations, or persons forcibly compelled into such an identity through mutilation, castration, amputation, or any surgical, chemical or hormonal procedure." "It explicitly excludes persons with different sexual orientations and non-heteronormative gender fluid identities. The Bill removes the right to 'self-perceived gender identity' from Section 4(2), replaces the simple District Magistrate process with a medical board 'authority' headed by a Chief Medical Officer, and mandates hospitals to report every transgender surgery to the District Magistrate and the authority."

Notwithstanding this very strong opposition, the Parliament passed the Bill, as we have reported, without any meaningful debate or discussion, or addressing the elephant in the room. However, that is not all: the protests continue. And as Abhinav Lakshman reports, in a further development, the Supreme Court-appointed panel asks Centre to withdraw Transgender Bill that removes right to gender self-determination. They have made the plea on the grounds that the proposal to "deny self-identification" of gender went against the decision of the Supreme Court in the 2014 NALSA v Union of India verdict.

Meanwhile, Ragavi M. and Ashna Butani report that two members from the National Council for Transgender Persons - southern representative Kalki Subramaniam and north east representative Rituparna Neog resigned. They called the amendment Bill "a step backward for our fundamental rights to self-identification and dignity". Read here. Organisations have also written to the President of India, urging her not to grant assent to the Transgender Amendment Bill. The letter was written by All-India Feminist Alliance (ALIFA), a pan-India collective of grassroots organisations, along with the National Alliance for Justice, Accountability and Rights (NAJAR); the groups said they were 'extremely alarmed and distressed at the undue and unjustifiable haste' with which the Bill was passed in Parliament. However, President Droupadi Murmu has given her assent to the Bill, the Union Law Ministry said in a gazette notification on March 30, 2026.

There has been another issue that has exercised people across the world, and that is to do with social media addiction and children. A Los Angeles jury found Alphabet's Google and Meta liable for \$3 million in damages on March 25, 2026, in a landmark social media addiction lawsuit. This might set the stage for other successful trials against these large companies, as more and more evidence emerges that they have deliberately ignored or aided in addiction-causing behaviour among teens and children. Additionally, a New Mexico jury also said Meta harms children's mental health and safety, violating state law. Some part of that discussion is happening in India as well, particularly in Karnataka: in



the State, a draft policy on 'Responsible Digital Use Among Students' sets goals for parents, schools. For a lowdown on what this is all about do watch this video by Rishita Khanna, Ravichandran N. Afshan Yasmeen writes about the recent NIMHANS study that flags rising parental concern over children's screen time. Researchers say that parents are increasingly reporting difficulties in regulating their children's technology use, especially when it begins to interfere with sleep, studies and daily routines.

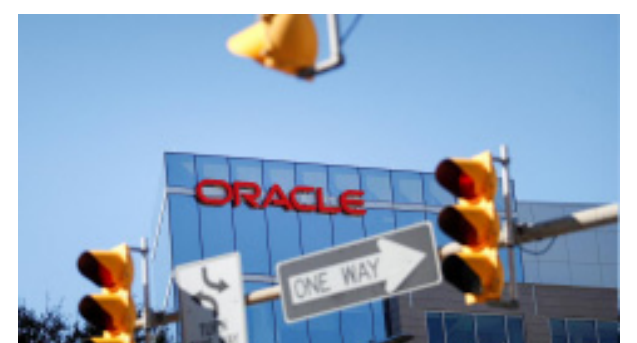
For the flip side of it, here is a story from Telangana, where Lavpreet Kaur writes about Meta alerts and the local police's response in stopping suicides. Do read, here. There is some regulatory action that cannot have come sooner. As Semaglutide slipped off patent and Indian pharma will now be able to manufacture the drug, there has been a sudden uprising of concern about quality of the drugs and fakes reaching the market. Bindu Shajan Perappadan reports that the Centre intensifies regulatory surveillance over GLP-1 weight loss drugs. Telangana, too, cautions against unapproved semaglutide use amid rising drug demand for weight loss.

Moving on to the topic of infectious diseases, here's a study that says antibiotic resistance fuels 87% of India's typhoid economic burden. Antibiotic-resistant typhoid infections accounted for at least 87% of India's disease-related economic burden in 2023, according to a study in The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia. The total economic burden due to typhoid fever was estimated at ₹123 billion. Divya Gandhi reports that Nipah virus could turn into something "far more severe", scientists warn. Kyle B. Enfield in The Conversation warns that a new COVID-19 variant BA.3.2 is spreading quickly across U.S. — and explains what you need to know. This election season, we had better be mindful of the heat. We know in 2024, the heat turned out to be fatal for many polling officers on the field. In order to avoid the same situation, one needs to be watchful As Kerala goes to vote on April 9, the State's Health department has issued guidelines. Others will do well, including the Central Election Commission, to put out such guidelines.

This article is for those who follow make up trends, going by social media hype. Athira Elssa Johnson explains how your skincare routine maybe wrong: experts flag increasing skin damage from misinformation. She also explains why the tendency to overlook and dismiss perimenopause must change Zubeda Hamid in the In Focus Podcast finds out: How to make a living will? In another episode, she discusses: Does India have enough health professionals to care for its rising senior population? And with the Shigella cases in India, do check out all you need to know about: shigellosis. A.S. Jayanth writes on the surging cost of health care in Kerala Abhilasha Semwal points out that as digital health gets a push, there is a price to pay and asks who will bear these costs for the underpaid ASHA workers Aditi Prasad Apte brings an important issue to the limelight: Are we over-supplementing with vitamins?

## Oracle begins layoffs affecting thousands: Report

Cloud computing firm Oracle is laying off thousands of employees, CNBC reported on Tuesday (March 31, 2026), citing two people familiar with the matter. Late on Tuesday, Oracle said it will lay off 491 employees working remotely in Washington state and at its Seattle offices effective June 1, according to a notice filed under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act. The job cuts are part of a "reduction in force and other terminations," Oracle said, adding that its Seattle sites will remain open. The company had about 162,000 full-time employees globally as of May 2025. The WARN Act requires employers to provide at least 60 days' notice ahead of layoffs. Oracle declined to comment on the CNBC report, although several social media users on Reddit, X and anonymous workplace network Blind, shared details of the potential cuts, fuelling uncertainty and confusion among employees. The layoffs come amid Oracle steps up spending on artificial intelligence infrastructure in an effort to better compete with cloud rivals, such as Alphabet and



Amazon. In a March filing, Oracle said it expects total costs tied to its fiscal 2026 restructuring plan to reach up to \$2.1 billion, largely driven by employee severance and related expenses. Shares in the company climbed more than 5% in afternoon trade, but remained down about 29% this year so far.

# Rebuilding a Healthy Relationship with Exercise



The condition often exists alongside an eating disorder or body image issue, and sometimes substance abuse. Fortunately, it is curable with time, patience, commitment, and support. Here are 10 tips on how you can mend your relationship with exercise and find joy in movement again. Try not to sit alone with your thoughts. If you're experiencing anxiety around exercise, feeling stressed about a particular issue, or need help feeling comfortable, attempt to communicate that to someone you trust.

As lonely as this journey of healing your relationship with exercise might feel, you don't have to go through alone. If you need a friend to ride to the gym with you, ask them. If you're struggling to fill the void that cutting out constant exercise has left, communicate that. Remember that no one knows how to help you unless they know what you're going through, so keep your loved ones in the loop. They might not understand how you feel, but they can offer emotional support. Even when you get frustrated with them wanting you to control your addiction, in the future you'll likely look back and appreciate what they did.

When you feel an urge to exercise for the wrong reasons — like feeling a need to compensate after a meal or while having a bad body image day — find a way to distract your mind. Distractions can include offering to wash the dishes after a family meal, watching a comfort movie, Facetimeing a pal, or meditating. They can be a really useful technique for managing those loud voices pushing you to work out, when actually, what's best for you is rest. Endorphins released in the brain of someone with an exercise addiction create feelings of achievement or pleasure following a workout, but the endorphin rush happens so frequently and intensely that the brain begins to downregulate endorphin production (2Trusted Source). That means the comedown as you stop exercising intensely can feel draining. Exercise doesn't have to just be about working out. It can be a social bonding experience with people you love. Whether it's a countryside walk or following along with a virtual fitness class together, make exercising enjoyable again by involving people who help reduce your anxiety, crack jokes with you, and have deep conversations.

Working out can be a time to make memories — more than a time to burn calories. If you're focused on being present in others' company, you're not preoccupied with how your movements could be altering your body, what you might be doing wrong, or how you look while exercising. Avoid moving in ways that make you feel bad or grumpy. Having the best technique means nothing if you hate every moment of your workout and feel depleted afterward. Find forms of exercise that make you feel energized, alive, and appreciative of what your body can do. Remember: Working out isn't solely about becoming a sweaty mess, nor is it about looking perfect or having the best technique. It's far healthier to try a dance class with a friend and be utterly terrible at it, but still have a great time, rather than spend an hour in the gym squatting for your life. We've been conditioned to believe exercising should be something we dread, but that isn't true — fitness can be fun!

When you're choosing to exercise, question who you're doing it for. Are you exercising because you want to move and it makes you feel good? Or are you doing it to alter your body to fit beauty standards, compete with your gym buddy friends, or "make up" for something you ate? If it's for any of the latter, it's a good idea to step back and reevaluate the purpose exercise is serving in your life. Fitness should be a personal experience; never harm yourself in an attempt to look like another person or meet unreasonable or unsafe expectations. A key aspect of this recovery process is recognizing and understanding your triggers, so if you feel compelled to exercise for the wrong reasons, you may want to work with a professional therapist to delve into why and where the feeling comes from. You'll then get better at interrupting your unhealthy urge to exercise and develop better coping techniques for your emotions. Ultimately, exercising doesn't make those deeper issues disappear. It only buries

them and acts as a superficial coping strategy for complex life issues. This one is especially crucial if a healthcare professional has advised you to stop exercising altogether for a while. When you embark on the journey of healing your relationship with exercise and you feel truly ready to start moving again, it's best not to dive in headfirst. Start small with what makes you feel comfortable rather than heading for high intensity workouts every day of the week. The point of overcoming exercise addiction is learning that exercise can benefit you in several ways and serve many purposes; it isn't always about going to extremes. This is not only important for allowing yourself to get back into the swing of things, but it can also prevent damage to your physical health. Compulsive exercising can cause severe damage to your mental well-being by creating stress and interfering with social activities. It can also damage your physical health by affecting your organs, joints, and muscle mass, make you prone to injury, and cause menstrual complications. It's vital that you listen to your healthcare provider's advice.

If your relationship with exercise has been toxic for a long time, you'll likely feel guilty or unsettled when your routine is interrupted. Particularly following long periods without exercise, your desire to work out could be even stronger than before. However, it's OK to go multiple days without a workout! That's allowed, promise. Developing self-control is an important part of overcoming exercise addiction, and recognizing when it's time to slow down is crucial. Rest days are just as important, if not more so, than days spent exercising. Try not to pressure yourself into working out, especially if you aren't feeling up to it. Workouts are never compulsory, and one special thing you can learn in this healing process is that you always have the freedom to choose when you do it. If you plan to head to the gym one morning but don't want to leave your bed when your alarm sounds, that's fine! Roll over and enjoy that extra hour of sleep! If you've scheduled a run but friends invite you to a last-minute brunch, head to the brunch! It's fine for your workout routines to be flexible, and there's never a punishment for skipping a day.

Learning to trust your body is one of the most valuable life lessons any of us can acquire. Following an exercise addiction, this can be a real challenge since you'll be used to overriding the signals your body sends. However, understanding the communication from your body is a skill that will make life so much better and healthier. When your body is telling you to rest, that isn't a sign of your body being weak or encouragement for you to test its limits. It means your body needs time to recharge so it can be strong the next day. Human bodies aren't robots, they will tire. They require us to be gentle with them. This means slowing down when you're becoming overworked and pressing pause when your energy levels are low. Your body knows its own needs best, so trust that by skipping a workout. You're preserving the precious vessel that carries you through life and maintaining the healthiest version of it. I can assure you, your body isn't asking you to skip spin class because it hates you. Quite the opposite. Curing an exercise addiction is a physical journey, but it's even more of a psychological one. It's one thing to switch up your fitness regimen, but you have to do the work on the inside, too. This means shifting your mental approach to fitness.

Exercise is detrimental if it's used to punish our bodies. Instead, use exercise as a way of feeling grateful for your body's abilities and celebrating its power. Developing a more positive attitude toward movement is something that happens over time, but it's certainly possible. Challenge those toxic thoughts about exercise existing only as a means of "burning off" or "earning" calories, or sculpting your body into an impossible shape. Exercising and eating should exist peacefully alongside one another — not be at odds with one another. Movement isn't a prerequisite for eating; we need to eat regardless of whether movement is in the cards that day. I know it might feel impossible to develop a healthy, balanced relationship with fitness if you've battled addiction, but acknowledging the problem and committing to a new mindset about movement and its role in your life is a great place to start. Find the fun in fitness, rely on the support of your trusted family and friends, and commit to doing the internal work on difficult issues. Then, you may be surprised to find you're healthier than you've ever been before. Emily Bashforth is a writer and journalist specializing in mental wellbeing and has been featured in a variety of online and print publications. Much of her work focuses on her own experiences with mental illness, specifically eating disorders. Emily campaigns to raise awareness of issues affecting people with EDs and the importance of equal access to eating disorder treatment.

## Pulkit Samrat becomes the first Indian actor to step into the ring with a professional boxer



Mumbai: Actor Pulkit Samrat ended up creating history during the trailer launch event of his upcoming sports drama "Glory". He became the first Indian actor to step into the ring with a professional boxer and the third to achieve this feat globally. Before him, only Tom Hardy and Jake Gyllenhaal have dared to box with a professional. On Friday, Pulkit participated in a powerful and unprecedented live boxing match against professional boxer Neeraj Goyat at the trailer launch of "Glory".

Not just a promotional gimmick, it was a full-fledged, high-impact bout, demonstrating intense preparation, discipline, and grit from Pulkit's side for his next. In a display of sportsmanship and mutual respect, Neeraj spoke highly of Pulkit after the match — applauding his dedication, courage, and the sheer effort it takes for an actor to step into a real combat scenario. Earlier, Pulkit revealed what made him say yes to "Glory". He said, "What pulled me into Glory was the truth of that world, it's tough, it's unforgiving, and that's what makes it beautiful, because every win matters and every step is earned. Ravi doesn't react, he absorbs, calm on the outside, the fire within, and that space between control and breaking is where real strength is built. Playing him

reminded me that greatness is about showing up again and again, even when it hurts, because champions are made in everything they survive. Grateful for this journey, this is just a glimpse". Created by Karan Anshuman and Karanya Ahuja, "Glory" also stars Divyendu, Suvinder Vicky, Jannat Zubair, Ashutosh Rana, Sikandar Kher, Kunal Thakur, Sayani Gupta, Yashpal Sharma, and Kashmira Pardeshi in pivotal roles, along with others. Produced by Mohit Shah and Anshuman under the Atomic Films banner, the series has been written by Anshuman, Ahuja, and Vaibhav Vishal. Directed by Karan Anshuman and Kanishk Varma, "Glory" is expected to premiere on May 1.

## Low Effort Health Hacks

Sustaining habits long-term can be one of the most important factors in protecting your health. However, thinking about your diet, activity levels, stress management, sleep, and any other health areas at once can understandably be overwhelming for many. Starting with manageable habits is a great way to make them sustainable in the long term, allowing you to focus your resources on where they're most needed. We asked our Healthline Editorial Team what small steps they take to boost their general health, without requiring much extra time, money, or disruption. "A few times a day, I make an effort to simply squat in place when I'm not busy or doing some simple task — or just on my phone! I think in yoga it's called Malasana, or Garland Pose, or many other names. I do it mainly for flexibility and some muscle strength; it's very good to move after all the sitting we tend to do, as long as there are no mobility restrictions." Quotes represent individual opinions. All content is strictly informational and should not be considered medical advice.

# Is Floor Sitting the New Standing? This Unique Desk Surprised Us



After some initial vetting and a conversation with a physical therapist, we decided to put this extremely adjustable standing desk in the hot seat. We had our doubts about this adjustable standing desk, that lowers all the way to the floor. At just over \$1,000, would it feel more like an overpriced ironing board? (An actual Slack message between our team.) Marinamantra provided this desk for free. But our opinions and analyses are ours alone, and have not been reviewed, approved, or otherwise endorsed by the brand. The short answer: It can be both good or bad, depending on how often and how well you do it. In itself, sitting on the floor is just as detrimental as sitting in a chair when it's done for too long, or with incorrect posture. But if you adjust your position often, that's when things change. Movement is critical.

Having the option to move between three different positions versus a sitting only desk or a sit-to-stand desk is a major advantage. That's according to Gregory Minnis, Doctor of Physical Therapy. He explains that no matter the position, staying stationary for long periods can lead to joint stiffness, reduced blood flow to muscles, and overuse injuries. This desk offers more opportunities to move. Kneel on the floor, squat for a while, sit on the floor, sit in a chair, stand, repeat. On paper, it's a win. With that in mind, it was time to test this sleek, minimalist desk. The desk is extremely heavy and comes in three boxes, which eased our fears that it would resemble a flimsy ironing board. Coral Clark, the Healthliner who took this desk on, described it as sturdy despite its minimalist design. She said the top of the desk wobbles a tiny bit when she types vigorously, but the base still feels solid and doesn't shift. And when she adjusts the height, her words: so smooth and quiet. "The sound isn't disruptive, and the movement is strictly vertical. I'm not wor-

ried that anything is going to shift or fall over on the desk."

Coral was surprised at how much she used the various heights. She had given up two previous standing desk toppers — the kind you situate on top of a standard desk. Despite being sturdy, they were clunky. She spilled four too many coffees before calling it quits. "I thought before that I didn't enjoy standing while working," she said. "I would stand for an occasional 30-minute meeting with my old desk, and on my first day with the new desk, I stood for three hours without realizing how long I had been up for." For her initial testing period, she used the desk for three full work days (about 24 hours in total). Over those days, she stood for about 7 hours, sat on a yoga ball for 8 hours, sat in her chair for 3 hours, and floor-sat for 6 hours. "I love the versatility," says Coral. And that's really the key. According to Minnis, these opportunities to move more often throughout the workday and be less sedentary will help reduce stiffness and muscle fatigue. Our only complaint: It's pricey at \$1,049. Our best standing desk pick starts at \$600 (but can easily run closer to \$1,000 depending on size and customization). That said, it won't lower all the way to the floor. This is worth the cost if you think that you will genuinely use it at different heights. That's from our tester Coral. Any standing desk at this price range may only be worth the investment for those who work from home at least a few days per week.

"It makes a WFH day less monotonous and gives your body a break from sitting hunched over all day. It is a hefty investment, but it is a solid piece of furniture that I believe will last a long time," says Coral. If you're new to adjustable desks, you might want to start with a budget-friendly brand. Flexispot and Fezibo are two brands our team members use that offer desks in the \$200 and \$300 range. There aren't any customization options for this desk like other popular brands — think Uplift or Branch, where you add drawers, wheels, grommets, and keyboard trays. But it still comes with some convenient features. There is a compartment in the back to tuck your cables — and an optional monitor shelf. To our surprise, it also has power outlets in front of the desk. "They're so camouflaged that I didn't notice them until reading someone else's review of the desk." And if you're moving it around your space, the bottom knobs roll to make it easier to relocate, without the need for clunky wheels. We dig this. It's not cheap, but the quality surprised us, and we plan to keep testing the desk to see how it holds up with more use.

## 3 Best (HIPAA-Compliant) Telehealth Blood-Testing Brands in 2026



You may need more flexibility in blood test screening than your local lab allows. Perhaps privacy, transportation, or the sheer repetition of certain tests leave you longing for a more personalized process. Enter telehealth blood testing outside doctor-ordered clinical tests. Telemedicine — including virtual visits — has been around for some time, but blood work has historically required getting in the car and waiting in line with the rest of fasting and/or frustrated folks needing the same services. Increasingly, services offer at-home blood tests or tests you can order for yourself. And 61% of survey respondents in 2022 preferred personal access to in-home testing overall. These tests are delivered to your home, which you can mail in or take to your nearest lab for ready-packaged, pre-labeled organization.

See how each service we've medically vetted compares. According to studies, at-home blood tests have 90% to 92% success rates for novel home-based blood collection and are helpful for older adults, people with disabilities, and rural populations who may not have nearby clinical facilities. Here are our medically vetted picks. Finger-prick blood tests — called dried blood spot testing clinically — can have benefits beyond convenience when self-administered. According to a 2021 observational study, following initial doctor-ordered labs performed in a clinic, subsequent remote testing was useful for both patient and clinician monitoring. What's more, patient-initiated blood sam-

pling contributed to an improvement in shared decision making. A 2022 survey of telehealth blood testing sought to understand if at-home blood testing is a convenient, feasible, and safe alternative to in-person lab visits from the consumer perspective. Their primary concerns were accuracy, cost, and ease of use. It found that 69% of folks were looking for a seamless experience after a doctor's visit and the ability to share lab test results with other members of their healthcare team. If you're intrigued by the privacy and convenience of telehealth blood testing, but not sure if you have what it takes to collect your own sample, you might want to ask yourself the following questions before trying your first kit: Generally, yes. Some accept FSA and HSA cards, while others are cash pay with flexible payment options. Coverage depends on your plan and insurer. Some plans cover remote collection, others require traditional labs. It's wise to check with your insurer before ordering a kit and call ahead to clarify the specific test or service with the telehealth company. For tests like A1C, CRP, and total protein, at-home finger-prick blood collection results are equivalent to lab results when performed properly.

Kits include prepaid, pre-addressed materials. Samples are stable at room temperature because they contain medically approved preservatives. It's important to follow instructions and, if possible, avoid mailing on weekends and label samples correctly. If your sample is insufficient, contact your chosen service. You may get a replacement kit and additional guidance. Some telehealth brands even offer phone or chat support. Turnaround time varies. For blood sugar/A1C finger-prick tests for example, results are available on average 6 to 9 days after ordering to results being available online. Remote blood testing from validated services like our telemedicine options above offers HIPAA-compliant, convenient access to self-administered finger-prick bloodwork to test fertility and check thyroid, hormone, blood sugar, and other health metrics. It's not for everyone or every type of lab panel. For your test of interest and price point, it's wise to review the options above and call to learn whether Medicare or your insurance covers telehealth blood testing and the time frame for results.

## Don't fear AI, but don't trust it blindly: CJJ Surya Kant

Bengaluru: Cautioning that the adoption of technology in the judiciary must be accompanied by a clear and conscious understanding of its inherent limitations, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday urged judicial officers not to be "afraid" of AI. Asserting that technology must remain an aid, not a substitute, he said the integration of Artificial Intelligence into the judicial process must be guided by a principle of balance, leveraging its benefits to enhance efficiency while steadfastly preserving the human intellect, experience, and constitutional conscience that lie at the heart of justice.

The chief justice was speaking at the 22nd biennial state-level conference of judicial officers, themed 'Reimagining the Judiciary in the Era of Artificial Intelligence', organised by the Karnataka State Judicial Officers Association. "I would also like to add that you should not be afraid of AI. What do you do when a case involving very complicated facts and complex questions of law is placed before you? You apply more thought, spend more time, exercise greater patience, and feel a sense of satisfaction when you decide such a case," Justice Kant said. "The same will happen with AI tools when we begin using them carefully and consciously, ensuring that the judge within you remains independent and is not influenced by these technical tools," he added. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Supreme Court judges B V Nagarathna and Aravind Kumar, and Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court, Vibhu Bakhru, among others, were present at the event.

Stating that the emergence of AI presents both significant opportunities and serious challenges for the judiciary, the CJJ said that, on one hand, AI has the potential to en-

hance efficiency in meaningful ways by assisting in legal research, streamlining case management, organising large volumes of data, and reducing administrative burdens that often consume valuable judicial time. "With structured and targeted training, judicial officers can effectively harness these tools to improve productivity and ensure that greater time and attention are devoted to the core function of adjudication," he said. However, he added, the adoption of such technology must be accompanied by a clear and conscious understanding of its inherent limitations. "AI operates on patterns, algorithms, and existing datasets; it does not possess judgment in the human sense, nor can it engage with the ethical, social, and moral dimensions that frequently underpin judicial decision-making," Justice Kant said. "The process of judging is not merely analytical—it is also reflective, contextual, and guided by constitutional values. An over-reliance on AI tools risks reducing this nuanced exercise to a mechanical output, thereby diluting the depth, independence, and integrity of judicial reasoning," he said. Expressing concern about inaccuracies generated by such systems, he said there have been recent instances of fabricated precedents, incorrect citations, and entirely fictitious legal propositions being produced by AI platforms. "These so-called 'hallucinations' are not minor technical lapses; they strike at the very foundation of the judicial process, which rests on accuracy, authenticity, and trust. If left unchecked, they have the potential to mislead, distort legal arguments, compromise the quality of adjudication, and misdirect outcomes," he said. Justice Kant further warned of the growing risk of AI tools being misused to generate misleading pleadings, frivolous claims, or superficially convincing yet substantively flawed submissions. "

## Illness is more than just biological – medical sociology shows how social factors get under the skin and cause disease



Health and medicine is more than just biological – societal forces can get under your skin and cause illness. Medical sociologists like me study these forces by treating society itself as our laboratory. Health and illness are our experiments in uncovering meaning, power and inequality, and how it affects all parts of a person's life. For example, why do low-income communities continue to have higher death rates, despite improved social and environmental conditions across society? Foundational research in medical sociology reveals that access to resources like money, knowledge, power and social networks strongly affects a person's health. Medical sociologists have shown that social class is linked to numerous diseases and mortality, including risk factors that influence health and longevity. These include smoking, overweight and obesity, stress, social isolation, access to health care and living in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Moreover, social class alone cannot explain such health inequalities. My own research examines how inequalities related to social class, race and gender affect access to autism services, particularly among single Black mothers who rely on public insurance. This work helps explain delays in autism diagnosis among Black children, who often wait three years after initial parent concerns before they are formally diagnosed. White children with private insurance typically wait from 9 to 22 months depending on age of diagnosis. This is just one of numerous examples of inequalities that are entrenched in and deepened by medical and educational systems. Medical sociologists like me investigate how all of these factors interact to affect a person's health. This social model of illness sees sickness as shaped by social, cultural, political and economic factors. We examine both individual experiences and societal influences to help address the health issues affecting vulnerable populations through large-scale reforms.

By studying the way social forces shape health inequalities, medical sociology helps address how health and illness extend beyond the body and into every aspect of people's lives. Medical sociology formally began in the U.S after World War II, when the National Institutes of Health started investing in joint medical and sociological research projects. Hospitals began hiring sociologists to address questions like how to improve patient compliance, doctor-patient interactions and medical treatments. However, the focus of this early work was on issues specific to medicine, such as quality improvement or barriers to medication adherence. The goal was to study problems that could be directly applied in medical settings rather than challenging medical authority or existing inequalities. During that period, sociologists viewed illness mostly as a deviation from normal functioning leading to impairments that require treatment.

For example, the concept of the sick role – developed by medical sociologist Talcott Parsons in the 1950s – saw illness as a form of deviance from social roles and expect-

tations. Under this idea, patients were solely responsible for seeking out medical care in order to return to normal functioning in society. In the 1960s, sociologists began critiquing medical diagnoses and institutions. Researchers criticised the idea of the sick role because it assumed illnesses were temporary and did not account for chronic conditions or disability, which can last for long periods of time and do not necessarily allow people to deviate from their life obligations. The sick role assumed that all people have access to medical care, and it did not take into account how social characteristics like race, class, gender and age can influence a person's experience of illness.

Parsons' sick role concept also emphasised the expertise of the physician rather than the patient's experience of illness. For example, sociologist Erving Goffman showed that the way care is structured in asylums shaped how patients are treated. He also examined how the experience of stigma is an interactive process that develops in response to social norms. This work influenced how researchers understood chronic illness and disability and laid the groundwork for later debates on what counts as pathological or normal. In the 1970s, some researchers began to question the model of medicine as an institution of social control. They critiqued how medicine's jurisdiction expanded over many societal problems – such as old age and death – which were defined and treated as medical problems. Researchers were critical of the tendency to medicalise and apply labels like "healthy" and "ill" to increasing parts of human existence. This shift emphasised how a medical diagnosis can carry political weight and how medical authority can affect social inclusion or exclusion. The critical perspective aligns with critiques from disability studies. Unlike medical sociology, which emerged through the medical model of disease, disability studies emerged from disability rights activism and scholarship. Rather than viewing disability as pathological, this field sees disability as a variation of the human condition rooted in social barriers and exclusionary environments. Instead of seeking cures, researchers focus on increasing accessibility, human rights and autonomy for disabled people. A contemporary figure in this field was Alice Wong, a disability rights activist and medical sociologist who died in November 2025. Her work amplified disabled voices and helped shape how the public understood disability justice and access to technology. By focusing on social and structural influences on health, medical sociology has contributed significantly to programmes addressing issues like segregation, discrimination, poverty, unemployment and underfunded schools. For example, sociological research on racial health disparities invite neighborhood interventions that can help improve overall quality of life by increasing the availability of affordable nutritious foods in underserved neighborhoods or initiatives that prioritise equal access to education. At the societal level, large-scale social policies such as guaranteed minimum incomes or universal health care can dramatically reduce health inequalities. Medical sociology has also expanded the understanding of how health care policies affect health, helping ensure that policy changes take into account the broader social context. For example, a key area of medical sociological research is the rising cost of and limited access to health care. This body of work focuses on the complex social and organisational factors of delivering health services. It highlights the need for more state and federal regulatory control as well as investment in groups and communities that need care the most. Modern medical sociology ultimately considers all societal issues to be health issues. Improving people's health and well-being requires improving education, employment, housing, transportation and other social, economic and political policies.

## Trump pushes 1-year, 10% cap on credit card interest rates, banks balk



Reviving a campaign pledge, President Donald Trump wants a one-year, 10% cap on credit card interest rates, a move that could save Americans tens of billions of dollars but drew immediate opposition from an industry that has been in his corner. Mr. Trump was not clear in his social media post Friday (January 9, 2026) night whether a cap might take effect through executive action or legislation, though one Republican Senator said he had spoken with the President and would work on a bill with his "full support". Mr. Trump said he hoped it would be in place January 20, one year after he took office. Strong opposition is certain from Wall Street and the credit card companies, which donated heavily to his 2024 campaign and to support his second-term agenda. "We will no longer let the American Public be ripped off by credit card companies that are charging interest rates of 20 to 30%," Mr. Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

Researchers who studied Mr. Trump's campaign pledge after it was first announced found that Americans would save roughly \$100 billion in interest a year if credit card rates were capped at 10%. The same researchers found that while the credit card industry would take a major hit, it would still be profitable, although credit card rewards and other perks might be scaled back.

Americans are paying, on average, between 19.65% and 21.5% in interest on credit cards according to the Federal Reserve and other industry tracking sources. That has come down in the past year as the central bank lowered benchmark rates, but is near the highs since federal regulators started tracking credit card rates in the mid-1990s. The Republican administration has proved particularly friendly until now to the credit card industry. Capital One got little resistance from the White House when it finalised its purchase and merger with Discover Financial in early 2025, a deal that created the nation's largest credit card company. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which is largely tasked with going after credit card companies for alleged wrongdoing, has been largely nonfunctional since Mr. Trump took office. In a joint statement, the banking industry was opposed to Mr. Trump's proposal.

"If enacted, this cap would only drive consumers toward less regulated, more costly alternatives," the Ameri-

can Bankers Association and allied groups said. The White House did not respond to questions about how the President seeks to cap the rate or whether he has spoken with credit card companies about the idea. Senator Roger Marshall, R-Kan., who said he talked with Mr. Trump on Friday (January 9) night, said the effort is meant to "lower costs for American families and to reign in greedy credit card companies who have been ripping off hardworking Americans for too long." Legislation in both the House and the Senate would do what Mr. Trump is seeking. Senators Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and Josh Hawley, R-Mo., released a plan in February that would immediately cap interest rates at 10% for five years, hoping to use Mr. Trump's campaign promise to build momentum for their measure. Hours before Mr. Trump's post, Mr. Sanders said that the President, rather than working to cap interest rates, had taken steps to deregulate big banks that allowed them to charge much higher credit card fees. Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., have proposed similar legislation. Ocasio-Cortez is a frequent political target of Mr. Trump, while Ms. Luna is a close ally of the President.

## Forces that opposed Somnath temple reconstruction still active, need to defeat them: PM Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday (January 11, 2026) said the forces that had opposed the reconstruction of the Somnath temple in Gujarat after independence are still active, and India needs to remain alert, united and powerful to defeat them.

The history of Somnath is not that of destruction and defeat but of victory and renewal. This is the cycle of time that fundamentalist invaders are now reduced to pages of history, but the Somnath temple still stands tall, he said.

Mr. Modi was speaking at the Somnath Swabhiman Parv held to mark 1,000 years since Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion of the Somnath temple in the year 1026. Despite multiple repeated attempts for its destruction over centuries, the Somnath temple stands today as a powerful symbol of resilience, faith and national pride, owing to the collective resolve and efforts to restore it to its ancient glory. PM Modi said, "The true history of hatred, atrocity and terror was concealed from us, and we were taught that the attack was an attempt to loot the temple." After independence, when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel took the oath of rebuilding the Somnath temple, his path was obstructed, he said.

## EU countries override France to greenlight Mercosur trade deal



The EU gave a long-delayed go-ahead on Friday (January 9, 2026) to a huge trade deal with South American bloc Mercosur championed by business groups but loathed by many European farmers – overriding opposition led by key power France. Most of the European Union's 27 nations backed the pact following an Ambassadors' meeting in Brussels, paving the way for it to be signed later this month in Paraguay.

More than 25 years in the making, supporters see the deal as crucial to boost exports, support the continent's ailing economy and foster diplomatic ties at a time of global uncertainty. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen called it "proof that Europe charts its own course and stands as a reliable partner". She said she looked forward to the signing – which Argentina said was planned January 17. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the deal sent "an important signal of our strategic sovereignty and capacity to act", a message echoed by Spain, which said it would "forge shared prosperity" with Latin America. On the Mercosur side, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva hailed "a historic day for multilateralism". And Paraguay's Foreign Minister, one of the four founding members of Mercosur, along with Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, defended the deal as "balanced".

But the European Commission, which negotiated the text, failed to win over all of the bloc's member states. Heavyweight France, where politicians across the divide are up in arms against a deal attacked as an assault on the country's influential farming sector, led an ultimately unsuccessful push to sink it. Ireland, Poland, Hungary and Austria also voted against the accord. That was not enough to block it; however, after holdout, Italy ultimately threw its weight behind the pact. 'Economic clout' The deal will create a vast market of more than 700 million people, making it

one of the world's largest free trade areas. Part of a broader push to diversify trade in the face of U.S. tariffs, it will bring the 27-nation EU closer together with Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay, removing import tariffs on more than 90% of products. This will save EU businesses four billion euros (\$4.6 billion) worth of duties per year and help exports of vehicles, machinery, wines and spirits to Latin America, according to the EU. It will also help the bloc reduce its dependency on China for critical raw materials, said Agathe Demarais, of the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank.

"The conclusion of the EU-Mercosur trade deal is great news for Europe's global geopolitical and economic clout," she said. Germany, Spain and other backers believe the deal will provide a welcome boost to their industries hampered by Chinese competition and tariffs in the United States. But France and other critics opposed it over concerns that their farmers would be undercut by a flow of cheaper goods, including meat, sugar, rice, honey and soybean, from agricultural giant Brazil and its neighbours. French Agriculture Minister Annie Genevard argued that it was "not the end of the story", as the European Parliament had still to vote on the deal. With the deal still requiring approval from the European Parliament, France has warned against any attempt to bring it into force before then. 'Pain' vs 'benefits'

Farmers in several European countries mounted a final show of anger against the text's approval, marching in protest in Warsaw and blocking roads in France and Belgium. "There is a lot of pain," Judy Peeters, a representative for a Belgian young farmers group, told AFP at a protest on a motorway south of Brussels. "There is a lot of anger." Over the past months, the commission has been at pains to reassure farmers and their backers that pros outweigh cons. It has stressed that the accord is expected to boost EU agri-food exports to South America by 50%, in part by protecting more than 340 iconic European products – from Greek feta to French champagne – from local imitations. It also laid out plans to set up a 6.3 billion-euro crisis fund and safeguards allowing for the suspension of preferential tariffs on agricultural products in case of a damaging surge in imports. The latter were tightened further at the last minute by member states lowering the threshold for action, a late concession to Italy. Angry farmers disrupted traffic in Milan with their tractors Friday, dumping barrels of straw and pouring milk on the ground in front of the regional council building. But Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni defended an agreement she hoped would "bring benefits in many areas" and "for everyone".

## Why was bail denied to Umar and Sharjeel? | Explained



The story so far: The Supreme Court on January 5 declined to grant bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case, notwithstanding their incarceration for nearly six years without the commencement of trial.

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What did the court rule?

The court held that the constitutional guarantee of personal liberty is not "absolute", and remains subject to the stringent bail regime prescribed under special statutes such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). A Bench comprising Justices Aravind Kumar and N.V. Anjaria, however, granted conditional bail to five other co-accused, observing that the allegations against them indicated conduct of a subsidiary or facilitative nature, thereby warranting differential treatment.

How was a 'hierarchy of roles' established?

The court held that prosecutorial evidence placed Mr. Khalid and Mr. Imam on a "qualitatively different footing" from the other accused, warranting a distinct assessment of the "hierarchy of participation". It observed that the two did not stand on equal footing in terms of culpability, since they were the "ideological drivers" who allegedly devised the strategy of converting protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act into disruptive road blockades aimed at paralysing the national capital.

Hierarchy of roles: The Hindu editorial on no bail for Umar Khalid

By contrast, the court held that the five accused granted bail were "local-level facilitators", whose alleged roles were confined to logistical arrangements at protest sites. It said their participation was "derivative" in nature, as they merely carried out directions from those positioned higher in the chain of command. In these circumstances, the judges found that continued custody of such "minor participants" would be disproportionate.

Why did prolonged custody not justify bail?

The accused had argued that their prolonged incarceration without trial violated their fundamental right to a speedy trial under Article 21 of the Constitution. They had relied on the Supreme Court's 2021 ruling in Union of India versus K.A. Najeeb, which had held that the rigours of the stringent bail bar under the UAPA may "melt down" where there is no realistic prospect of the trial being completed within a reasonable time, as continued detention would offend constitutional guarantees. The court, however, distinguished the precedent, observing that it does not lay down a "mechanical rule" whereby delay, by itself, can override the statutory constraints governing bail under the UAPA. It emphasised that Section 43D(5) prescribes a stringent

threshold for the grant of bail, which departs from the general principles applicable under ordinary criminal law. Having found that Mr. Khalid and Mr. Imam prima facie occupied a "central role" in the alleged offence, the judges observed that the degree of circumspection required before constitutional guarantees are permitted to displace the statutory embargo on bail is "correspondingly greater". By contrast, in the case of the co-accused granted relief, the court noted that the allegations against them were confined to facilitative tasks. In the absence of any "command authority" or capacity to interfere with the trial process, it held that the balance tilted in favour of granting them liberty. The judges also rejected the defence contention that the delay in the trial was attributable solely to the Delhi Police, noting that a perusal of the trial court record showed the prosecution had, at various stages, expressed readiness to commence arguments on the framing of charges, while multiple procedural objections were raised on behalf of the accused.

How expansive is the court's reading of a 'terrorist act'?

Section 15 of the UAPA defines a "terrorist act" as conduct undertaken with the intent to threaten, or likely to threaten, the unity, integrity, security, economic security, or sovereignty of India, or to strike terror among the people or any section thereof. While the provision refers to the use of weapons such as bombs, explosives, or firearms, it also extends to acts committed by "any other means". The defence had argued that, in the absence of overt violence, the organisation of protests and "chakka jams" (road blockades) attributed to the accused constituted a constitutionally protected form of protest and could not fall within the ambit of Section 15. It had contended that the residual phrase "any other means" must be read ejusdem generis (of the same kind) with the preceding reference to violent methods. Rejecting this submission, the court agreed with the prosecution that Section 15 cannot be read as being confined to the use of conventional weapons alone. It observed that acts resulting in the "sustained choking of arterial roads" and the "systemic disruption of civic life" could attract the provision if they threaten economic security or disrupt essential services. The judges further noted that when such blockades are timed to coincide with major international events, such as the 2020 visit of U.S. President Donald Trump, they prima facie constitute an act of terror under the UAPA.

What happens next?

For the five accused granted relief, the apex court imposed onerous conditions to prevent any possibility of tampering with evidence or influencing witnesses. Each was directed to execute a personal bond of ₹2,00,000 with two local sureties and are restrained from leaving the national capital without prior permission of the trial court. Notably, until the conclusion of the trial, they have been barred from addressing or attending any gathering and from circulating any material, including posts in electronic or physical form, of any kind, not limited to the case. In the case of Mr. Khalid and Mr. Imam, the court carved out a limited window for them to revive their plea for bail, permitting them to approach the trial court either upon the completion of the examination of the protected witnesses relied upon by the prosecution or upon the expiry of one year from the date of the ruling, whichever is earlier.

What are the implications?

Advocate Vrinda Grover told The Hindu that the verdict marks a grave departure from settled judicial precedent. "When an individual is subjected to pre-trial detention, the presumption of innocence continues to operate. Any ruling that renders personal liberty subservient to state interests in such cases is anathema to the Constitution," she said. Ms. Grover further cautioned that treating allegations of road blockades as "terrorist acts" risks emboldening governments to weaponise the law to criminalise dissent. "There is no jurisprudence to support the proposition that chakka jams can be treated as acts of terror. On the contrary, past precedents consistently hold that the more draconian the statute, the greater must be the degree of judicial scrutiny to ensure that the allegations squarely fall within its four corners," she added.

## To cushion Indian flyers, jet fuel price for domestic flights hiked only partially; price for international flights more than doubles



Even as the prices of aviation turbine fuel (ATF), or jet fuel, have surged globally due to the raging West Asia war, the price of the fuel for domestic scheduled flights in India has been hiked only partially by the public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs), according to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG). According to the ministry, given the surge in international prices of jet fuel, the price in India was expected to more than double from Wednesday (April 1), but only a "partial and staggered" increase is being passed on for now for scheduled domestic airlines. For overseas flights, however, airlines will have to pay the full market-linked price for ATF. Non-scheduled operators, like private charter operators, will also have to pay the full price, which has gone up by almost 115% from March levels.

"ATF prices in India were deregulated in 2001 and are revised on monthly basis based on a formula of international benchmarks. Due to the closure of Strait of Hormuz and extraordinary situation in global energy markets, price of ATF for domestic markets was expected to increase by more than 100% on 1 April. In order to insulate the domestic travel costs from the substantial increase in international prices, PSU Oil Marketing Companies of the Ministry of Petroleum, in consultation with Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), have passed only a partial and staggered increase of 25% (only Rs.15/litre) to the airlines. Foreign routes will pay for the full increase in ATF prices consistent with what they pay in other parts of the world," the MoPNG posted on social media platform X.

Following the announcement from the MoPNG, ATF prices listed on the website of India's largest OMC Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) were revised significantly downwards from levels that were published early Wednesday morning. The price of ATF in Delhi had jumped almost 115% month-on-month to a record Rs 2.07 lakh per kilolitre as of early Wednesday; the price listed now specifically for scheduled domestic airlines is Rs 1.05 lakh, higher by just 8.6% from March levels. The new reduced price for domestic scheduled airlines in Mumbai is Rs 98,247 per kilolitre, against the full price of Rs 1.95 lakh. For airlines on international run, the price of ATF in Delhi jumped 107% to \$1,690.81 per kilolitre. The OMCs usually revise jet fuel prices on the first of every month; ATF prices vary across the country due to differences in levies charged by states.

Jet fuel accounted for over 40% of Indian airlines' operating costs even before the war and industry insiders had cautioned that a significant jump in fuel prices and the consequent surge in airfares could lead to demand destruction, forcing airlines to cut flights on routes that see a fall in passenger footfalls. MoPNG, MoCA, and the OMCs were in talks on ATF pricing in view of the global price surge amid the West Asia war. It is not clear yet whether the government will support the OMCs in covering their under-recoveries on jet fuel sales to domestic airlines. The fuel retailers are also bearing losses on retail sales of petrol and diesel as the prices of the two fuels have remained unchanged despite the surge in international prices of crude oil and petroleum products. To cushion the OMCs, the government recently reduced excise duty on the two automobile fuels

by Rs 10 per litre each.

Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu said that the move to allow only a partial pass-on of ATF price hike for scheduled domestic flights is "both pragmatic and forward-looking, while ensuring that foreign routes bear the full market-aligned price". In a post on X, Naidu wrote, "This calibrated approach will help shield passengers from sharp fare increases, ease the burden on domestic airlines, and support the continued stability of the aviation sector at this crucial juncture. It will also benefit the broader economy by ensuring the smooth movement of cargo and maintaining vital air connectivity for trade and logistics". Anticipating a surge in jet fuel prices in India in line with the jump in other countries, major Indian airlines like IndiGo, Air India group, and Akasa Air had imposed or hiked fuel surcharges on tickets, varying from around Rs 200 for domestic flights to \$200 for long-haul international routes. The surcharges and fares could go up further, particularly for international flights, industry insiders said.

The jump in ATF prices—except for the regulated increase for domestic airlines—in India appears broadly in line with the movement in international prices. ATF prices in India are linked to the Mean of Platts Arab Gulf (MOPAG), a price assessment by S&P Global based on jet fuel prices in West Asia. The global average jet fuel price for the week ended March 27 was \$195.19 per barrel, up 103.9% from the February average and 116.8% higher than last year's average, according to data from S&P Global Energy compiled by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Since the beginning of the West Asia war on February 28, global ATF prices have almost doubled to \$195.19 per barrel for the week ended March 27 from \$99.40 for the week ended February 28, as per the data compiled by IATA. The crack spread—difference between the price of crude oil and products like ATF derived from it—trebled to \$81.44 per barrel for the week ended March 27 from \$27.83 for the week ended February 27. Given the surge in crack spreads, which are reflective of margins, there have been calls in recent weeks from India's aviation sector to de-link ATF pricing in India from global jet fuel prices, and instead have a pricing model based on the price of crude and an agreed margin over that, it is learnt.

"The financial impact of this crisis is yet to be fully felt, as although the spot price of jet fuel has more than doubled, most of the impact will only hit us from next month. We, like other Indian carriers, have already imposed a fuel surcharge on new tickets to help mitigate this imminent cost increase, but not every customer is willing to pay higher airfares so there is a limit to how high we can price before demand drops. Additionally, given economic uncertainties, it is not certain that customers or companies will be as willing to travel as they were prior to the conflict, and may choose to stay put for a while," Air India MD and CEO Campbell Wilson wrote in an email to employees on March 20, it is learnt. "There will be pockets of new demand, such as we're seeing on—and deploying additional flights to—some Europe and North America cities, but already airlines in some parts of the world are reducing some flights due to high fuel prices. Depending on how fuel costs, airfares and customer demand moves, we may also have to adjust," Wilson wrote.

With the West Asia war effectively closing off the critical maritime chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz, crude oil and fuel prices have surged globally. In many countries, there are growing concerns of fuel shortages, including that of jet fuel. While ATF prices have increased in India as well, the country appears to be in a relatively comfortable position on the supply front as it produces significantly more volumes of jet fuel than its own consumption. Moreover, the government has also imposed an export duty of Rs 29.5 per litre on ATF to disincentivise the fuel's export and ensure adequate availability in the domestic market.

## IndiGo names IATA head Walsh as chief executive, to join airline by August



India's largest airline IndiGo on Tuesday announced a high-profile appointment as it named aviation industry veteran Willie Walsh, currently the director general of the global airline trade grouping International Air Transport Association (IATA), as its new chief executive officer. Walsh's appointment comes three weeks after Pieter Elbers suddenly resigned as IndiGo CEO. Elbers stepped down three months after IndiGo faced an unprecedented operational disruption that brought civil aviation operations across India to their knees. With Elbers's exit, the airline's promoter and managing director Rahul Bhatia had temporarily stepped in to assume management of the airline's affairs.

"The Board of InterGlobe Aviation Limited (IndiGo) today appointed Mr. William Walsh as the Chief Executive Officer, subject to Regulatory approvals. Mr. Walsh's tenure at IATA comes to a close on the 31st of July, 2026, and he is expected to join no later than on the 3rd of August, 2026," IndiGo said in a release.

"As we enter a new phase of transformation and growth, I am delighted to welcome Willie to IndiGo. He is an iconic and accomplished aviation leader and brings a rare combination of global perspective, operational expertise of having built strong customer-focused airlines, deep industry experience and a values driven leadership, making him exceptionally suited to lead IndiGo at this pivotal cusp of growth," the release quoted Bhatia as saying.

In an email to employees, Bhatia is learnt to have written that Walsh has the distinction of being intimately familiar with "the levers of managing" low-cost airlines, while also having led global network airlines like British Airways, and with India possibly being the last bastion of massive growth in aviation globally, there couldn't have been a "finer leader" to expand IndiGo's footprint within India and overseas. Bhatia, who had signed off the e-mail to staff announcing Elbers's departure with a reassuring "Main Hoon Naa" (I am there), signed off the mail announcing Walsh's appoint-

ment by calling himself "Kuchh Hee Dinon Kaa Mehmaan" (only a few days' guest), it is learnt.

Prior to taking over as IATA director general in April 2021, Walsh spent his entire career in the airline industry, starting in 1979 as a cadet pilot with Aer Lingus, an airline he later headed as CEO. Walsh was appointed the chief executive of British Airways in 2005. He led British Airways through the 2008-09 global financial crisis, established a transatlantic joint business venture with Iberia, Finnair, and American Airlines, and oversaw the 2011 merger of British Airways and Iberia under new parent company—International Airlines Group (IAG)—of which he was the first CEO and continued on that position till 2020

"Mr. Walsh is widely considered as one of the most successful, respected, influential and long-lasting leaders in modern aviation history. He is admired for his pragmatic and resolute management, effective complex restructuring, and successful mergers and acquisitions... In his new role as IndiGo's CEO, Mr. Walsh will be responsible for the overall management and strategic direction of the airline with a focus on transformational initiatives to strengthen the operational performance, advance the Company's network and commercial strategy while enhancing customer experience. He will work closely with the Board and the leadership team to rightfully position IndiGo as it scales up to the next phase of its growth," IndiGo said. Elbers, a high-profile aviation executive himself, had been IndiGo's CEO since September 2022, just as the airline came out of the pandemic. Prior to joining IndiGo, he was the President & CEO of Dutch carrier KLM for eight years. His tenure at IndiGo saw the airline expand its network far and wide beyond India, a strategy Elbers liked to call "internationalisation".

Elbers was also instrumental in the IndiGo's evolution from a typical low-cost carrier into a "fit-for-purpose" airline, which now offers a business class product on its top routes, and has even entered the wide-body long-haul segment with flights to various European cities. IndiGo is now counted among the world's top airlines by passenger volumes, and has in recent years tightened its stranglehold over India's domestic aviation market with a dense and high-frequency network. The period has also seen the airline placing world record-breaking aircraft orders, including an order for wide-body jets for long and ultra-long-haul operations. The large-scale disruption, which erupted on December 3, peaked on December 5 with over 1,600 of the airline's 2,300-plus daily flights getting cancelled in a single day. With the DGCA granting specific exemptions, the airline—with a domestic market share of 65%—was able to swiftly stabilise operations over the course of the next few days.

## 'Romantic films were not allowed': Aamir Khan reveals the 'strict' childhood rules that shaped his life, and why he still barely watches movies today; expert weighs in



How we engage with entertainment may feel like a matter of personal choice, but early life experiences can quietly shape these preferences in lasting ways. In a recent interview, Aamir Khan reflected on this aspect of his life, describing how his relationship with films has always been different. He shared, "This is how I've been since childhood. I've been a reader. The only films I've watched consistently are the black-and-white films or the really old ones that used to come on Doordarshan. Back in the day, I grew up in a very conservative household. And my parents were very strict about watching films and all that. We were not allowed to watch films. So, at that time, I remember, if I had asked my mom if I could watch a film, she would say yes, but romantic films were not allowed." Even when access to films became easier, his inclination leaned elsewhere, including literature and older cinema.

What stands out is how these early boundaries may have shaped not just habits, but also comfort levels and preferences over time. He further explained, "I got into filmmaking at the age of 18. I started working as an assistant. I don't want to sound patronising, but just as a joke, I'd like to say that some people play football and others watch it. That's a good way to put it. I make films, I barely watch them. That's the truth of the answer. I barely watch films. So, I

don't watch the latest movies. I have no idea what's happening in Hollywood. I'm in my own world, I don't really watch stuff."

Impact on a person's long-term preferences for entertainment, leisure, or creative expression Psychologist Rasshi Gurnani tells indianexpress.com, "Growing up in a restrictive environment often leads to what psychologists call internalised norms, beliefs and preferences shaped by early authority figures. When certain forms of entertainment are limited or discouraged, the child may either adopt those restrictions as their own preferences or develop a muted curiosity toward them." Over time, she notes that this can influence leisure choices, leading individuals to gravitate toward what feels "acceptable" or familiar. "Additionally, limited exposure during formative years can reduce sensory and emotional association with certain media, making them less engaging in adulthood. In some cases, this also fosters a stronger inclination toward solitary or cognitively engaging activities like reading, which may have been more accessible or encouraged."

Can growing up with limitations around content influence emotional comfort or openness toward those themes later in life?

"Yes, early restrictions can influence emotional comfort later in life through a process known as emotional conditioning," states Gurnani, adding that if romantic content was framed as inappropriate or discouraged, the individual may subconsciously associate it with discomfort, awkwardness, or even mild guilt. This doesn't necessarily mean avoidance, but it can create a level of detachment or reduced emotional resonance with such themes. "Eventually, this may affect how easily a person engages with or expresses emotions related to intimacy and romance. However, these patterns are not fixed and can evolve with new experiences, relationships, and conscious exposure," concludes Gurnani.

## 'If you don't have symptoms...': Biochemist says controlling glucose spikes reduces PCOS symptoms; we verify

In a recent Instagram post, French biochemist and bestselling author Jessie Inchauspé shared that managing blood sugar fluctuations may play a key role in reducing polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) symptoms. According to her, the condition is often misunderstood. PCOS is not a single disease but a cluster of symptoms. She explained that it includes irregular or missed periods, lack of ovulation, acne, hair loss on the scalp in women, and elevated testosterone levels. She stressed that high testosterone is believed to drive many of these symptoms, but the real trigger may lie elsewhere.

"So if you want to get testosterone levels down to try to get rid of PCOS symptoms, you gotta get insulin levels down, and to do that you need to get glucose spikes down," she noted. She further stated, "Now, in 70 per cent of the cases of PCOS, the female also has high insulin levels, whatever her body weight, this can be the case," challenging the widespread belief that insulin resistance only affects those who are overweight. According to her explanation, elevated insulin stimulates higher testosterone production, which then worsens PCOS-related symptoms. "High insulin levels produce more testosterone, and high testosterone is often the cause of PCOS symptoms," she added.

Taking the argument a step further, she suggested that symptom resolution may redefine how we look at the condition. "I would argue that if you don't have the symptoms, you don't have PCOS anymore," the biochemist noted.

To control glucose spikes, she recommended practical strategies such as pairing carbohydrates with protein or fibre, avoiding sugary foods on an empty stomach, and taking a walk after heavy meals, all aimed at improving insulin response. But how strong is the evidence linking insulin resistance and glucose spikes to elevated testosterone levels in PCOS? Kanikka Malhotra, consultant dietician and diabetes educator tells indianexpress.com, "Insulin resistance and blood sugar spikes strongly drive higher testosterone in PCOS. Some studies show this link in 70% of women, regardless of weight. High insulin teams up with hormones to overproduce androgens from the ovaries, worsening hair growth, acne, and irregular periods." She adds that lowering



insulin through diet (like low-GI Indian foods such as millets and besan roti), exercise, or medications like metformin helps many reduce symptoms, but not everyone equally, due to genes and body type. Work with a qualified dietician for the best results.

Can PCOS truly be considered reversed if symptoms disappear?

Malhotra cautions, "No, medically PCOS isn't 'reversed' even if symptoms vanish. It is a lifelong genetic trait, like a predisposition that can flare up. Jessie Inchauspé's idea ignores the criteria requiring two issues (cycles, hormones, ovaries), which may persist. Lifestyle wins (e.g., balanced thalis with a rainbow food approach and regular walks) bring remission, slashing risks like diabetes by 50%. Focus on annual scans to catch silent issues early."

Should lean women with irregular periods or acne be routinely screened for insulin resistance?

"Absolutely," says Malhotra, adding that seventy per cent of women with PCOS have insulin resistance even if they are slim, so testing should go beyond normal sugar checks using Oral Glucose Tolerance Test (OGTT) or Homeostatic Model Assessment of Insulin Resistance (HOMA) for spikes causing acne and period issues. "Simple Indian swaps like jeera water, skipping maida, and doing yoga regularly can help prevent progression. Early intervention with inositol (1-2 g/day) restores cycles in most of lean cases," concludes Malhotra.

## Nayanthara to feature opposite Salman Khan in Vamshi Paidipally's film



Mumbai: Tamil star Nayanthara will feature alongside actor Salman Khan in filmmaker Vamshi Paidipally's next film, the makers announced on Wednesday. The action drama film is backed by producer Dil Raju under his banner Sri Venkateswara Creations. It will start production later this month.

"The Queen Arrives... The epitome of versatility and excellence @nayanthara joins #SalmanKhanVamshiPaidipallyFilm. It's an honour to have you on board for something truly special that's underway," the studio posted on Instagram. Nayanthara is one of the most recognised names in south cinema, having starred in multiple Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam films. Some of her hits include "Chandramukhi", "Ghajini", "Billu", "Raja Rani", "Naaanum Rowdy Dhaan" and "Viswasam". She made her Bollywood debut with "Jawan", the 2023 blockbuster in which she starred alongside Shah Rukh Khan. The movie, which earned over Rs 1,000 crore at the global box office, was directed by Atlee.

Paidipally is known for blockbuster hits such as "Yevadu", "Oopiri", "Maharshi" and "Varisu". Khan will next feature in "Maatrubhumi", which was previously titled "Battle of Galwan". The film is based on the 2020 Galwan Valley conflict between India and China and it is directed by Apoorva Lakhia of "Shootout at Lokhandwala" fame.

## Mahindra reports 21 per cent growth in March auto sales

New Delhi: Indian prominent automobile manufacturer Mahindra & Mahindra on Wednesday announced that overall auto sales for March 2026 stood at 99,969 vehicles, marking a growth of 21 per cent including exports.

domestic sales touched 60,272 units in March, up 25 per cent, while overall UV sales including exports reached 62,109 units. Domestic Commercial Vehicles sales for the month were 24,928, marking a growth of 11 per cent.

The company reported year-to-date exports rising 18 per cent to 40,990, while total exports eased 4 per cent year-on-year to 3,968 vehicles in March. The financial year concluded with all-time-high volumes of 6,60,276 SUVs and 2,89,597 light commercial vehicles under 3.5 tonnes, delivering robust YoY growth of 20 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively, across both segments, the company said in a release. "In March, we achieved SUV sales of 60,272 units, a growth of 25 per cent and light commercial vehicles under 3.5 tonnes of 24,928 units, a growth of 11 per cent YoY," said Nalinikanth Gollagunta, CEO, Automotive Division, M&M Ltd.

## After Vaishali's Candidates win, her guru RB Ramesh warns: 'She can do even better'



Barely two days after Vaishali Rameshbabu secured the right to challenge Ju Wenjun at the Women's World Championship, her long-time guru RB Ramesh has an assessment about the Indian prodigy that should worry the rest of the world: she's not realised her full potential yet. Far from it! "Chess-wise, I would still say both Praggnanandhaa and Vaishali have not shown all their strength on the board," Ramesh tells The Indian Express from Cyprus where he rushed after Vaishali's title was confirmed. "The feeling I always have is that they could still do better. There are still some parts of them that have not realized themselves what they are capable of. So that is something I'm waiting to see."

Vaishali entered the Candidates as the lowest rated player in the eight-woman field, and despite winning the event in a thrilling photo-finish in the final round, she still leaves Cyprus as the lowest-rated player. As she has highlighted in multiple conversations since winning the Candidates, the past two years have seen her experience some wretched form which eroded her rating. The only thing that went right for the 24-year-old over the past two years was her winning the FIDE Grand Swiss tournament, which earned her a spot in the Candidates. Over the past decade or so, Ramesh has had a ring-side view to the rise of Praggnanandhaa and Vaishali, the siblings who are chasing chess greatness. But even now, things they do can leave him impressed. Like the way she hoisted herself up to the top of the table after being at the bottom of the standings after five rounds in the 14-round event. At the previous Candidates too, she had done something similar, ending the tournament with an unprecedented five-match winning streak. "In the first half of the Candidates tournament this time, she was struggling. And normally when a player is struggling, very few manage to make a good comeback, meaningful comeback. Usually the tournament ends so-so, or bad. But to turn around the tourna-

ment, which was not going well — in fact, she was on a score of minus-one in the first six rounds and ended with a plus score — and winning the tournament outright, that was amazing quality. She made a very powerful comeback. That can happen only when you can overcome your own negativities. She was the lowest seed in the tournament, and winning the tournament ahead of so many higher-tier players. Yeah, both those qualities, I was very impressed with," says Ramesh.

"She's probably the hardest-working chess player among the female players. She just slogs it out a lot, devoting a lot of time for preparing and learning in chess. That kind of commitment, that too for 18 or 19 years (is rare)," says Ramesh, who has shaped their career from a young age at Chennai's Chess Gurukul. Ramesh loves to share the tale of how the siblings never got bored of chess as kids and would travel over an hour one way to get to his classes when they were both very young. Those qualities, over the years, have only amplified. Vaishali Rameshbabu meets her mother Nagalakshmi after winning the Women's Candidates tournament. (Photo: Michal Walusza/FIDE) Vaishali Rameshbabu meets her mother Nagalakshmi after winning the Women's Candidates tournament. (Photo: Michal Walusza/FIDE) "Sometimes after a good performance, there are players who want to take a break. But not Prag and Vaishali. I've seen many times when she was very young, let's say after she won a prestigious tournament like the under-10 or under-12 World Championships... once she reaches India, the very next day she will come for chess class. On the other hand, I've seen people taking a one-week-long break after winning a state championship. Because they feel they deserve that, something like this. "Usually, many players will take it slow once in a while. They will not prepare so much or they won't feel the mood. But she's someone — just like her brother Pragg — who can just slog it out day in and day out. So that kind of perseverance, that kind of commitment, is very unique and special. For such a long period, she has been spending so many hours on this pursuit on a day-to-day basis." Ramesh also said that what was impressive about both the siblings was that success has never gone to their head, no matter how much of it comes knocking at their doorstep. "They are very level-headed. I have seen many players who get success and it really makes them feel like they are some kind of gift to humanity or something. They start acting very strange. But these two are very normal human beings. That's very nice to see," says Ramesh.

## Takhellambam Inunganbi wins bronze at Asian Judo C'ships; ends 13 year drought

Indian judoka Takhellambam Inunganbi ended a 13-year medal drought at the Asian Judo Championships after winning the bronze medal in the women's -70 kg category on Friday. The 27-year-old judoka's bronze medal is the first medal won by an Indian at the continental championships after Angom Anita Chanu won a bronze in the women's -52kg category at the 2013 edition held in Bangkok, Thailand. Competing in Ordos, China, Inunganbi defeated Mongolia's Lkhagvadulam Sarantsetseg by ippon in the bronze medal match to secure her spot on the podium. She also had won the gold medal at the Amman Asian Open last year. She got a bye in the first round and started directly in the quarter-finals, where she lost to Uzbekistan's Shirinjon Yuldoshova. However, as Yuldoshova reached the final, Inunganbi claimed her first win in the repechage defeating Alina Moldokulova of Kyrgyzstan. After that, she claimed the bronze medal with a dominant win over the Mongolian.

India had another medal bout on the day but Yamini Mourya bowed down to a Japan's Mina Komiyama in the women's 57kg bronze medal bout. The final four Indian Judokas, two each in men's and women's, including Commonwealth Games medalist Tulika Maan, will be in action



on Saturday. Including Inunganbi's medal, Indians have won a total of 16 medals at the Continental championships with four silver and 12 bronze medals. No Indian judoka has won a gold medal yet. Poonam Chopra (1993), Najib Aga (1995), Pankaj Sharma (1997) and Ramashrey Yadav (2009) are the silver medal winners. India has fielded a full strength team of 18 judokas for the ongoing continental meet. India's biggest medal hope will be 2024 Paris Olympian and Commonwealth Games medalist Tulika Maan who will feature in the women's +78kg division on the final day.

## Sumit Antil complains about javelin coach's abuse; Neeraj Chopra backs complaint

Sumit Antil Neeraj chopra Double Paralympic gold medalist javelin thrower Sumit Antil, supported by former Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra, has accused Dronacharya awardee coach Naval Singh of mental harassment and verbal abuse. Double Paralympic gold medalist javelin thrower Sumit Antil, supported by former Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra, has accused Dronacharya awardee coach Naval Singh of mental harassment and verbal abuse. In a written complaint to the Sports Authority of India (SAI), Sumit has mentioned verbal abuse on multiple occasions, dragging his family into it.

"I trained under him (Naval) in 2018-19, but even after leaving him, he constantly abuses us verbally. He gets drunk and goes on to abuse the families of different athletes, including mine, Neeraj bhai, Navdeep, and others. He (Naval) would deliberately share recordings of his abusive rants with my manager," Sumit told The Indian Express. "I have made this complaint only after it went beyond a certain level. Paani sar se upar aa gaya tha ji," he added further. SAI accepted that they had received the complaint but stated that they had nothing to do with Naval Singh, and he was engaged with the Athletics Federation of India to train Sachin Yadav as part of the national coaching camp. "A complaint has been received from Sumit Antil, Paralympic Gold Medalist, alleging verbal abuse by Coach Mr Naval Singh. The complaint has also been supported by other athletes, including Neeraj Chopra. The coach in question is not an SAI employee and is training another leading athlete as part of the National Coaching Camp organised by AFI. The complaint has been received against the coach, and the matter is being duly taken up with the federation," a source from SAI said.

Apart from Neeraj, Paralympic gold medalist Navdeep Singh and Para Athletics World Championship medalist Sandeep Chaudhary also endorsed Sumit's complaint. "We all, Neeraj Chopra, Sumit Antil and Navdeep Singh, have written to SAI and authorities about this issue. I don't know whether Neeraj bhai trained under Naval sir or not but me, Sumit and Navdeep trained under him in the past. But then he would call us and use abusive language as well words for us and also our families. It has happened a lot of times, and sometimes he calls in a drunken state," Sandeep told



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The .Sumit also complained of ignorance by SAI and termed the response as an ignorant one. "I have a simple question: if someone is verbally abusing me, who do I go to? How does it matter who employs the coach? If he is training in a SAI premise and harassing athletes who are part of TOPS, I think the only way is to file a complaint with SAI," he explained. Double Olympic medalist Neeraj Chopra got involved in the melee when Sumit sent him the recordings and asked for his support. "I told Neeraj bhai what was happening. He heard the recordings and immediately told me that I will support you. He also wrote a letter in support of my complaint asking SAI to take stern action," said Sumit. In the mail accessed by The Indian Express, Neeraj wrote, "I write this as an athlete who has had the honour of representing India at both national and international levels, and who firmly believes that sport must uphold dignity, discipline, and respect. The statements made by coach Naval Singh are not just inappropriate; they are disgraceful." "If elite athletes like Neeraj bhai and Paralympic medalists are not immune to this kind of harassment, what will happen to the junior kids?" Sumit concluded.

## Sunrisers Hyderabad signs Gerald Coetzee as replacement for injured David Payne



New Delhi: Sunrisers Hyderabad have roped in Gerald Coetzee as an injury replacement for David Payne for the remainder of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 season. The franchise confirmed the move in an official media advisory on Saturday with Payne ruled out after sustaining an ankle injury. The left-arm pacer featured in two matches this season, picking up as many wickets before being sidelined.

"Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) have signed Gerald Coetzee as a replacement for David Payne for the remainder of TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026. Payne — who played 2 games for SRH in the ongoing IPL season and picked 2 wickets from the same — is ruled out of the remainder of the season due to an ankle injury," the league said in a statement. Coetzee, a right-arm fast bowler, ar-

rives with significant international pedigree, having represented South Africa national cricket team across formats. The 24-year-old has played four Tests, 14 ODIs and 18 T20Is, claiming a total of 67 international wickets. Coetzee, who went unsold at this year's auction, has experience in the IPL with Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Titans. He took 15 wickets in 14 matches.

The 25-year-old was part of South Africa's squad for the T20 World Cup but did not play. After the tournament, he participated in all five T20Is against New Zealand. He is set to join Sunrisers Hyderabad for INR 2 crore. Meanwhile, SRH received a boost with the arrival of captain Pat Cummins, who joined the team on April 17. He is expected to play in their match against Rajasthan Royals on April 25. Currently, SRH is fifth on the points table and will face Chennai Super Kings later on April 18. He is no stranger to the IPL either, having previously featured in 14 matches for Gujarat Titans and Mumbai Indians, where he picked up 15 wickets. Known for his pace and aggressive approach, Coetzee adds firepower to SRH's bowling attack as they look to strengthen their campaign in the business end of the tournament. The South African quick will join the Hyderabad-based franchise for a fee of INR 2 crore, stepping in as a like-for-like pace option following Payne's untimely injury setback.

## Shubman Gill steers Gujarat Titans to five-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders

Ahmedabad: Shubman Gill's elegant 86 complemented a probing new-ball spell from Kagiso Rabada and Mohammed Siraj as Gujarat Titans registered a commanding five-wicket win over the laggards Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League here on Friday. Gill was in complete control, firing on all cylinders as he steered the Titans to their third win of the season. This came after the pace duo of Rabada (3/29) and Siraj (2/23) had ripped through the KKR top order, exploiting movement with the new ball to bowl them out for 180.

KKR's total was largely propped up by Cameron Green's fighting 79 off 55 balls, his first significant contribution with the bat this season. The former champions continue to remain winless in the ongoing edition. The two powerplays told the tale of the match. While KKR limped to 37 for 3, Gill powered GT to a commanding 71 for 1, seizing early control of the chase. Chasing a below-par total, Gill set the tone from the outset, striking three boundaries, including a pristine straight drive, and a six in the first three overs. He then anchored the innings with poise, pacing his knock to perfection. His innings was peppered with eight fours and four sixes.

While KKR managed to pick up a few wickets, they were never able to stem the flow of runs or apply sustained pressure. When Sai Sudharsan departed, Jos Buttler ensured there was no let-up, announcing his arrival by cracking a boundary off his first ball before following it up with a six and another four in quick succession. Earlier, KKR were rocked early, losing three wickets in the first four overs. Rabada and Siraj bowled with precision, while Ashok Sharma (2/45) and Prasad Krishna (1/32) provided able support. Green, who found it hard to get going in the beginning, weathered the early storm before breaking free in the middle overs, smashing seven fours and four sixes in his 55-ball stay. He stitched together a 55-run stand with



Rovman Powell and followed it up with a 60-run partnership with Anukul Roy. Green particularly relished facing Rashid Khan, taking him apart for five boundaries and four sixes, but the Afghanistan spinner had him caught behind off the final ball of the innings. Luck, too, favoured him. He survived an early LBW appeal, saw an outside edge fly to the boundary, and was dropped on 62 by Washington Sundar off the very next ball.

However, he waged a lone battle as no other KKR batter could survive in the middle for long. To add to KKR's woes, Green was starved of strike towards the fag end of the innings, watching wickets tumble at the non-striker's end. Siraj and Rabada had set the tone of the match in the powerplay itself. Ajinkya Rahane was the first to fall, dismissed for a golden duck in the opening over by Siraj. Rabada then struck with the ball, producing a lovely outswinger that drew young Angkrish Raghuvanshi into a tentative poke, only to find the edge through to the wicketkeeper. Tim Seifert, playing his first game of the season, had his stay cut short as Rabada deceived him with a short-of-a-length delivery, which the Kiwi slapped straight to his compatriot Glenn Phillips at point.

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She got a bye in the first round and started directly in the quarter-finals, where she lost to Uzbekistan's Shirinjon Yuldoshova. However, as Yuldoshova reached the final, Inunganbi claimed her first win in the repechage defeating Alina Moldokulova of Kyrgyzstan. After that, she claimed the bronze medal with a dominant win over the Mongolian. India had another medal bout on the day but Yamini Mourya bowed down to a Japan's Mina Komiyama in the women's 57kg bronze medal bout. The final four Indian Judokas, two each in men's and women's, including Commonwealth Games medalist Tulika Maan, will be in action on Saturday. Including



Inunganbi's medal, Indians have won a total of 16 medals at the Continental championships with four silver and 12 bronze medals. No Indian judoka has won a gold medal yet. Poonam Chopra (1993), Najib Aga (1995), Pankaj Sharma (1997) and Ramashrey Yadav (2009) are the silver medal winners. India has fielded a full strength team of 18 judokas for the ongoing continental meet. India's biggest medal hope will be 2024 Paris Olympian and Commonwealth Games medalist Tulika Maan who will feature in the women's +78kg division on the final day.

## With Shubman Gill greener than Cameron Green, GT give KKR that sinking feeling

Gujarat Titans might not intimidate adversaries with raw power or beguiling variations, but in beating Kolkata Knight Riders, they demonstrated the flexibility and versatility that make them genuine title contenders. The chase of 181 came with a late wobble near the finishing line, but nerveless Shahrukh Khan and Rahul Tewatia ensured that Shubman Gill's splendid 86 did not end up in a losing cause. The first stroke a batsman plays in this format is so often a peek into his mind. Gill's was an emphatic leave. He wouldn't resort to anything out of his nature just to quieten the critics harping on his strike rate. He bats the way his batting has been honed, frame-worked in the game's orthodoxies but postmodern in his outlook. He wouldn't manufacture strokes, or target unnatural allies for runs, or live on a thrilling but precarious edge.

A gifted stroke-maker, he doesn't need to improvise or invent. The usual fix suffices. Precisely for this reason, he can be consistent but at the same time score fast. He averages 40 in IPL at a strike rate of 140. To put the numbers in perspective, Sanju Samson, a batsman touted of superior

make, averages 31.33 with a marginally better strike rate of 140.08. When he strums along, he crushes the belief of fast bowlers, because he hardly flirts with risk. Two balls after the leave, Gill spanked Vaibhav Arora through covers for his first four. In the second over, he lashed Kartik Tyagi for successive fours. The second was sublime, crunching him down the ground, the front elbow winking at the flood-lit skies. His first six was rendered in classical Test match style, stepping and carving the left-arm spinner Ankul Roy through extra over. When Sudharsan departed, the score on 57 in 5.1 overs, and Jos Buttler strode in, he handed over to the Englishman the keys to attack. But his departure, by then half the target was wiped off, did not fluster Gill, who soon completed his half century in 27 balls. The required run rate under control, he tickled singles, ran brisk twos, like Virat Kohli at his chasing best, and struck the intermittent boundaries. A straight six off Varun Chakaravathy was imperious, a pick-up six off Tyagi was regal. It was a hard-length ball into his body. He just moved forward, a half a step and slapped the ball through deep mid-wicket fence.

## Sonali Raut accuses Bigg Boss Marathi 6 makers of 'unhygienic living conditions': 'Dead rats, cockroaches'



Actor Sonali Raut has made some serious allegations against the makers of Bigg Boss Marathi 6, and has shared her grievances against the makers. Sonali has reportedly sent a legal notice to the makers where she alleged that she was subjected to severe mental and physical distress during her time on the show. She also claimed to have contracted a skin disease, "scabies", due to "unhygienic living conditions". Now, Sonali has taken to social media to share videos of herself with close-up images of her body covered in rashes and marks, including her back, arms, legs, and torso. The video also displayed text describing the unhygienic living conditions inside the Bigg Boss house. The text mentioned, "Rats inside the kitchen eating away groceries. Cockroaches coming out of food. As a punishment one washroom for 17 contestants. Inside the washroom people used to smoke, eat

food, chicken, eggs, litter, dead rats around. People used each other's napkins and towels due to shortage." Sonali shared the video with the caption, "Beyond the glamour lies a dark reality of exploitation. I entered #BBMarathi6 with trust but left with a contagious disease. It's time to hold the makers accountable. ????" In her statement earlier, Sonali had highlighted the poor living conditions in the Bigg Boss house. According to IANS, she had said, "The environment was extremely unhygienic. There were big rats inside the kitchen eating away at the grocery and the same was being used to cook n contestants to feed on... The food that came from Endemol Production during 'Weekend ka War' had cockroaches coming out of the food. As a part of punishment only one washroom was used for all 17 contestants in which people used to smoke, litter, eat food... chicken, eggshells n dead rats around as you know men and women are different." Sonali also shared that only 17 toothbrushes and razors were provided by the second week and had to be borrowed from each other. "There were times I was left starving and didn't have proper food, no proper sleep... Electronic appliances like microwaves, clothes dryers which were there were used from Big Boss Hindi because it had stickers of previous contestants like Amaal, Tanya and Mridul. Appliances were not hygienic and not properly maintained," she had shared. She further stated, "My Agreement was shared with the fellow contestants which is clearly a breach of trust. I trusted the platform, but my health and well-being were compromised. There needs to be accountability so that no one else suffers like this." Medical Disclaimer: This content discusses personal accounts of physical illness and hygiene concerns; it is for informational purposes only and not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of a qualified healthcare provider regarding a medical condition or contagious disease.

## 'Kanjoo's' production houses give 2 rotis for lunch, ration crew's food, says Archana Puran Singh



Several actors over the years have spoken about the harsh working conditions on film sets, so much so that crew members are often categorised as "above the line" and "below the line." This distinction, they say, often extends into how they are treated, including something as basic as food breaks. Recently, the cast of the new Netflix dramedy Toaster, Rajkumar Rao, Sanya Malhotra, Abhishek Banerjee, and Archana Puran Singh, stated similar concerns.

'Kanjooosi is a mentality' Sanya Malhotra, in a conversation with News18, highlighted the issue, saying how some production houses don't even ensure proper meal breaks. "Some production houses don't even give us lunch breaks." Adding to this, Archana Puran Singh spoke in detail about how tight schedules often come at the cost of basic comfort and dignity for the crew. "They want to pack in as much work as possible. We would've 9 am - 6 pm and 2 pm - 10 am shifts. These days, shifts span over 12 hours. Even then, they expect us to extend our work hours to 13-14 hours and skip lunch breaks. This is a kind of kanjooosi (stinginess)

only. Kanjooosi is a mentality. Phir aap har cheez mein kanjooosi karte ho (Then you become stingy about everything). How can you not let the light men, who hold their equipment and stand under the sun for hours, eat? They don't have assistants like us bringing them fruits. It's terrible."

Adding further, Archana recalled, "We've experienced this a lot. There was a very big production house, which I don't want to name. We used to call them, 'Ek boti, do roti.' (One piece of meat, two pieces of bread). If you ask a crew member about them, they would say, 'Achcha, yeh toh ek boti, do roti waale hai.' At the lunch table, the non-vegetarian food served would be very limited. Crew members would be told to only have a certain number of rotis and one serving of the non-vegetarian item." Rajkumar Rao also raised concern about the lack of structured breaks on set. He said, "I wonder why lunch breaks are not given. If the shoot begins at 12:30 pm, they expect us to keep at it till maybe 3:30 pm. They can instead let everyone have their lunches at 1:30 pm and then resume. They should think about crew members as well. I really don't get it." Abhishek Banerjee pointed out how such small decisions reflect larger attitudes. He said, "Chhoti chhoti cheezon mein na, samajh mein aa jaata hai kanjooosi. Their idea is, isko kyun khilaaye? To save very little money, you're depriving people." (In small things itself, you realise the stinginess. The idea is, why feed them?). Concerns around overworking in the industry came into sharper focus last year when Deepika Padukone reportedly walked out of two major projects, Spirit and the sequel to Kalki 2898 AD, allegedly after her demand for an eight-hour work shift was not met. In a conversation with Harper's Bazaar, she said, "We've normalised overworking. We mistake burnout for commitment. Eight hours of work a day is enough for the human body and mind. Only when you're healthy can you give your best. Bringing a burnt-out person back into the system helps no one."

## Malayalam television actor Siddharth Venugopal dies at 41 after prolonged illness



Malayalam television actor Siddharth Venugopal has passed away after a prolonged illness. He was 41. Siddharth's demise has come as a shock to fans and colleagues alike, with many from the industry expressing grief and paying tribute to the late actor. Actor Seema G Nair shared the news of Siddharth's passing on Facebook. She wrote, "All hopes have faded... popular serial actor Siddharth Venugopal has journeyed to a painless world... for the past two years I fought for you, even when my mind and body were exhausted, I kept running to bring your life back... today God decided that you shouldn't suffer anymore... I can't bear it Siddharth, I am breaking down."

Many actors from the Malayalam television industry paid tribute to the late actor. Kishore Sathya wrote, "Another artist has been lost too soon. Siddharth Venugopal was a familiar face to audiences through television serials. He had been battling cancer for some time. Our beloved Seema G Nair had been taking care of his health. The film industry has always stood by many people, including the late Sharanya, for their medical needs. I pray for Siddharth's soul to rest in peace, and bow my head in gratitude to Seema G

Nair's kind heart." Siddharth is survived by his mother and younger brother. Hailing from Chalakudy in Thrissur, he developed his love for acting during his college days. He began his journey in showbiz as a presenter before transitioning into acting and starring in television shows. He was known for his work in shows like Kasthooriman and Bhagyajathakam.

## Vijay Deverakonda announces next film with director Shouryuv

Hyderabad: Telugu star Vijay Deverakonda on Saturday announced that his next film was to be directed by well known director Shouryuv, much to the delight of fans and film buffs.

Taking to his Instagram page to make the announcement, Vijay Deverakonda wrote, "My next is-#VDxShouryuv. Introducing the team taking on the scary task of making this intimidating film. So happy to have this firecracker global team working on this one with Shouryuv on his wild imagination and intense heart."

The actor further went on to say, "ROAR my friends. I will give you my all. Peak excitement and lots of love. #EricDurst" The actor also shared a poster that showed him walking four dogs with the technical crew of the film walking behind him with various arms in their hands. The film, which is tentatively being referred to as VDXShouryuv, boasts of a brilliant technical team. It will feature one of the world's finest cinematographers Alejandro Martinez as its Director Of Photography.

## 'Hera Pheri 3 not happening for now' says Akshay Kumar; denies rift with Paresh Rawal



Akshay Kumar is currently busy with the promotions of his latest release Bhooth Bangla. While the film has received mixed reviews, what fans have been eagerly waiting for is to see Akshay reunite with Suniel Shetty and Paresh Rawal in Hera Pheri 3. However, in a recent interaction, the actor spoke about the film and revealed that it is not happening for now. Akshay Kumar on Hera Pheri 3's future

Speaking to Subhankar Mishra on his YouTube channel, Akshay said, "Hera Pheri 3 abhi filhaal toh nahi ban rahi (The film is not happening as of now)," said the actor. Akshay admitted that he himself was shocked after the film came to a halt. He said, "Mujhe khud jhatka laga tha. Koi baat nahi, Welcome bana li. Thoda kuch mantra padna padega ki sab theek ho jaaye. Abhi ek saal toh nahi hain. Uske bohot saare issues hain, aisa nahi hain ki hum teeno (actors) saath nahi hain. Welcome to the Jungle mein hum teeno saath hain. Kuch kuch cheezein hoti hain jo main camera pe nahi bol sakta. Bohot saari cheezein, agreements hain, which takes the project backwards (I am myself in shock. But that's okay.

I think we need some good mantras to make it happen. For the next one year the film is not on track. There are many issues, but not with us three actors. We are working in Welcome to the Jungle. There are some things that I cannot speak on camera. There are agreements)." He added, "Apne aap ayega, jab waqt ayega tab ban jaayega. Bas yahi hein ki budhapa na ho jaaye tab tak (It will come on its own time. When the time is right, the film will be made. I hope we are not old by that time!)"

For the unversed, Hera Pheri 3 has been facing legal troubles since its inception. Production house Seven Arts International has filed a case against the film's makers. The production house claimed that Sajid Nadiadwala only had the rights to remake one film—the Hindi adaptation of the Malayalam original Ramji Rao Speaking (1989). This adaptation was the first Hera Pheri film, released in 2000 and directed by Priyadarshan. However, they alleged that Nadiadwala violated the contract and went on to make the sequel Phir Hera Pheri in 2006. They also accused him of transferring the rights of the franchise to a third party—Akshay Kumar's production house, Cape of Good Films—without having the rights to the franchise in the first place. The matter is currently in court. The chatter around the making of Hera Pheri 3 has been going on for a few years now. Akshay and the team announced the film with the original trio, following which, Paresh backed out of the project. Later, Paresh rejoined the team but the film's making has been halted. Hera Pheri released in 2000, with Priyadarshan as the director, and became one of the most popular Hindi comedies of all time. The film had a sequel in 2006, titled Phir Hera Pheri, which was directed by Neeraj Vora.

## 'Felt a bit sorry for Virat Kohli': LizLaz says she's a Kohli 'fan', 'appreciates' his support



my DMs. I got so many messages today, people were super excited about it."

An older clip of the influencer has also resurfaced, in which she speaks about her fondness for Kohli, calling herself a fan. She explained that this interest began during her first visit to India last year, when she was introduced to cricket. She watched Kohli play during the Indian Premier League. "It was obviously the IPL last year, so I started watching with my Bangalorean friends. It was contagious. I was also becoming a Royal Challengers Bangalore fan. And obviously, if you support RCB, Virat Kohli is the most exciting player to watch. He's just so good. So I was happy about him liking the picture." When asked whether she felt disappointed that the post was later unliked, she responded, "No, I felt a bit sorry for him actually! I was so happy that he liked it, but then him unliking it, I felt a bit bad for him because I don't even know how it became such a big story. How did people notice, how did they make it news... that was probably not his intention behind it, but still I am grateful for it and I appreciate the support from him." She added that the sudden attention has led to new queries about work opportunities, and she is open to exploring options in India. She also expressed a desire to visit the country again soon. A similar controversy had emerged last year when fans noticed that Kohli had 'liked' a post by Avneet Kaur on Instagram. At the time, Kohli issued a clarification, attributing the interaction to the platform's algorithm. He wrote, "I'd like to clarify that while clearing my feed, it appears the algorithm may have mistakenly registered an interaction. There was absolutely no intent behind it. I request that no unnecessary assumptions be made." However, the explanation only added to the online buzz. Avneet had also subtly responded to the situation. When asked about receiving appreciation from prominent figures online, she told media, "May the love keep coming." LizLaz, whose real name is Jennifer, is a German-South African travel vlogger and singer. She has built a growing fan base in India, particularly after her song Samosa gained popularity online.

## Akshay Kumar-Wamiqa Gabbi pairing sparks debate: Bollywood heroes and their widening age-gap with heroines

After generating considerable buzz around the reunion of Akshay Kumar and Priyadarshan, their latest film Bhooth Bangla has finally hit the big screen. But beyond the nostalgia, the film has sparked a familiar conversation—one Bollywood hasn't quite outgrown. Akshay Kumar is paired opposite Wamiqa Gabbi, who is 26 years younger than him. And this isn't an exception, it's a pattern. Since the early '90s, a handful of male superstars have remained constant: Akshay Kumar, Salman Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Ajay Devgn, and Hrithik Roshan. While they've aged, their on-screen romantic counterparts have consistently gotten younger.

Starting with Akshay Kumar, the actor has appeared in 39 films from 2016 to the present, excluding Bhooth Bangla. A closer look at his filmography reveals a consistent pattern in age gaps between him and his leading ladies. In 2016, he starred in Airlift alongside Nimrat Kaur with a 14-year age difference, Housefull 3 with Jacqueline Fernandez with an 18-year gap, and Rustom opposite Ileana D'Cruz with a 19-year difference. The trend continued in 2017 with Jolly LLB 2, where he was paired with Huma Qureshi (19 years), and Toilet: Ek Prem Katha alongside Bhumi Pednekar, who is 22 years younger. In 2018, Padman saw him opposite Radhika Apte with an 18-year gap, while Gold featured Mouni Roy with a similar 18-year difference. The following year, 2019, included Kesari with Parineeti Chopra (21 years), Housefull 4 with Kriti Sanon (23 years), and Good Newwz with Kareena Kapoor, marking one of the smaller gaps at 13 years. In 2020, Laxmi paired him with Kiara Advani, who is 24 years younger. In 2021, Bell Bottom featured Vaani Kapoor with a 21-year age gap, while Sooryavanshi saw him opposite Katrina Kaif with a comparatively smaller 16-year difference. By 2022, the gap widened further. In Samrat Prithviraj, he starred opposite Manushi Chhillar with a 30-year age difference, while Cuttputli featured Rakul Preet Singh with a 23-year gap. Most recently, in 2024's Sarfira, he was paired with Radhika Madan, who is 28 years younger, continuing a trend that has remained largely consistent over the years. Films featuring actresses already covered in the infographics have



been skipped for clarity. Moving to Shah Rukh Khan, a similar pattern emerges in his recent filmography. In 2017, he starred in Raees opposite Mahira Khan with a 19-year age gap, and Jab Harry Met Sejal alongside Anushka Sharma with a 23-year difference. Following his return to the big screen in 2023, Pathaan featured Deepika Padukone with a 20-year age gap, Jawan paired him with Nayanthara with a 19-year difference, and Dunki saw him opposite Taapsee Pannu with a 22-year age gap. Next, Salman Khan's filmography further highlights the widening age gap trend. In 2016, he starred in Sultan opposite Anushka Sharma with a 23-year difference. This was followed by Tiger Zinda Hai (2017), where he was paired with Katrina Kaif with an 18-year gap, and Race 3 (2018) alongside Jacqueline Fernandez with a 20-year difference. In 2019, Dabangg 3 featured Saiee Manjrekar, marking a striking 36-year age gap—one of the widest in mainstream Bollywood. The pattern continued with Radhe (2021), where he starred opposite Disha Patani with a 27-year gap, and Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan (2023) alongside Pooja Hegde with a 25-year difference. Looking ahead, Sikandar (2025) pairs him with Rashmika Mandanna, who is 30 years younger, reinforcing a pattern that has remained consistent over the years.